

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL

THE COMPOSITIONAL AND IMPROVISATIONAL STYLE
OF THELONIOUS MONK

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FOR THE DEGREE OF M. MUS. IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

BY

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Introduction

Schopenhauer calls architecture "frozen music". This is not merely an aesthetic comparison: the analogy goes into the very substance of both arts. By the same token one could call music "sounding architecture". The "measure" is essential for both to such an extent that music borrows the very term for its metrical units. Architecture in turn uses the "motif", another kind of unit, as a germ-cell for building purposes -- just as music does -- by reiteration, modification, combination, grouping and regrouping. Perfect FORM crowns the masterpiece of architecture as well as the masterpiece of music. 1

Western art music from plainsong to the present day has seen a great many stylistic evolutions and revolutions. From the first beginnings of the cantus firmus and monody through increasing harmonic, rhythmic, and notational, complexity to the highly rigorous organizational principles of Schoenberg and his contemporaries, the language has managed to survive such "onslaughts" as the rhythmic and harmonic innovations of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, for instance.

The concert in the large Musikvereinssaal on 31 March 1913 [which featured Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony, op. 9, Webern's Six Pieces, op. 6, and Berg's Altenberg-Lieder, among others] ended with one of the greatest tumults in modern musical history, comparable only with that of the first performance of Igor Stravinsky's Rite of Spring in the Paris Champs Elysées Theatre on 28 May in the same year. 2

With the advantage of hindsight, it is possible to see how audience reaction to the music of Stravinsky, Debussy and Schoenberg was probably conditioned as much by fear at the overthrowing of the ideals of the ancien régime as it was by the innate conservatism of certain sectors of the listening public, and their adherence (or lack thereof) to the prevailing musical fashions of the day. The same hissing that greeted the Leipzig performance of Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor

in 1859³ was also reserved for the infant bebop of the 1940s which Cab Calloway was to disparage as "Chinese music"⁴.

Thus the eternal dialectic between tradition and innovation in the "sounding architecture" of music : bricks may change their chemical makeup as structures themselves may change, but bricks will always be organized into structures to make buildings (at least until the next earthquake occurs). As Ernst Toch has put it, "FORM is to forms as the universe is to a mountain or a tree"⁵. Gunther Schuller⁶, in discussing the thematic approach in jazz improvisation, has stated:

The history of classical music provides us with a telling historical precedent for such a prognosis : after largely non-thematic beginnings (in the early middle ages), music over a period of centuries developed to a stage where (with the great classical masters) thematic relationships, either in a sonata or various variational forms, became the prime building element of music, later to be carried even further to the level of continuous and complete variation as implied by Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. In short, an over-all lineage from free almost anarchical beginnings to a relatively confined and therefore more challenging state. The history of jazz gives every indication of following a parallel course, although in an extraordinarily condensed form. In any case, the essential point is not that, with thematically related solos, jazz improvisation can now discard the great tradition established by the Youngs and Parkers, but rather that by building on this tradition and enriching it with the new element of thematic relationships jazz is simply adding a new dimension. And I think we might all agree that renewal through tradition is the best assurance of a flourishing musical future.

It does not seem too far-fetched to see in the history of Afro-American improvised folk music (or what Miles Davis has referred to as "social music" in contradistinction to concert music) a condensed history of Western art music with Jelly Roll Morton as Bach and Ornette Coleman and his colleagues as the Second Vienna

School -- a schema of comparison in which Charlie Parker would represent one of the great instrumental virtuosi of the Romantic era, perhaps.

With the advances in communication and mobility afforded by our brave new world, jazz has had to adapt at a much quicker rate than that of the music from Bach's time to the present day; within its own architectural confines jazz has lived through the same dialectical upheavals as has Western music since 1685.

Composers from the classical period to the time of Bartók and beyond have explored the potential of the thematic principle as a means of construction; in fact it has functioned as an organically based compositional method despite the vagaries of the language, which has changed greatly during this period. Toch's point about FORM and forms contains this implication : namely that FORM through the composer's individual manner of connecting themes (or motives, for that matter) survives the changes that fashion forces upon form. The timeless quasi-Platonic idea of FORM thus lives to outlive the individual forms.

It is sonata form, perhaps, that best illustrates this point. The sonata principle as a method of organizing material has breathed life into music from the time of Domenico Scarlatti, through that of Haydn, Mozart and Brahms up to Berg and Bartók, being more and more freely expressed with the passage of time. Whether this principle is based on the true idea of themes in opposition (as much Hegelian music criticism would have it) or on that of essential thematic similarity (as in Reti and others), the fact remains that it has proved a most durable and flexible method of construction, underpinning both the sonata itself and the symphony.

"How would you describe the form of a fugue? Among the wealth of Bach's fugues no two show the same structure. Yet each of them displays a masterful FORM, be it macrocosmically majestic or microcosmically graceful and dainty".⁷

So it may be that the keen listener is given intelligible thematic materials, in the form of subjects or themes or motives ("bricks"), which act as signposts or guides; what becomes compelling about the material is not so much its "character" as the way in which it is moulded by the composer's creative intelligence.

To what extent this creative moulding has been definable as a conscious or unconscious process has varied through the history of music. However it seems reasonable to observe that this process, in the works of the greatest composers, has given rise to art where craftsmanship and inspiration meet to create something of timeless meaning.

Art reflects life to some extent, or a consciousness thereof that is somehow unique, and the most successful art seems to convey a feeling of the continuity of life and its processes. However it is expressed -- by means of a sequence of notes, an arrangement of words on a page, or an idea brought into life in stone -- it serves effectively to cast new light on the dreams and despairs of life.

To discuss the emotional significance of certain groupings of notes may endow them with an undue amount of meaning -- while to consider them capable of recognition as captivating signals may well not -- but the point remains that these themes or motives certainly may be perceived as having a characteristic identity, whatever its emotional connotations.

"A good fugue subject is invested with either melodic or rhythmic power, or both; the stress may be toward one or the other, or both. A good melody is not necessarily a good subject for a fugue, though it may be excellent for a sonata; on the contrary, a good fugue subject may possess no particular melodic attractiveness".⁸

Now clearly the nature of a fugue subject, in addition to its contrapuntal usefulness, very largely dictates the form the fugue will take. A grave and solemn subject, for instance, is treated in note-values that befit it, in the same way as the colours of a painting are brought out best by a frame which harmonizes well with them.

During the common practice period, composers were drawing both from a given harmonic language with inherent grammatical implications and from a more or less finite repertoire of formal structures. Thus it may be seen that the treatment of melody was subject to certain restrictions in keeping with its harmonic implications.

Reti⁹ has shown two stages of melodic treatment during the common practice period. During the pre-classical era, melodies were subject mainly to varying and imitation (like the contrapuntal devices of the Bach era), while during the classical period and after these techniques were expanded to include transformation, in addition.

The aim of this study is to show how these techniques are carried through into the twentieth century from the composed music of common practice, and are also used in improvised musics (both jazz and world-music). In the hands of a skilled composer or improviser, these methods of treatment have invested music with a high degree of inner logic and coherence.

Footnotes : Introduction

- ¹Ernst Toch, The Shaping Forces in Music : An Inquiry Into the Nature of Harmony, Melody, Counterpoint, Form (New York: Criterion Music, 1948), p. 155.
- ²H.H. Stuckenschmidt, Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work, trans. Humphrey Searle (London: John Calder, 1977), p. 184.
- ³Karl Geiringer in collaboration with Irene Geiringer, Brahms: His Life and Work, 3rd ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), p. 61.
- ⁴Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, eds., Hear Me Talkin' To Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men Who Made It (New York: Rinehart, 1955; paperback reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1966), p. 344.
- ⁵Toch, *ibid.*, p. 154.
- ⁶Gunther Schuller, "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation", Jazz Review (November 1958), 21.
- ⁷Toch, *ibid.*, p. 154.
- ⁸George Oldroyd, The Technique and Spirit of Fugue: An Historical Study, with a foreword by Sir Stanley Marchant (London: Oxford University Press, 1948, paperback reprint ed., 1974), p. 29.
- ⁹Rudolph Reti, The Thematic Process in Music, with a prefatory note by Donald Mitchell (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), pp. 61ff.

1. Some aspects of thematicism in concert and improvised music forms

1.1 Some thematic techniques in the twentieth century

Fluent continuity and logic in music derive from factors not yet unmistakably defined. In older styles repetitions, variations, transformations, etc. of fundamental elements furnished audible and visible connectives, and supported by subdivisions, limited size and contents they meet the requirements of comprehensibility. 1

In written music after common practice, composers have solved the problem of comprehensibility in various ways: the serialists by elaborating on the implications of the tone-row, for instance, and the minimalists by using fundamentally tonal material organized into patterns.

Olivier Messiaen, for one, has drawn inspiration from the sound-phenomena of the world around us; he is a keen amateur ornithologist and has integrated the patterns of birdsong into his compositions. The title of his main theoretical work, La technique de mon langage musical, clearly indicates his cognizance of the denotational component of music, that music may still function as a language with certain laws to be understood even if it has no inherent "meaning". By analogy with "real" language, a large part of one's comprehension of a foreign (hence unintelligible) language depends on one's ability to detect patterns and structures in sound. Once the patterns are understood, the framework is provided into which the words fit as "meanings".

This perhaps explains the current lack of interest of the man in the street in contemporary concert music. It is difficult for a layman to perceive the patterns being used, say, in serial music, because the contemporary musical language no longer functions according to the grammatical and syntactical rules of common practice. The grammatical laws being different, the language becomes unintelligible unless one is willing actively to listen,

an effort apparently beyond most people.

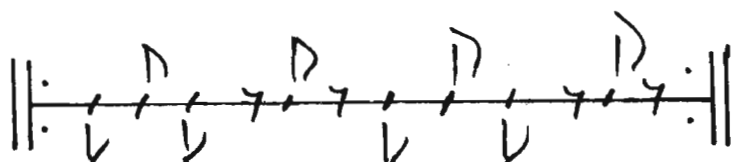
The problems of musical form, unlike those of the graphic and plastic arts which are fixed in time, are principally those of relating the sound-materials to those which have been heard and those which are to come. The attributes of unity, variety, balance, all are perceptible only by an act of will. The understanding of the shape of music is not attained by relaxing and allowing the sounds to flow through one like electricity through a wire. Such a procedure may provide a pleasant tingle now and then by momentary combinations of sound, but the meaning of the music, as expressed in the interrelationship of its parts, is irrevocably lost. 2

The success of contemporary popular music rests largely on its accessibility (and disposability); by continuing to use a simplified version of traditional harmony, it makes no demands on the average listener's attention and hence sells widely till superseded by the next hit song. This process of course is aided by vast publicity machinery and the attentions of the media but the point still holds that the relationship of much of today's popular music to that of Berg and Bartók (or that of Monk and Cecil Taylor for that matter) is that of baby talk to computer operating languages.

One type of contemporary concert music that has captured a share of the popular imagination is that of the minimalist school. Based on repetitive patterns which are modified by rhythmic displacement (that is, different instruments starting patterns a beat or more after the initial pattern) and augmentation (that is, progressive lengthening of durations), it can be very hypnotic, though the large scale works tend towards an excessive feeling of stasis, something akin to watching Andy Warhol films where

nothing happens for eight hours or so.

Minimalism derives its interest then from the modifications carried out on these patterns, its hypnotically slow rate of change and its generally tonal vocabulary. In fact one of its leading exponents, Steve Reich, has managed to construct a piece lasting approximately ninety minutes out of a single rhythmic pattern. "There is, then, only one basic rhythmic pattern for all of DRUMMING:



This pattern undergoes changes of phase position, pitch and timbre, but all the performers play this pattern, or some part of it, throughout the entire piece". 3

The relationship between this rhythm and the 3 : 2 pattern which underpins much of the rhythm of African music is clear and Reich's work on the piece began shortly after his return from a field trip to Africa where he studied with a master drummer.

The beauty of the music lies in the way all the lines interlock, meshing and unmeshing, now running counter to each other, now joining together. Close concentration by the listener can produce a feeling of displacement, a little like the effect you experience when sitting in one train while another train begins to pull out of the station. For a moment you are suspended in a relativity limbo, uncertain as to whether it is you, the other train, or the station itself that is moving. 4

The music under discussion here is actually African drum music but there are clear parallels to the effect of minimalist music on the listener. Another similarity is the relative lack of improvisation in both of the musics examined. "The distinctive thing about musical processes is that they determine the note-to-note details and the overall form simultaneously [sic]. One can't improvise in a musical process -- the concepts are mutually exclusive".⁵

The procedures adopted by the minimalist composers are intentionally very different from those of traditional Western music practice. The sense of "development" from one's perception of a theme being transformed is lacking, if not totally absent, precisely because the patterns of minimalism, while couched in the tonal language of Western music, do not function in the same way as symphonic themes or fugue subjects.

Minimalism, at least as practised by Reich, may be seen as one successful synthesis of ethnic rhythm patterns with Western tonality and temperament.

Another minimalist composer is Terry Riley whose In C (1964) is considered to be "the first and still perhaps best-known example of what is sometimes called minimalism or phase music".⁶ In C consists of 53 patterns or motives to be played in order from 1 to 53, but the important difference between this and music such as that of Reich is the fact that the composer has elected to give the performers a considerable amount of freedom of choice.

It can be played by any ensemble, amateur or otherwise, but the best performances will be made by musicians gifted with a special ability to improvise and to listen to one another. Not included in the score is a piano part, called the Pulse, which consists of even octave eighth notes to be drummed steadily on the top two C's of the keyboard throughout the duration of a performance. Each member of the ensemble plays the fifty - three figures of the score in sync with the Pulse and moves consecutively from Figure 1 to Figure 53. When he moves from figure to figure, where he places his downbeats, and how often and how long he rests is up to him. A performance ends after all the players have arrived at Figure 53. The quality of the music depends upon spontaneous interaction within the ensemble. 7

Now it seems clear from the above that "spontaneous interaction within the ensemble" and the amount of freedom of choice given to the individual performers will create a situation where no two performances of the piece will be identical, which is not the case with "strict" minimalism. This also serves to "humanize" the piece. The random and the given elements of music are thus very well integrated here, and it seems significant that after this composition Riley turned his attentions more and more toward improvised forms of music and virtually stopped writing out his compositions.

His 1980 piece Shri Camel consists of improvisations for digital organ which exploit the possibilities of non-Western intonation systems. Shri Camel with its use of just intonation and quasi-vocal inflections clearly draws from Riley's studies with Pandit Pran Nath, the Indian kirana raga singer. "The densely textured multi-tracked organ improvisations, whose hypnotic effect is enhanced by the echoes of a digital delay system, represent a new blend of Eastern and Western musics". 8

Thus one may see how the minimalist school, as represented by Reich and Riley, has drawn inspiration from non-Western sources (rhythm and intonation) to breath life into a common practice model, or tonal framework.

Another aspect of this ethnic fertilization has been the way some composers have used folksongs as a basis on which to build melodies. The composer Béla Bartók, for instance, drew a great deal on the folk music of his native Hungary.

It is interesting to speculate on the origins of Bartók's fascination with folk music, something that was definitely not a concern of most of his fellow musicians. An obvious reason is that he found in the modal tonalities and asymmetrical rhythms of folk songs an appealing alternative to the major-minor tonal system which dominated the art music of both Eastern and Western Europe at the turn of the century. 9

In the music of Haydn it is possible to detect elements of Croat folk-tune, for instance, in the minuet of the String Quartet Op. 20, no. 2, where use is made of "Some of the 'Dudelsack' [Bagpipe] droning of which Haydn was very fond, and which makes frequent and most effective appearance in his quartets". 10

Charles Ives was another composer who incorporated well-known folk and popular tunes of the day into his pieces, which as a consequence tend to have a very recognizable American sound, despite their sometimes very dissonant harmonic vocabulary. Leonard Bernstein, in discussing Ives' Second Symphony, has this to say:

Let us try to identify ourselves with young Ives, a mere twenty-seven years old, trying to record the sound images of his world. Those images were a combination of the great works of the German tradition -- Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner -- plus the local music he lived with -- hymns, folk songs, patriotic songs and marches, college songs. All this can be found in this Second Symphony -- from Beethoven's Fifth to Turkey in the Straw. But it all comes out Ivesian, transmogrified into his own personal statement. 11

The two uses of folk song mentioned above place a different emphasis on its structural importance. Haydn's imitation of bagpipes is almost, but not quite, programmatic, in that it creates a description of the social atmosphere in which folk song playing occurs, whereas Ives quotes from folk song in a very direct way. Geiringer¹², in his discussion of Brahms' Violin Concerto, makes mention of "the fiery Rondo-finale with its suggestion of Hungarian melodies", but oddly enough does not allude to the scordatura section of the concerto where the solo violin imitates gypsy (Zigeuner) music (1st movement, bars 332 - 336).

An interesting connection is apparent in this regard between composers who use folk song and a tendency towards thematicism or monothematicism. Haydn, for instance, is often seen as exhibiting monothematic tendencies, especially in his later quartets. In monothematicism, the essential tension or contrast between the two themes of a sonata movement is not used as a constructive principle; rather the interest is derived from the elaboration of two closely related themes in the development section.

Haydn had used thematic development -- a method of dissecting the subjects of the exposition and then developing and reassembling the resulting fragments in an unexpected manner -- in his earlier works, but never with such logic and determination. Henceforth [from the Russian quartets, op. 33, onwards], this device, combined with modulations, ruled the development sections of the sonata form. 13

In Gustav Mahler's Symphony, no. 1, as well, with its allusions to naturalistic elements (the cuckoo), Viennese café music, Ländler, and the minor key "Frère Jacques" which underpins the marcia funèbre movement, elements of folk song are clearly discernible. While clearly not a convincing example of monothematic tendencies, the symphony exhibits Mahler's reworking of some

of the themes already used in Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen. This practice (of composers) seems to indicate that certain themes have a kind of "identity through association" in the composer's mind and thus are worthy of being worked through again.

This reworking of a theme (or themes) may take place in different pieces of music (as seen in the discussion above of two of Mahler's works) or may form the basis of an entire composition. In contemporary musical language, it is less apt to talk of themes perhaps than of motives or patterns, which change of terminology clarifies two implications: the first, that motives generally do consist of less notes than do themes and the second, that motives, because of their "atomic" structure, often have less tonal characteristics than do themes.

Anyone who listens to his [Schoenberg's] music can discover in it some small complexes of notes which return like fixed ideas. They appear either horizontally or vertically, as melodic or chordal groups, thus entirely in the idea of 'musical space', which Schoenberg did not describe until he was a mature composer and theoretician. These complexes of notes, minimal bricks which make up minimal forms, consist of three notes. They have the peculiarities and functions of cells in an organism. They attach themselves to their likes and so develop into complexes of four or more notes. 14

The more complex nature of the transformations wrought in modern music, plus the expanded harmonic idiom, tend to obscure the connections between the cells. It is thus easier to hear the invertible counterpoint in, say, a Bach fugue than it is to perceive the cellular connections in dodecaphonic music, for instance. By transformations is meant mirroring, inversion, octave displacement and other such procedures.

Nevertheless it is important to realize that these procedures did not detract from the clear messages this information conveyed to the composer's intelligence or emotional sense. One thinks of the encoding of verbal messages in

musical form, such as Bach's famous spelling of his name in the notes B-flat, A, C, B-natural, Berg's Chamber Symphony's three themes, based on the names of the protagonists of the Second Vienna School (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg), and Schoenberg's love of sending birthday greetings in the form of difficult contrapuntal exercises like puzzle canons and mirror canons.

These are not mere mathematical tricks, however, but show the composer's ability to manipulate materials that are not the products of intuition pure and simple. In other words, the sequence of notes, once fixed, is as full of possibilities to the composer as if it were purely the product of inspiration: it is akin to a sculptor or a potter knowing what is likely to result from the use of a particular kind of stone or clay. A remark of Schoenberg's in this regard is most illuminating: "One cannot analyse by simply working at the notes. I at least hardly ever find musical relations by eye but I hear them".¹⁵

Douglas Jarman has this to say about mathematical procedures in Berg's music:

Highly artificial techniques, rigorous formal symmetries, number symbolism, ciphers, cryptograms and various other conceits are so peculiarly Bergian and are so constant and important a feature of Berg's mature music as to suggest that such procedures and devices not only acted as a stimulant to his creative imagination but had a further, and perhaps a deeper and more personal, significance for him.¹⁶

Jarman's use of the word "conceit" seems deliberate, and it seems not inappropriate to allude to analogous procedures in English metaphysical poetry (for instance, that of John Donne and Andrew Marvell) in this regard. The last lines of Donne's Holy Sonnet no. 10 ("Death be not proud..."),

"One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die".

This paradox can only make sense on a philosophical or religious level that penetrates the surface meaning of the words, as it is clearly impossible for death to die in the physical sense. This embodiment of two meanings is a feature both of this kind of poetry and of certain musical procedures as indicated above, in which the "higher" or "inner" meaning depends on structural complexities either in words or notes of music.

Berg's use of the same series in his song "Schliesse mir die Augen beide" of 1925 and in the subsequent Lyric Suite has been seen as caused by "his desire... to use a series with strong lyrical possibilities",¹⁸ probably a similar reason to Mahler's carrying through of themes as mentioned above. In Berg's usage, however, the series is set within a completely different rhythmic framework so as to produce two entirely different melodic structures.

Halsey Stevens has illustrated the vagaries of one of the motives of Bartók's String Quartet no. 4 (1928) which is subjected to treatment by inversion and both diatonic and intervallic expansion. In discussing the structure of the work, Stevens has this to say: "The rigors of its logic are matched by the extreme concentration of its idiom. It is a quartet almost without themes, with only motives and their development".¹⁹ He goes on to mention the structural import of the motivic patterns shared by the first and fifth, and second and fourth, movements respectively.

An example of a virtually monothematic movement of Bartók's is seen in the Music for String Instruments, Percussion, and Celesta (1936) whose fugue subject is used as the single constructive principle for the entire first movement.

The remarkable economy of the movement is demonstrated in the total absence of materials outside the subject. There is no countersubject; there are no episodes; there are no 'free' contrapuntal lines. The entire fabric is woven with a single thread. There are intervallic changes, and the other modifications which Bartók's fugue subjects normally undergo, the foreshortenings and prolongations; but every note may be directly traced to the subject itself. 20

The ability to carry through an idea with such single-mindedness is clearly that of a master who thereby imbues the work with tremendous inner logic and coherence. Although some other material of subsidiary import is introduced in the later movements, the implications of the subject form the constructive basis of most of the work, which exhibits the structural characteristics of arch-form, as does much of the later music of Alban Berg.

No discussion (however brief) of the ways in which contemporary composers have made use of the resources available to them can afford to overlook the work of John Cage.

Over the past 50 years Cage has ambled through one musical frontier after another: homemade percussion, magnetic tape, prepared piano, electronically generated sound, mixed media presentation, composition by chance procedures, alternative forms of notation. He has forwarded a virtually endless stream of ideas about process, indeterminacy, and silence (the title of his most widely read book) which have attained semi-scriptural stature (it was Cage, after all, who coined the term 'experimental music'), ultimately influencing not only classical music but popular and jazz currents as well, through artists as diverse as Brian Eno and Laurie Anderson to Anthony Braxton and Philip Glass. 21

What is of primary interest to this study is the mention of "chance procedures" in which the note-to-note events are determined by external or random means, such as sequences of the dice throws and so on. The idea of "chance procedures" may seem to be paradoxical or self-contradictory at first sight but this may be resolved if one regards it as yet another way of organizing sound

where the intention is to neutralize any personal connotations; the composer is able to distance himself considerably from his creation and thereby create perhaps the most absolute of absolute musics.

This type of procedure is not immediately apparent to the listener. Steve Reich discusses this point with reference to Cage:

The process of using the I Ching or imperfections in a sheet of paper to determine musical parameters can't be heard when listening to music composed that way. The compositional process and the sounding music have no audible connections. Similarly in serial music, the series itself is seldom audible. 22

Bearing in mind that it is possible to use a series in a tonal manner through the choice of certain intervals within it and thereby create something grammatically more related to the common practice world, it seems clear that Reich's remarks about serial music above should not be accepted without reservation. Schoenberg, the pioneer of serial music and also a brilliant teacher and theoretician himself stressed the importance of connectedness if only on a microscopic level (that is, the motivic as against the thematic level) in saying: "coherence in music can only depend on motifs and their metamorphoses and developments". 23

Cage's procedures, one feels, are akin to a koan in Zen Philosophy whose paradoxical nature forces the student to abandon intellectual procedures to arrive at the truth. To E. M. Forster's famous dictum (in Aspects of the Novel), "Only connect", one might expect Cage to counter: "Only disconnect".

In interview with Bill Shoemaker, Cage is very clear about his intentions. His experience of hearing the sounds of his own body operating in the anticipated total silence of the Harvard anechoic chamber was a revelation.

I keep trying to find other ways than I have in the past of writing

non-intentional music, or providing stimulus for non-intentional improvisation. Most of my life I was opposed to improvisation because improvisation seemed to be dependent on taste and memory, which I wanted the music to be free of. 24

To what extent a system of music based on removing the notion of intention on the part of the composer or performer is capable of expressing anything beyond philosophical ideals seems open to question. It is therefore perhaps true to say that Cage has been more influential in terms of his ideas than of his music.

We can build an atomic power station more easily and land on the moon more quickly than we can apprehend the great classical and modern music and make it the property of the working people. For, unfortunately, listening to music requires training. If that does not occur, then listening lags behind the most progressive social consciousness. 25

Between 1900 and the present day there have been tremendous changes in concert-music. The common practice harmonic framework has to a large extent been felt to be outmoded; despite this fact, composers have by and large maintained formal connections by thematic means. Whether these take place on thematic or motivic levels, as events more and more tend to microscopically small connections, the procedures essentially have not changed and in fact with the dissolution of the tonal language these means of connection have become of paramount importance for the achievement of internal coherence. The way in which these connections are used in improvised musics forms the basis of the next part of this study.

Footnotes : 1.1

- ¹ Ursula v. Rauchhaupt, ed., Schoenberg, Berg, Webern : The String Quartets : A Documentary Study (Hamburg : Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft MBH., 1971), p. 51.
- ² Halsey Stevens, The Life and Music of Béla Bartók (New York : Oxford University Press, 1953; revised ed., 1964), pp. 191 - 92.
- ³ Steve Reich, "Introduction to Drumming". Notes for his recording of Drumming, Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ, Six pianos. Deutsche Grammophon 2740 106.
- ⁴ James Lincoln Collier, The Making of Jazz : A Comprehensive History (London : Granada, 1978; paperback ed., London : Macmillan, 1981), p. 10.
- ⁵ Steve Reich, "Music as a gradual process". Notes to 2740 106.
- ⁶ Jim Aikin and Joel Rothstein, "Terry Riley", Keyboard, vol.8, no.4 (April 1982), 11.
- ⁷ David Behrman, notes to Terry Riley's recording In C, Columbia MS 7178.
- ⁸ Aikin and Rothstein, *ibid.*, 11.
- ⁹ David Burge, "Contemporary piano : Bartók's Improvisations, op, 20", Keyboard, vol. 8, no. 12 (December 1982), 66.
- ¹⁰ Walter Willson Cobbett, ed., Cobbett's cyclopedic survey of chamber music, Vol. 1, (London : Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 546.
- ¹¹ Leonard Bernstein, notes to his recording of Charles Ives, Second Symphony, Columbia MS 6889. Bernstein also mentions Ives' quotation of the following songs : "America, the Beautiful", "Camptown Races", "Swanee River" and others.
- ¹² Geiringer and Geiringer, Brahms, p. 256.
- ¹³ Karl Geiringer in collaboration with Irene Geiringer, Haydn : A Creative Life in Music. 2nd ed., (Berkeley, U.S.A : University of California Press, 1963).
- ¹⁴ Stuckenschmidt, Schoenberg, pp.525 ff. This discussion of the "Primal Cell" gives many examples of inter-cellular connections (even inside some of the tone-rows themselves). This is noteworthy in view of Schoenberg's denial of "thematic" connections in his work.

- ¹⁵Radio broadcast, Frankfurt 1934, quoted in Stuckenschmidt, *ibid.*
- ¹⁶Douglas Jarman, The Music of Alban Berg (London : Faber & Faber, 1979), pp. 226 - 27.
- ¹⁷Arthur M. Eastman et al., eds., The Norton Anthology of Poetry (New York : Norton, 1970), p. 240.
- ¹⁸Reginald Smith Brindle, Serial Composition (London : Oxford University Press, 1966; reprint ed., 1980), p. 5.
- ¹⁹Stevens, *ibid.*, pp. 186 ff.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 273.
- ²¹Bill Shoemaker "The Age of Cage", Downbeat ; For Contemporary Musicians, vol. 51, no. 12 (December 1984), 26ff.
- ²²Reich, "Gradual Process". Notes to 2740 106.
- ²³Stuckenschmidt, *ibid.*, p. 510.
- ²⁴Shoemaker, *ibid.*, 27.
- ²⁵Hanns Eisler, A Rebel in Music : Selected Writings, ed. Manfred Grabs, trans. Marjorie Meyer (New York : International Publishers, 1978), p. 199.

1.2 Some thematic principles in improvised music

The first part of this study was an examination of how composers have used the thematic principle within contemporary concert music. The relevance of these procedures to improvised music in general and to Monk in particular can only apply, however, if the essential similarity between the processes of composition and improvisation is accepted.

Composition, as a rule, gives rise to a notated, repeatable product in the form of written music while the improviser is concerned with a more or less instantaneous result. When the improviser exhibits a high degree of skill, say, with intervallic manipulation, then the result may well approach a level of instantaneous "composition".

It is thus because of Monk's highly developed sense of orientation within an improvisation that Ran Blake has been prompted to say: "Monk's solos are superb examples of what I call 'liquid composition'. He always seemed to be aware, when playing a solo, of where he had been and where he was going, and he almost never resorted to spinning out lead lines merely to be filling space".¹

Western music notation has not really been adequate in conveying the nuances of some improvised musics; this is illustrated in microtonal improvisations where new notation has had to be invented to account for intervals smaller than the chromatic scale.

In the notation of Afro-American improvised music as well, our current rhythmic vocabulary can only arrive at an approximate idea of the feeling of "swing". The laconic designations "eighths straight" and "eighths swung"

are as inadequate in conveying this feeling as are the over-notated attempts of composers to get this idea across to orchestral musicians who are by the nature of their work unfamiliar with this notion.

Steve Lacy has spoken of the value of improvisation in an interview with Derek Bailey : "I'm attracted to improvisation because of something I value. That is a freshness, a certain quality, which can only be obtained by improvisation, something you cannot possibly get from writing. It is something to do with the 'edge'. Always being on the brink of the unknown and being prepared for the leap". ²

Bill Evans is very well qualified to discuss the nature of improvisation. In an article called "Improvisation in Jazz", he draws explicit parallels between Japanese visual art and the spontaneity of jazz improvisation. He writes:

There is a Japanese visual art in which the artist is forced to be spontaneous. He must paint on a thin stretched parchment with a special brush and black water paint in such a way that an unnatural or interrupted stroke will destroy the line or break through the parchment. Erasures or changes are impossible. These artists must practice a particular discipline, that of allowing the idea to express itself in communication with their hands in such a direct way that deliberation cannot interfere.

The resulting pictures lack the complex composition and textures of ordinary painting, but it is said that those who see well find something captured that escapes explanation.

This conviction that direct deed is the most meaningful reflection, I believe, has prompted the evolution of the extremely severe and unique disciplines of the jazz or improvising musician. ³

Unfortunately this ideal is very difficult to put into practice; it is only at

the boundaries of control that one can attain Marcel Duchamp's idea, "to reach the impossibility of transferring from one like object to another the memory-imprint".⁴ The boundaries of control are at one end the abandonment of structural parameters (as in free improvisation) and at the other the situation where the composer fixes so many of the parameters that any latitude in performance is virtually done away with.

Most improvised music exists in an area between these poles of control, as it places the responsibility for the creation in the hands of the performer. Thus it is possible to guess the identity of a performer in jazz not only by his individual "sound" but also by the types of motivic connections he employs during the course of a solo.

The universe of discourse of jazz is fairly circumscribed and the limited harmonic background of much of it tends to restrict the performer's choices as well as those of the accompanists, all of whom play fairly well-defined roles within the creative process.

Ethnic music also tends to function within a more or less fixed framework. Lucy Durán's discussion of the structure of Gambian kora music contains striking parallels to the "theme and variation" structure of much jazz:

Kora players divide the instrumental aspect of performance into two components, the kumbengo (a recurrent theme) and the birimintingo (variation and embellishment). The term 'kumbengo' (plural kumbengolu) is used in several contexts, all of which are related to its general meaning of strings, which, when sounded together, are in agreement. 5

After describing the structure of the theme, in which there is considerable room for individual expression, Durán goes on to discuss types of variation. The first category displays a close relationship to the original material while the second introduces new melodic motifs or ornamental passages.

The third category called sariro combines a simplified version of the melody with a new accompaniment.

"It is significant that the melody played with the thumbs in this example corresponds exactly to the melodic skeleton as established for the Tilibo kumbengo, with which kumbengo the sariro is always associated in 'Tutu Jara'". ⁶

The use of a kumbengo as an idée fixe in two different pieces is the world-music correlative to the art-music practices of such as Mahler and Berg and is another example of using identical material in different settings. In this case, the material exists untransformed in the new instance, unlike the rhythmic changes made by Berg.

These are then the basic categories of variation as expressed in Gambian kora music, which is according to some writers ⁷ the possible source for the beginnings of the American blues; while the blues in relation to some aspects of jazz improvisation is more fully examined later (2.3), some remarks about the form in relation to world-music improvisation practice are in order. The blues is clearly a synthesis resulting from placing African vocal music in a diatonic context, which accounts for the importance of untempered ("blue") notes in the sound of the blues. What is significant for this study is that blues melodies were being replicated by various singers on different tunes long before the structure of the blues came to be fixed as the twelve-bar one we know today.

An oral tradition does not consist only of words. Melodic ideas may form

part of its currency as well and are especially powerful in combination with words, as in the blues, whose verse-structure often takes the form AAB. A represents an idea which is repeated, sometimes with slight variation, while B takes the form of a commentary on the situation as described by A.

Fig. 1.2.1 Bessie Smith "St Louis Blues" (Handy) Source: Arrigo Polillo,
notes to Bessie Smith, I Grandidel Jazz - 70

The musical example (Fig. 1.2.1) from Bessie Smith illustrates how this verse-structure has its melodic analogue which reinforces the meaning of the song. In other words, the verbal structure is paralleled by the melodic one.

Bernard Lortat-Jacob has studied Sardinian folk music, which consists (like some of the country blues) of singing accompanied by guitar. His findings imply a kind of oral tradition in which actual structures are memorized and unconsciously referred to.

The Sardinian song with guitar (canto a chitarra) is mostly performed during informal gatherings, at home or in bars, by men essentially. As it is largely improvised and has a different form with each performance, its analysis raises particular problems; hence the hypothesis of a relatively stable model, called "mother model", which exists in women's memory and is unconsciously but constantly referred to by men in their improvisations. 8

In jazz compositional practice, Frank Tirro⁹ has illustrated the way in which existing harmonic and hence formal structures are reinhabited by new melodies. This conscious reworking of what Tirro has called the "silent theme" repertoire is paralleled by the practice of quoting snatches of different melodies in new harmonic contexts, thus drawing on memory and intuition. Dexter Gordon is particularly fond of this, as is Monk.

It is clearly much more difficult to maintain overt thematic relationships within an improvisation which is spontaneously created. To do so calls for a very highly developed intuitive sense, beside the obvious requirement of a good ear. Jazz improvisers often base the opening phrase of a solo on the last one used by the previous soloist; someone who does this very well is the Durban pianist Roy Petersen who sometimes remembers very long phrases and can reproduce them exactly. This procedure obviously reinforces the listener's sense of continuity, as the same material is used by different soloists in new contexts.

The next section of this study considers some of these thematic factors in some of Monk's pieces and solos and examines in their historical context the relationships between his compositional and improvisational procedures.

Footnotes : 1.2

- ¹Ran Blake, "The Monk Piano Style", in Bob Doerschuk et al., "Thelonious Monk", Keyboard, vol.8, no. 7 (July 1982), 26 - 27.
- ²Derek Bailey, Improvisation : Its nature and practice in music (Ashbourne, Derbyshire, U.K: Moorland Publishing, 1980), pp. 74 - 75.
- ³Bill Evans, "Improvisation in Jazz", notes to Miles Davis, Kind of Blue, Columbia CS 8163.
- ⁴Quoted in Shoemaker, "The Age of Cage", p. 28.
- ⁵Lucy Durán, "Theme and variation in kora music : a preliminary study of 'Tutu Jara' as performed by Amadu Bansang Jobate" in D.R. Widdess and R.F. Wolpert, eds., Music and Tradition : Essays on Asian and other musics presented to Laurence Picken (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1981),pp. 185 - 86.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 191.
- ⁷Samuel Charters, The Roots of the Blues (Boston : Marion Boyars, 1981).
- ⁸Bernard Lortat-Jacob, "Improvisation et modèle : Le chant à guitare Sarde", L'Homme, vol.24, no. 1 (January - March 1984), 89.
- ⁹Frank Tirro, "The Silent Theme Tradition in Jazz", The Musical Quarterly, vol.53, no. 3 (July 1967).

2. The compositional and improvisational style of Thelonious Monk

2.1 Hawkins, Parker, and the birth of bebop

With the exceptions of the ragtime period, during which pieces were through-composed and entirely written down leaving little or no room for improvisation, and the free jazz era, where there is no formal structure as such, the jazz composition has tended to adhere to a more or less fixed structure in which the melody (or "head" in jazz parlance) is played once or twice, sometimes preceded by an introduction. Following this "exposition", the main body of the composition then consists of improvised material based on the chord progression (or "changes") which is concluded by a restatement of the melody, thus a kind of recapitulation with or without a coda.

Following the ragtime era this improvised material assumes greater and greater importance in the piece for two reasons: firstly the amount of time allotted to improvisation becomes longer and longer partly no doubt due to the greater freedom in time granted by the long-playing record and secondly the rise of the first great soloists of jazz, such as Armstrong, Young, and Hawkins, whose abilities often transcended the simple melodic materials at their disposal, begins.

In the pioneer days of jazz in New Orleans and Chicago, players tended to improvise from a melody or set figure. Armstrong, for example, would, while improvising, have the song's melody firmly in mind all along the way, and he would improvise by adding to it

notes or phrases that his ear told him were part of the ¹ harmonic underpinning of the song at any given moment.

The reliance on the ear alone as a force of inspiration, despite its deft treatment in the hands of a master craftsman like Armstrong, has shortcomings which Hawkins was able to overcome by his higher level of musical training which enabled him to base his improvisations on the harmonic structure in preference to that of the melodic. This naturally establishes a less direct or more oblique relationship between the head's melodic material and that of the solo.

Hawkins' famous solo on "Body and Soul" exemplifies this approach. It is probably only in the first eight bars that Hawkins maintains these melodic connections, and even here the melody is elaborated upon in such a way as to be a kind of commentary on the original. André Hodeir, in his discussion of melodic content in jazz, refers to these eight bars as an example of "paraphrase" which "retains definite melodic affinities with the theme phrase [the original tune itself] from which it springs".² These affinities are perhaps not quite as definite as Hodeir maintains, as a simple mapping from Hawkins' interpretation to the original will indicate.³

Hawkins creates tension and interest chiefly by his skillful rhythmic manipulations of the material. At the points where his line coincides with that of the original melody, he uses displacement through delay or anticipation in constant challenge to the listener's expectations. Thus those places where both the rhythmic and melodic material coincide with the original are perceived by the listener as points of arrival or resolution.

Fig. 2.1.1: "Body and Soul" (Green) Upper line is Hawkins' solo. Lower line is tune as written. Sources: Hawkins -- Frank Tirro, *Jazz: A History* (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 368 - 70; original -- *Real Book*, p. 59.

The contents of bar eight for instance (in the original four beats of D -flat) reveal only a brief faithfulness to the original melody for one beat where it is quickly superseded by a D-natural on the third beat. The figures which separate these two quarter-notes (on D-flat and D-natural respectively) are basically a pair of four sixteenth-notes "swung", thereby anticipating the rhythmic units of the solo (largely sixteenth-note values or less).

Considering the fourth beat of the previous bar (7) as well, it will be seen that the arpeggio introduced on this beat is amplified on beats two and four of the following bar which are displaced echoes of it. If

these are removed from the eighth bar, the resulting chromatic line D-flat -- D-natural -- E-flat is revealed. It is a neat touch on Hawkins' part to resolve the C-flat of the eighth bar by downward skip of a minor sixth onto the root of the E-flat minor chord, instead of by half-step to the fifth (B-flat). This bears a clear connection with the "theme phrase" and serves as a temporary resting-place before Hawkins begins his solo proper.

The rest of the solo exhibits more tenuous connections to the original melody than does the abovementioned segment. This tenuousness is increased by Hawkins' sure-fingered use of double-timed passages where the listener's attention is captured both by ingenious displacements and by Hawkins' use of sequence to establish motivic connectedness.

In bars 7 and 8 of the second chorus, the figure (Fig.2.1.2a) is used sequentially as well as inverted in its last occurrence, on the last beat of bar 8 (Fig.2.1.2b).

Another example of a similar process is found in bars 4 - 6 of the second chorus, where the motive (Fig.2.1.3a) occurs first on the third beat of bar 4, then as per Fig.2.1.3b on the downbeat of the next bar, and finally on the upbeat of the fourth beat of the sixth bar in the form of Fig.2.1.3c, where it is less immediately recognizable on account of its altered metrical position.

This little appoggiatura figure permeates "Body and Soul" to a very great extent: in bar 1 of the second chorus, it occurs in augmentation on the third beat, and in bar 10, it is treated in sequence on beats 2 and 4. Hawkins flats the F as well, thereby preserving the intervallic shape, and in the following bar (11) it is both repeated in the guise of the first four sixteenth-notes (Fig. 2.1.3d) and then expanded by means of an inserted note and displaced (Fig. 2.1.3e).



Fig. 2.1.2. Coleman Hawkins "Body and Soul" a -- bar 38 b -- bars 40 - 41



Fig. 2.1.3. Coleman Hawkins "Body and Soul" a -- bar 36 b -- bar 37 c -- 38 d -- bar 43 e -- bar 43.

It is too much to say that Hawkins invented playing against the chords; other musicians before him, especially pianists, had done it. But Hawkins explored the chord structure of a song more thoroughly than had most improvisers, and he acquired whole schools of followers. Abandoning the melody at the outset, he would think in terms of the implications of each chord as it came along, and what he could do with it. This freed him of total dependence on his ear and allowed him to add notes to chords or alter them by following standard rules of harmony. 4

The idea of Hawkins' approach giving rise to "whole schools of followers" somewhat bears out the importance of the point made above ⁵ about the cult of the individual in jazz. The first thing that is apparent about a musician's style is most likely to be his "sound". The sound of Lester Young, Hawkins' chief rival, has been described by Jo Jones as follows:

Some people would tell Lester that he didn't have a good tone, that he should change his tone. And that would cause friction. These people never think in terms of the physical features of an individual and how each one has different physical characteristics and that these make him play the way he does play. ⁶

Hawkins' tone was certainly considered the ideal of the day, as is bore out by the considerable initial opposition by musicians to that of Young; in fact Young and Hawkins may be considered as complementary, rather than opposite, to one another. In fact these two musicians were for a time the Scylla and Charybdis that many an apprentice had to negotiate in order to find his individuality.

In due course there was to appear on the jazz scene a musician who would combine the sound of Lester Young with the approach of Coleman Hawkins in the midst of a musical revolution in which he was a prime mover. The revolution was bebop and the musician Charlie Parker, who was to say: "I was crazy about Lester. He played so clean and beautiful. But I wasn't influenced by Lester. Our ideas ran on differently". ⁷

In combining Young's lyrical tone with Hawkins' harmonic insights, Parker, in the company of musicians like Kenny Clarke, Thelonious Monk, and Dizzy Gillespie, was to be in the vanguard of a new and esoteric musical form. To be able to take part in the new harmonic and rhythmic landscape required a

certain amount of musical training, for the bebop musicians were to try to exclude by musical means all those of the ancien régime.

This was achieved by a harmonic re-working of the old structures of pieces, which included modulations to remote areas and the use of substitute chords. To a neophyte guest on the bandstand, unaware of these complexities, these harmonic advances could well cause him to come to musical grief. The use of substitute and passing chords to expand the amount of choices open to the soloist is claimed to have been instigated by none other than Coleman Hawkins, who was one of the older generation most sympathetic to bebop:

A lot of people didn't know about flatted fifths and augmented changes and they thought that to go to a D-flat chord you had to go from A-flat seventh - where I might go from a D-ninth. Of course that sort of thing is extremely common now, but it certainly wasn't before I did 'Body and Soul'. 8

The practice of substituting a D-ninth chord for an A-flat seventh is known as tritone substitution from the fact that the roots of the two chords are a tritone or diminished fifth apart. Taking the bare tritone of the A-flat (Fig. 2.1.4a) chord and enharmonically altering the spelling (Fig. 2.1.4b) enabled the improviser to use a chord built on the tritone distance, thus giving him notes foreign to the original chord to work with.

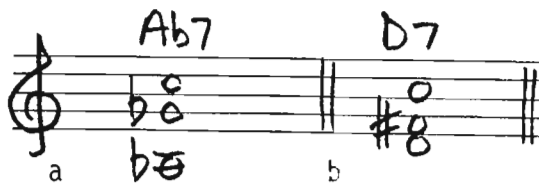


Fig. 2.1.4 a,b Tritone substitution (chords with roots a diminished fifth apart)

In addition to various substitutions, another problem the bebop musicians were able to resolve through their more advanced harmonic knowledge was that of remote modulation.

The bridge of "Cherokee" is long and harmonically more difficult than most of the bridges of the most popular songs. (As originally written, it is polytonal. Few jazzmen of the day understood this concept; most found the bridge puzzling. Eventually, Parker worked out a set of changes for it, based on the "Tea for Two" changes). 9

One must question Collier's use of the term "polytonal" here. The bridge of "Cherokee" certainly seems to go to fairly distant regions from the home key but the progression can certainly be analyzed out in terms of II and V progressions. Hints of polytonality of a fairly fleeting nature obtain in the 3rd and 11th bars where it appears as in Fig. 2.1.5.

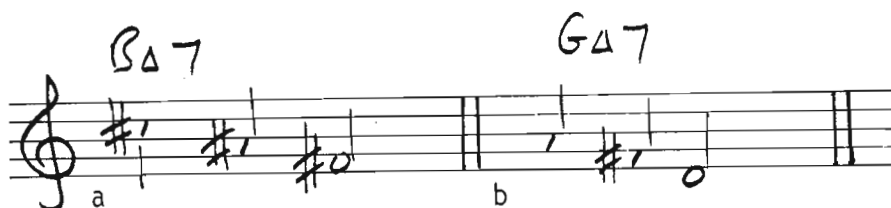


Fig. 2.1.5 Polytonality in the bridge of "Cherokee" (Noble) a -- bar 35
b -- bar 43.

The appearance of polytonality (or strictly speaking bitonality) is deceptive. Analysis of these bars in bitonal terms through verticalization of the melodic constituents gives us F sharp major / B major seventh and D major / G major seventh respectively. As, in each case, there is only note (the ninth) that is not based on the original harmony, which when compressed yields B maj 9 and G maj 9 respectively. What Collier probably means is

that musicians couldn't handle the modulating aspects of the bridge, which goes into keys such as G-sharp major for alto and C-sharp major for tenor which present a number of fingering difficulties aggravated by the quick tempo.

The musicians of the bebop school were able to overcome these difficulties by dint of superior training and hard practising, but there were other factors which tended to make bebop an exclusivist school.

The swing band movement made jazz popular, and, predictably, there was a reaction. In fact, there were two reactions, one looking back and the other looking forward. The black beboppers began their search for a new way of playing at least in part because of resentment at seeing whites becoming richer and more celebrated at playing jazz than blacks were, and in part because of boredom with what had become, by the early 1940s, a stereotypical music. They wanted something new, something that was their own, and something -- some of them hoped -- that whites could not play. 10

Despite the understandable resentment of black musicians at whites cashing in on their music, it seems to me that the beboppers were basing this new creation more on demonstrable technical prowess rather than skin colour. Collier is wise to qualify this statement as he does, for the bebop Weltanschauung really excludes firstly all non-musicians and secondly all professed musicians who were unable to cope with the unusual modulations at quick tempi characteristic of the harmonic language of bebop.

Kenny Clarke, one of the leading architects of the movement, was to say in conversation with Leonard Feather:

We'd play "Epistrophy" or "I've Got My Love To Keep Me Warm" just to keep the other guys off the stand, because we knew they couldn't make those chord changes. We kept the riff-raff out and built our clique on new chords. 11 (*Italics mine*).

It is one of the ironies of jazz history that Coleman Hawkins, whose re-harmonization of "Body and Soul" was indirectly to fertilize and inspire much of the harmonic adventurousness of the new music, was to be unable to deal with its rhythmic innovations.

But try as he might to catch up with the beboppers, Hawkins was by the late 1940s out of the vanguard and into the ruck. He was able to understand what the beboppers were doing harmonically, but they were doing rhythmically eluded him as it eluded every one of the older men. 12

In marked contrast to the somewhat four-square phrasing of the swing era which tended to be grounded on the strong beats in the bar, bebop players tended to phrase more around the weak beats. Miles Davis had this to say with reference to Parker's approach to the blues:

Like we'd be playing the blues and Bird [Parker] would start on the 11th bar, and as the rhythm section stayed where they were and Bird played where he was, it sounded as if the rhythm section was one and three instead of two and four. Everytime that would happen Max [Roach, the drummer] would scream at Duke [Jordan, the pianist] not to follow Bird, but to stay where he was. Then eventually it came around as Bird had planned and we were together again. 13

"Cool Blues (take 4)" illustrates some of the master's great gifts of invention and rhythmic flexibility. The piece itself is fairly simple, the melody consisting of a single phrase repeated three times, with chromatic inflection to fit the harmonic structure. This structure conforms to that of the traditional strophic shape of the blues phrase.

Given this very basic framework, Parker is able to develop a highly flexible improvisation. André Hodeir, in alluding to Parker's "perfection of rhythmic construction", has this to say about the solo: "I am thinking not so much of

the admittedly remarkable way he 'airs out' his phrases by a generous and judicious use of rests as of the supremely intelligent way he makes long and short phrases alternate". 14

Fig. 2.1.6: Charlie Parker "Cool Blues (take 4)" (Parker). Theme. Source: author's transcription. 15

Parker makes use of an antecedent-consequent idea in the first four bars of the solo, (page 42 above), whose opening phrase (bars 1 & 2) is answered by a similar one. The B-flat on the last eighth in bar 3 is an anticipation of the C7 chord of bar 4. By dividing the first phrase Parker gets away from the three-strophe idea of the tune and then answers these symmetrical phrases with the one-bar figure in bar 5. Parker makes intelligent use of these repeated C's later on in the solo.

The short figure of bar 5 (the shortest in phrase length) is answered by the longest (bars 6 - 10). In bar 6 over an F7 chord Parker uses the A - A-flat alternation, that is, natural third alternated with minor third (sharpened ninth), which idea is carried over into the following bar (7) where the sharpened ninth of the C7 chord is sounded right on the downbeat.

Fig.2.1.7: "Cool Blues (take 4)". Charlie Parker's alto saxophone solo.
 Source: André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, p. 149

Fig. 2.1.8 "Cool Blues" a -- bar 9 solo, b -- bar 9 theme (above, p. 43)

This choice of note can be analysed in two ways: as the sharpened ninth per se or as the 7th note of the F dominant quartad from the previous bar. Parker places the E-natural on the next strongest beat, thus once again

making use of the sharpened ninth-diatonic third alternation in a metrically emphasised position.

The remarks of Hodeir regarding this solo continue as follows:

True, Parker respects the four-bar unit of construction characteristic of jazz themes, but instead of conforming to it mechanically, like Mezzrow, he interprets it and preserves his flexibility in spite of the framework's rigidity, which he is not afraid to modify from time to time (notably, and with particular elegance, in the ninth measure). 17

The ninth bar contains very little in the way of new material, so one is at a loss to understand the idea of modification, elegant or otherwise, that Hodeir makes so much of. The material of this bar (2.1.8a), is virtually identical with that of the original (2.1.8b), and thus serves as a fragmentary allusion to the opening material. As it bears the closest relationship to the melody both in the choice of notes and where they fall, the content of this bar can only be seen as a very close transformation of the opening material, yet another motive-correlative.

Mention was made above of Parker's use of repeated notes in the fifth bar of the solo. The relationship between the bracketed material is obvious (Fig. 2.1.9a) and (Fig. 2.1.9b) and one is reminded of a remark of Rudolf Reti concerning the use of thematic material: "For the creative mind structure is a means, not an obstacle, to the manifestation of its inspiration". 18

The material Parker uses to open his second chorus exhibits, despite its displacement in metrical position, clear connections with the opening phrase of the tune. Instead of starting the phrase on the downbeat however, Parker brings it forward by one and a half beats, and in bar 13, every note of the

phrase is played on the off beat (Fig. 2.1.10a). Once again, the bracketed material bears a striking resemblance to the tune although it has been moved forward by two beats (Fig. 2.1.10b).

Although space does not permit a detailed analysis of the second chorus some general points about it warrant mentioning. The relationship between the material of Bars 5 & 11 has been touched on already and this is further reinforced by the material of bar 23 (Fig. 2.1.11). One very subtle thing about Parker's use of this cell is the way he extends the duration of the last note: the quarter-note of bar 11 is extended to a half-note in bar 23, which would be the place where one would logically expect the phrase to end. The fact that this material corresponds not only in content but also recurs in the same bar in each chorus is a striking indication of how a great jazz improviser will set up connections whose correspondence help further to delineate the formal structure of the tune.



Fig. 2.1.9 "Cool Blues" a -- bar 5 b -- bar 11



Fig. 2.1.10 "Cool Blues" a -- bars 12,13 b -- bar 1

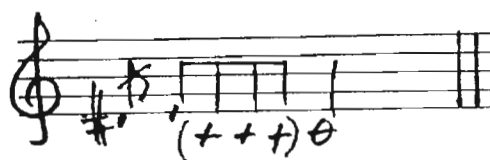


Fig. 2.1.11 "Cool Blues", bar 23

With these connections in mind, Parker's last phrase (corresponding as it does to a bar of silence in the original) almost sounds like the beginning of another chorus. It is hard to see how Hodeir can maintain that Parker is adhering to "the four-bar unit construction" given where the phrases begin and the great differences in the phrase-lengths themselves.

TABLE 1

PHRASE STRUCTURE IN CHARLIE PARKER'S SOLO ("Cool Blues (take 4)")

<u>Phrase number</u>	<u>Duration (in beats)</u>	<u>Metric position</u>
<u>1st chorus</u>		
1	6	1st eighth, bar 1
2	5½	Last eighth, bar 2
3	4	1st eighth, bar 5
4	13½	3rd eighth, bar 6
5	5½	2nd eighth, bar 10
<u>2nd chorus</u>		
1	5	6th eighth, bar 12
2	6½	2nd eighth, bar 14
3	4 1/4	4th sixteenth, bar 16
4	6	5th eighth, bar 17
5	7½	3rd eighth, bar 19
6	9½	11th sixteenth, bar 21
7	4½	3rd sixteenth, bar 24

This table gives an idea of the tremendous variety of phrase-lengths used by Parker. In those instances where the phrase durations correspond, they start on different parts of the beat, and, in fact, the only phrase which

would be seen to honour the three-strophe structure of the original blues is that one made by welding together phrases 1 and 2 of the first chorus. Even this idea is militated against by the way in which these phrases are obviously conceived of as single entities in antecedent-consequent form and the way in which the first five notes of the bars in question (1 and 3) correspond exactly both in pitch and metric position.

Parker's solo also contains a large amount of rhythmic variety. Such units as eighth-notes, dotted eighth-notes, quarter-notes, sixteenth-notes, eighth triplets and even a quintuplet are used. This amount of variety must have seemed completely forbidding to the average swing musician of the day whose vocabulary at that stage consisted mostly of eighth-notes. When one considers that Parker used groups of triplets and sixteenth-notes at tempi of $\downarrow = 300$ and higher, one begins to realize what a supreme master of the instrument he was. Very few players of the time could match this kind of command, let alone think coherently at that speed.

"Technical proficiency was a part of the movement, and the be-bop musician did his best to belittle anyone who could not maintain the demanding pace. The jam session was the be-bop musician's trial by fire". 19

Now clearly in terms of the bebop revolution in the fields of harmony, tempo, rhythm, and phrasing, the swing piano idiom could no longer suffice as an underpinning and a new kind of approach had to be worked out. The four-square, on the beat, phrasing of swing accompaniment gave way to a much more streamlined style, and it devolved upon the bassist both to provide the walking four beats in the bar and to outline the harmonic functions, tasks

formerly handled by the drummer and pianist respectively.

According to this development the quintessential bop pianist must be Bud Powell who combines a prodigious right-hand technique heavily based (as is to be expected) on the kind of figurations Parker was using with a fairly sparse left-hand. The harmonics are rather more implicit than previously and the function of the left hand becomes more rhythmic and percussive than harmonic.

Notwithstanding Monk's presence at Minton's and elsewhere during the formative years of bop his is not the archetypal bop pianist's approach. There are a number of reasons for this and the next part of this study will be an examination of Monk's early years and his relationship to the innovations brought about by the bebop revolution.

Footnotes: 2.1

¹ Collier, Making of Jazz, p. 223.

² André Hodeir, Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence, trans. David Noakes (New York: Grove Press, 1956; paperback ed., New York: Black Cat Books, 1961), p. 144.

³ Frank Tirro, Jazz: A History (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 368 - 70. The Real Book, 19th ed., (n.p., 1986), p. 59.

⁴ Collier, *ibid.*, pp. 223 - 24.

⁵ P. 25 above.

⁶ Shapiro and Hentoff, eds., Talkin' to Ya, p. 309.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

⁸ Coleman Hawkins, quoted in Collier, *ibid.*, p. 224.

Footnotes: 2.1 cont

- ⁹Collier, *ibid.*, p. 232.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 280.
- ¹¹Kenny Clarke, quoted in Tirro, "Silent Theme Tradition", 315.
- ¹²Collier, *ibid.*, p. 222.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 353 - 54.
- ¹⁴Hodeir, Evolution & Essence, pp. 152 - 53.
- ¹⁵Author's transcription. "Cool Blues (take 4)" was recorded by the Charlie Parker Quartet in C.P. Macgregor Studios, Hollywood, 19 February 1947. The group consisted of Parker, alto saxophone, Erroll Garner, piano, Red Callender, bass, and Harold 'Doc' West, drums. The recording is on Charlie Parker, vol.5, Everest Records FS 315.
- ¹⁶Hodeir, Evolution and Essence, p. 149.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 153.
- ¹⁸Reti, Thematic Process, p. 23.
- ¹⁹Tirro, "Silent Theme", 315.

2.2 Monk and bebop

The most significant reason why this split [between the boppers and other musicians] occurred was that the be-bop musician was trying to raise the quality of jazz from the level of utilitarian dance music to that of a chamber art form. At the same time he was trying to raise the status of the jazzman from entertainer to artist. His attempts were not immediately accepted, and when his music was rejected, the be-bop musician turned inward. 1

A good way of grasping the essential difference between music of the swing era (which certainly seems the paradigm of "utilitarian dance music") and that of the bebop era would be to engage the hypothetical jazz fan in the cheap seats in a listening test by asking him to hum the tune of "In the Mood" followed by a bebop tune like "Donna Lee". The chances of a relative degree of accuracy in the first case are fairly good; "In the Mood" is eminently hummable mainly because of its essentially monothematic character. Our hypothetical jazz fan would struggle with "Donna Lee" unless he were an aficionado of bop or had some musical training largely because it has a less easily definable melody.

It was suggested above that the chief innovations of the bebop era were in the harmonic and rhythmic fields; this is not to say, however, that the beboppers ignored melody altogether, but the idea of a "catchy" bebop tune does seem rather at odds with the somewhat serious aims of the musicians concerned. Leaving aside the opinions of those bigots who maintain that jazz ended when Charlie Parker picked up the saxophone, it is still astounding how little awareness there is in the public mind of the directions jazz took

between the period of bebop and jazz-rock fusion, when jazz surfaced once again in the amalgam of rock (volume and amplification) and jazz (improvisation and odd time-signatures).

The evidence above leads one to conclude with reluctance that the consciousness-raising attempts to the bebop musicians were doomed to failure, partly because of the nature of bebop melodies themselves and partly because of the huge commercial success and high visibility of swing, bop's precursor. It need hardly be added that bop largely paved the way for precisely those musicians whose careers took off during those thirty years of jazz's low profile, some of whom include Mingus, Davis, Coleman, Coltrane, Lacy, and Cecil Taylor, to name a few; no contemporary saxophonist worth his salt has not had to assimilate the lessons of Parker in the course of his apprenticeship.

Only with the coming of modern jazz did the problem of 'how to be popular' really arise. The bop revolution, which suddenly introduced a 'new way of experiencing jazz', dismayed the public. Despite the encouragements of propagandists, who unfortunately were better skilled at juggling words than defining them, the crowd returned to the more accessible forms of music (which were also easier to dance to) once it had satisfied its curiosity. For having tried to invent a complex idiom, capable of accounting for certain aesthetic truths, jazzmen found that theirs had become a specialist's art; by cutting their music off from its popular origins, they deliberately limited their audience to a group of connoisseurs. 2

This tension between the need for rapprochement with the audience and the equally strong (if not stronger) need to honour one's own musical integrity is of course one of the problems endemic to the practice of music, the least tangible (the long-playing record to the contrary) of commodities in the field of creation.

This may be one of the reasons why bebop musicians were fond of quoting other material in their solos (especially from popular songs); apart from displaying the soloist's abilities to manipulate a finite bit of melody, to show a knowledge of parallel harmonic contexts, and to use the quoted material as a code (for instance, Paul Desmond and Dave Brubeck sometimes would carry out whole "conversations" based on the titles of the song quoted), the primary function of these quotes is tongue-in-cheek, a way of referring to bygone days and bygone tunes.

The concert recorded at Massey Hall on May 15, 1953 with Parker, Gillespie, Roach, Mingus, and Bud Powell contains some good examples of this practice. Gillespie uses "Laura" in two of his solos, while Parker alludes to Bizet's "Carmen". The humorous element in these quotations (with reference to Hodeir's statement above) lies in their reference to the "popular origins" of the material and the distance between the contexts of the popular song and of the serious improvisation around it. In recent times, Steve Kuhn's version of Parker's "Confirmation"³ quotes from "Carmen" again which demonstrates the pianist's familiarity with the bebop idiom.

Monk is very fond of using quotations in a parodistic way. His version of "Dinah"⁴ recorded in 1964 contains a reference to another pop song namely "Louise", an amusing pun based on girls' names. The whole recording (as are most of his solo recordings) is permeated with references to the stride piano tradition as if Monk is taking a slightly sardonic look at his own roots. Monk's first album for Riverside, "Thelonious Monk plays Duke Ellington", was conceived of by the producer, Orrin Keepnews, as a way of

dispelling Monk's publicity image as the mad genius of bebop.

Monk had played standards before, but never more than one or two on a session, and the affinity of Monk and Duke Ellington was hardly as accepted then as it is today. The all - Ellington idea was part based on what Keepnews describes as "our general recognition of Monk's New York upbringing and of his awareness of James P. Johnson and the stride pianists." Monk thought an Ellington album was a great idea, and as on the next session ["The Unique Thelonious Monk" which was devoted to standards]⁵ he picked the tunes and the rhythm section.

The choices for the Ellington session were both astute and revealing. Except for 'I Got It Bad', which was introduced by the classic 1941 Ellington band, and 'Black & Tan Fantasy', a 1927 product of the "jungle" period, the compositions are Thirties-vintage Ellingtonia and undoubtedly reflect the music that Monk was digging as a teenager. They are hardly the most esoteric choices Monk might have made -- most were popular hits at one time -- yet they combine harmonic richness and lyric economy in ways that are highly compatible with Monk's conception. ⁶

This harking back to material of the past perhaps accounts for Monk's penchant for setting most of his solo performances and some of his group ones as well in a sometimes sarcastic, sometimes tender version of stride. What is not generally known is that Monk actually knew the players of the older generation personally, firstly by hearing them at the Harlem rent parties where he played as a teenager and secondly through developing friendships with them.

Billy Taylor, the noted New York pianist, has mentioned this fact in an interview with Michael Cuscuna. "I had an apartment near Minton's. And I rented a Steinway. Monk used to come up and bring James P. Johnson or Clarence Profit and play on the piano. He was close to all of the New York pianists that had influenced him". ⁷

James P. Johnson, a stride pianist of high technical accomplishment and engaging personality, was also to influence Duke Ellington; it is known that Ellington learned Johnson's "Carolina Shout" from the player-piano version. This bears out the similarity (of influence at least) between Ellington and Monk.

Yet if Monk was influenced to such a degree by the players of the stride school, why do we not detect the same technical preoccupations in his playing? There are two main reasons for this, the first being that Monk was willing to emulate the spirit rather than follow the letter of what had gone before him, and the second being Monk's tremendous shift in style in the early forties, right at the beginning of bebop.

There is very little recorded evidence to show the development of this shift thanks to the AFM ban on recordings during this time; but from a 1941 recording made by Jerry Newman at Minton's showing a rather ordinary Teddy Wilson-esque piano approach to the first Blue Note recordings he made as a leader Monk managed to establish a totally individual style. What is beyond doubt, however, is that this was a conscious decision.

Mary Lou Williams, who heard Monk in Kansas City when he as a teenager, had this to say about him:

While Monk was in Kaycee, he jammed every night, really used to blow on piano, employing a lot more technique than he does today. Monk plays the way he does now because he got fed up. I know how Monk can play.

He felt that musicians should play something new and started doing it. Most of us admire him for this. He was one of the original modernists, all right, playing pretty much the same harmonies then that he's playing now. Only in those days we called it "zombie music", and reserved it mostly for musicians after hours. 8

The harmonies might have remained more or less the same but the right-hand technique and feeling for space undergo a quantum shift in the years 1941 - 45, the formative years of bebop. The assertion above that Monk was not really considered a typical bop pianist is borne out by how few recordings of the bebop era he appears on as sideman, apart from the obvious stylistic differences elucidated above. Monk is featured on a June 1950 session with Parker, Gillespie, Curley Russell, and Buddy Rich -- hardly a typical bop rhythm section with the exception of Russell, but for the rest the boppers preferred the likes of Bud Powell, Sadik Hakim, Duke Jordan and others on piano.

Perhaps it was precisely Monk's determination to forge an individual style that prevented the beboppers from booking him; perhaps it may have been his concern for the relationship of sound to silence, which gave his accompanying and solos a very atypical cast, one not really suited to the Parkeresque approach of the bebop piano style.

What Monk did, however, in that period was to give support and help to younger musicians. Besides the amount that Bud Powell undoubtedly learned from Monk, the older man also gave the fledgeling a great deal of friendship and moral support. Miles Davis has also remarked: "If I hadn't met Monk shortly after I came to New York around 1945, I wouldn't have advanced as quickly as some say I did. He showed me voicings and progressions, and I remember Charlie Parker would take me down to listen to Monk all the time and make me sit in with him".⁹

It is difficult to reconcile Parker's endorsement of Monk with his

unwillingness to book him for more sessions than he did, and what is more difficult to understand is Miles's condemnation of Monk's accompanying abilities a scant nine years later during the famous Modern Jazz Giants session when he refused to allow Monk to play behind him. Miles was to say this about Monk at a later stage: "I love the way Monk plays and writes, but I can't stand him behind me. He doesn't give you any support". (Italics mine).

This statement of course illustrates as much about Davis's requirements from an accompanist as it does about Monk's actual ability (or lack thereof) to provide support for a soloist. This often consists of a restatement of the contours of melodic line (or sometimes just the "peaks" of that line) which furnishes the soloist with a map; rather than simply navigate the chord changes, as is the common practice in jazz improvising, the soloist has to bear in mind the melodic, as much as the harmonic, exigencies of the piece.

" 'If you know the melody', Monk once told a musician who insisted on playing the usual string of chord changes, 'you can make a better solo'".¹¹ Monk's comping behind Charlie Rouse on the live recording of the composer's "Jackie-ing", [for Jackie McLean?] illustrates this point very well.¹²

The tune, which is made up of 16 bars repeated, is introduced by a drum break consisting of 42 bars. Throughout the tenor's statement of the theme Monk plays the melody in the right-hand punctuating the contours with sparse chords. Although the piece can be analysed as consisting of 16 bars of $\frac{4}{4}$ time, the way Monk plays the chords suggests the necessity of inserting a $\frac{6}{4}$ bar and a $\frac{2}{4}$ bar to place the downbeat in the correct metrical position. If the trans-

scription in The Real Book (Fig. 2.2.1) is amended to make the 11th bar consist of six as opposed to four beats, the incorrect impression of rhythmic displacement of the accents is then put to rights (Fig. 2.2.2).

Handwritten musical score for "Jackie-ing" by Thelonious Monk. The score is written on four staves in 4/4 time. The first staff starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody begins with a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff continues the melody with a repeat sign. The third staff has a 4/4 time signature and includes a "4U" marking above the first measure. The fourth staff continues the melody. Chord symbols are written above the notes: BbΔ7, C-7, F7, D°, E°, F7, and BbΔ7.

Fig. 2.2.1 Thelonious Monk "Jackie-ing" (Monk) Source: The Real Book,
p. 514.

(♩ = 200)

Handwritten musical score for "Jackie-ing" by Thelonious Monk. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 200. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff starts with a B \flat Δ 7 chord. The second staff has a C-7 (F7) chord. The third staff has a B \flat Δ 7 chord, followed by D $^{\circ}$, E $^{\circ}$, F7, and B \flat Δ 7 chords. The fourth staff has a B \flat Δ 7 #11 chord. The score includes various rhythmic notations such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings like "5", "9", and "13".

Fig. 2.2.2 Thelonious Monk "Jackie-ing" (Monk) Source: author's amended version

The melodic accents as played by Monk continue as reference points throughout Rouse's solo, but are subjected to various rhythmic variations (augmentation, anticipation and delaying); the melody is stated for Rouse's first chorus, followed by the chords alone whose placement and voicings follow the contours of the melody. However the percussive use of alternating clusters and relative concords propels the accompaniment and thus the soloist; for instance, the two extremes of dissonance and consonance are constantly stated by Monk (through Rouse's solo and his own which follows it). These occur in the fourth bar in the form of the notes E and A-flat (G sharp) over a B-flat lydian tonality, forming either the implicit polychord E Δ /B \flat Δ 7 #11 or

B \flat Δ 7 #11
b7.

Whichever way the chord (Fig. 2.2.3) analyses out, Monk exploits its tonal ambiguities to the full, spinning jagged clusters out of it.

E Δ /B \flat Δ 7
(brackets indicate implied harmony)

Fig. 2.2.3 Polytonality in Monk "Jackie-ing"

One of the most striking factors about Monk's solo itself is the way in which the various voicings of the repeated B-flats in the melody (bars 14 - 15 of Fig. 2.2.2) virtually always occur in the same position (harmonically and metrically) thereby providing a resting point within the piece, and are harmonized with fairly consonant chords.

The fact that these harmonic features of dissonance and resolution occur in the same metric areas throughout Monk's accompaniments to solos and his own suggest the pianist's conception of the piece as very much an entity, with more or less constant emphasis points, something like a relief map.

For the 1959 version of the tune which is played by Monk, Rouse, and Thad Jones on cornet ¹³, Monk does not state the melody again behind Rouse's first chorus but does follow the relief map procedure outlined above. The alternation of sound with silence indicate an attention to textural detail and rhythmic sophistication that far outstrips mere bebop accompaniment; in

fact, these concerns indicate a composer's mentality at work.

Thad Jones's intelligent and well-constructed cornet solo reveals a similarity of conception in its use of space, revealing how Jones perhaps has been under-rated as a serious improviser. Monk constructs the opening of his solo out of Jones's closing figure which overlaps into the piano chorus. Monk capitalizes on this ambiguity of placement very well during the first eight bars of his solo by starting the phrase on the third beat of the second bar and shifting it from beat three to beat one, thus creating a measure of doubt in the listener's mind as to where the downbeat actually is.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Monk's "Jackie-ing" first chorus. The score is written on four staves in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The first two staves are labeled "THAD JONES" and "MONK" respectively, separated by a double bar line. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals. Chord symbols are written above the notes, including Bb47, F7, and E0. There are also some handwritten annotations like "c-7" and "D0 (F)". The score shows the transition from Jones's solo to Monk's solo, with Monk starting his phrase on the third beat of the second bar and shifting it from beat three to beat one.

Fig. 2.2.4. Monk "Jackie-ing" Monk's first chorus. Source: author's transcription

1 The second half of the solo returns to the contours of the melody which
 however are treated with a great deal of rhythmic freedom. It is for the
 most part as if Monk is attempting to blur the downbeats of the melody by
 means of these devices. The second chorus is virtually a reiteration of the
 original melody which ushers in the last statement of the tune by Monk and the
 front line instruments.

When one considers as well that the tune, being cast virtually throughout
 in the lydian mode, sets up as a consequence inherent tonal ambiguities
 and has the structural / metrical ambiguities of accent mentioned above,
 10 one begins to realize how sophisticated Monk's compositional conception
 actually is.

The last version was recorded in a solo piano session in London 1971 during
 the "Giants of Jazz" tour of that year ¹⁴, and is not surprisingly cast in
 a stride setting in places. As is usually the case with Monk's solo piano
 pieces, it is treated very rubato, especially during the first two state-
 ments of the tune, where the hesitancy and out-of-time feeling contribute
 to an oddly introspective, at times even tender, impression. It is highly
 significant that Monk begins his improvisation proper in the fourth bar
 of the third statement, which is accompanied by an accompaniment only des-
 cribable as a distillation of the essence of stride. The alternation of bass
 notes and chords in the left hand is certainly present, but treated with the
 same kind of tender hesitancy alluded to above, in that Monk never allows the
 tune to be over-ridden by the accompaniment.

It is a harmonically rich and melodically mobile performance pervaded by a

strangely anachronistic feeling of nostalgia, partly from the stride elements discussed above and also from the scattering of bare fifths in the left hand. Monk also takes the piece much slower ($\text{♩} = 150$) than the versions mentioned earlier.

Another striking difference between the 1971 recording and the group ones is revealed in Monk's introduction of a new harmonic element. This is in the form of the new chord which occurs in seven out of eight choruses of the tune (including the actual beginning and final statements). In each case bar the 7th chorus, Monk harmonizes the dissonant ambiguous chord of the fourth bar with an E bass, not present during the earlier recordings. This relationship of the tritone is used as a springboard for the actual beginning of his chorus, where he begins his run an octave above as the E bass appears. The melody returns to its original register during the eleventh bar but briefly takes off as a line of astounding beauty (bars 4 - 11).

The British critic, Max Harrison, wrote in 1961 an excellent article on Monk's approach to improvisation in which he stated:

Monk did not offer an assemblage of easily identifiable trade marks in the manner of a popular soloist: his improvisations are new wholes, not just accumulation of pleasing subjects. He was, in short, a composer, not simply because he wrote many 'tunes', or even themes, but because the compositional mode of thinking is evident in everything he did. One instance is his accompanying of other improvisers, for, instead of providing the normal type of chordal support, he often set modified fragments of the theme beside - not behind - the soloist's line in such a way as to give extended performances a closer-knit feeling of thematic reference. 15

This is precisely what Davis was taking exception to by asking Monk not to

play behind him during the famous Christmas Eve, 1954, session. ¹⁶ Monk clearly was displeased by this as his sarcastic comments at the beginning of "The Man I Love" (take 1) indicate. After Milt Jackson's introduction Monk is clearly heard saying: "When do I come in, man?" which is answered by a chorus of groans from the rest, and then: "I don't know when to come in, man". Davis then says to the engineer, Rudy van Gelder: "Hey, Rudy, put this on the record, all of it".

Despite these verbal and musical disagreements both Miles and Monk turn in some exceptional performances.

"The Man I Love" (take 1) has the following structure: the aborted introduction by Milt Jackson is done again and Miles (with Monk and Jackson behind him) states the theme at a typically Milesian rubato ballad tempo ($\text{♩} = \pm 63$). When the solos begin, Jackson plays a two-bar double-time break setting the new tempo which is maintained through the improvisations. These are in order: Jackson, Monk, lastly Miles, who brings the time back to the original tempo at the bridge.

What is extraordinary about Monk's solo is his use of an augmented version of the original theme during his first chorus. This rhythmic practice harks back to Miles's former ballad tempo after the introduction, and it is as if Monk superimposes a different tempo on the rhythm section. This creates a tremendous feeling of tension not present during Miles's original exposition, which also makes Miles's first entry immediately afterwards sound trite and old-fashioned by comparison; this tension is heightened by the amount of silence which surrounds Monk's augmented treatment of the theme.

This concept of space has been discussed above in connection with Monk's 1971 version of "Jackie-ing". In that instance, it is relatively gentle but in the case of the 1957 version of the sentimental standard "I Should Care"¹⁷, the treatment is far more radical.

It consists of a series of impulses which disregard the bar line completely, pulverize the musical tissue and yet preserve intact that "jazz feeling" which so readily evaporates in the smoke of a Tatum introduction. These elongations of musical time, presented here in a "non-tempo" context, are probably the direct descendants of those "in tempo" elongations to which his famous solo in The Man I Love (with Miles Davis) had already accustomed us. Is it so unreasonable to think that they exist as a function of a second, underlying tempo, imperceptible to us but which Monk hears in all the complexity of its relationships with the figures he is playing? ¹⁸

These Monkish conceptions of "elongation", close thematic relationship during both accompaniments and solos, and strongly dissonant, almost pungent harmonies are basically foreign to Davis's melodic sensibility which combines sensuousness and lyricism in a unique way. As an example of pungency let us consider Monk's expression of an E-flat major seventh chord in the seventeenth bar of his chorus on "The Man I Love". This chord includes both the natural and flattened sevenths (once the C-sharp is enharmonically re-spelt D-flat) and is thus harmonically ambiguous, to say the least, and highly discordant, including as it does the three semitones E-flat -- D -- D-flat. "It is understandable that Davis, who likes Red Garland and Ahmad Jamal, would not approve of Monk's accompaniment, but others, among them Sonny Rollins and Steve Lacy, feel that he is the finest accompanist in jazz". ¹⁹

Rollins is reputed to have been Monk's favourite musician, their affinity

reinforced by Rollins's concern for space and the maintenance of thematic relationships within improvised passages. Gunther Schuller's discussion of Rollins's improvising during the tenorist's blues "Blue 7" reveals some potent similarities between these two musicians.

In this, Rollins' second full solo, thematic variation becomes more continuous than in his first time around. After a brief restatement of part of the original theme, Rollins gradually evolves a short sixteenth-note run.... He reworks this motive at half the rhythmic value, a musical device called diminution. It also provides a good example of how a phrase upon repetition can be shifted to different beats of the measure thus showing the phrase always in a new light. 20

This sense of shared interests is borne out by the version of "Reflections" (Fig. 2.2.5) Monk and Rollins recorded on April 14, 1957²¹ with Art Blakey and Paul Chambers as the rhythm section.

Fig. 2.2.5 Sonny Rollins and Thelonious Monk "Reflections" (Monk) exposition (bars 1 - 2)

Monk begins the piece with an introduction made up of a figure in the shape of a descending run followed by a descending whole-tone figuration. He compresses this introductory figure into the motive which makes its first

appearance on the fourth beat of the first bar. The second time this figure occurs in the same place in the last eight bars ("Reflections" being an AABA tune), Rollins answers it delayed and at a different pitch, whereupon Monk answers the answer.

Monk's solo is not one of his most scintillating; perhaps, as Michael Cuseuna has suggested ²¹, the over-zealousness of Paul Chambers was a distraction to him, but in any event Monk's second eight-bar phrase is based on virtually only the introductory material and the little motive illustrated above which are modified both rhythmically and melodically. This material is interposed into Monk's fairly free paraphrase of his own tune in so contrasting a way as to debunk the fairly solemn tune. In short it acts as a persistent and not altogether welcome guest and is a good illustration of Monk's quirky sense of humour.

Miles Davis has put this in very succinctly "Monk writes such pretty melodies and then screws them up". ²² This statement not only ignores the joking element in this kind of treatment of Monk's, but invests Monk's themes with a quality only prevalent in a few exceptional pieces like "Crepuscule with Nellie" and "Round Midnight".

To return to "Reflections" however, one finds the aforementioned motive returning in Monk's last eight in exactly the place where one might expect it: namely on the fourth beat of the first bar. Rollins, as self-assured and confident as Monk was self-effacing and hesitant, uses the motive as if in passing on the third beat of the second bar of his chorus. Instead of

using it as highly contrasting material as does Monk, however, Rollins uses the motive as the basis for a longer phrase.

While Monk isolates it, in short, Rollins incorporates it in a more organic fashion. Rollins' solo also follows initially the contours of the melody, but this gives way to some pyrotechnics especially in the second eight in which Monk reiterates the motive sotto voce in almost plaintive contrast to Rollins' virtuosity.

During the tenorist's last eight, Rollins returns to the motive "in isolation" on the fourth beat of the first bar by which time it has clearly become an integral part of the two soloists' overall conception of the tune. Another subtle move that reinforces this connection is how Blakey plays a snare-drum figure of four sixteenth-notes in answer to the motive's appearance, but only in each soloist's respective last eight (almost as if to demonstrate his own recognition of it).

After Rollins' chorus, Monk enters with the bridge, thus by-passing the first sixteen bars, and the last eight, which concludes the performance, is given to Rollins. The motive is stated yet again by Monk as in the first statement and Rollins and Monk both use it, but in diminution -- that is, with the responses compressed in time.

The soloists' assured and humorous treatment of the motive and their use of the melody as a kind of constant thread running through their improvisations reveal how they are kindred spirits. Rollins is able (as is Blakey) to respond instinctively to Monk's motive and on this occasion comes out man of the moment.

He even manages not to be put off by Chambers who is by turns wooden and overly busy, a far cry from his excellent work with Davis and Coltrane, for instance ²³. All the records mentioned bear a close spiritual kinship to the blues and represent unique visions and transformations of the language of two of the most important improvisers of the fifties, each at a peak of individual creativity, to which performances Chambers contributes a great deal.

What is not in question is Chambers' musicianship or his technical ability; after all, he negotiates Coltrane's labyrinthine "Giant Steps" and "Moment's Notice" harmonic structures without hesitation or ceasing to swing. What is noteworthy, given his out-of-tune, lifeless and generally lacklustre performance of "Reflections", is the real value of his musicianship on the next piece, one of Monk's best known blue tunes recorded at the same session with the addition of Horace Silver (piano) and one of bop's leading trombonists in J.J. Johnson.

"Misterioso", as we have said, is a blues, and this is a familiar world where Chambers can hold his own very well; this "comfortable" feeling must then work in the context of a well-known form. In "Reflections" the shifting accents and musical word-play need a solid backdrop which Chambers does not provide; this argues he does not understand the concept behind the tune.

Steve Lacy, who worked with Monk for six months, has inherited some very interesting ideas from that period. He endorses Rollins' opinion about Monk's abilities as an accompanist and says this in connection with working with Monk:

I have respect for his melodies and I knew enough not to just regard them as chord progressions, but as songs to be presented. One of the things about his music is the way that it's put together, the way things evolve out of other things. The way he'll build a whole bridge out of one little part of the first section. His tunes are fabulously put together, really. Someday people will realise just how well put together they really are. 24

What Lacy also seems to have learned in his tenure with Monk is the courage to take risks and especially to stand by a decision. That Lacy was to take the path into the avant-garde and free improvisation in Europe after leaving Monk is to some extent a logical conclusion of the pianist's true radicalism. One thing Lacy clearly never forgot was his ability to penetrate the curtain of Monk's world. It is reputed²⁵ that Lacy was taken on by Monk because of his 'correct' version of "Work", but this ability was still there in the eighties as a review of a concert devoted to Monk's music in New York in February 1982 demonstrates:

Steve Lacy has never travelled very far from Monk (his one-time boss for a few months in the early '60s) -- his concentric circles of sound and short, slightly-altered phrases use dissonance with the same deft stroke. Most evidently on "Four in One", Lacy was the most brilliant improviser present and, certainly, one person whose position and importance in jazz history has to be re-evaluated. 26

Lacy is clearly a superlative improviser on recorded evidence alone; possessed of the most accurate intonation on the unforgiving soprano saxophone, he is able to work in the field of avant-garde jazz,²⁷ for example, his atonal solo at the end of the 1979 recording of "Reflections" (by Manfred Schoof, not Monk) with Globe Unity, perhaps the best European free jazz big band, and yet remain true to Monk's notions of form and melody, as is borne out by the 1982 review above and by his early sixties recording "Evidence"²⁸ which

includes perhaps the best version of a Monk tune in existence in the form of "Let's Cool One".

This ability of Lacy's surely argues a strong connection between form and freedom in Monk's music; that Monk's conception has highly liberating implications which were apparent to a great many musicians, especially during the sixties. In discussing Monk's famous solo on "Bags' Groove" from the notorious Davis - Monk - Jackson session discussed above, Martin Williams states: "Indeed, in 1954, Monk outlined the major tasks of the new jazz of the 1960s".²⁹

That these tasks paradoxically were to be carried out in the area of the blues establishes an immediate connection to Monk's concept of that form; both notions are to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Footnotes : 2.2

¹Tirro, "Silent Theme Tradition", 315.

²André Hodeir, Toward Jazz, trans. Noel Burch (New York: Grove Press, 1962; reprint ed., London: The Jazz Book Club, 1965), p. 202.

³Steve Kuhn Quartet, Last Year's Waltz, ECM 1213.

⁴Monk, Solo Monk, Columbia CS 9149.

⁵Monk, The Riverside Trios, Milestone M - 47052.

⁶Bob Blumenthal, notes to Monk, The Riverside Trios, Milestone M - 47052.

⁷Michael Cuscuna, notes to Monk, The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Thelonious Monk, Mosaic MR4 - 101.

- ⁸Shapiro and Hentoff, Talkin' To Ya, p. 311.
- ⁹Joe Goldberg, Jazz Masters of the Fifties (New York: Macmillan, 1965; reprint ed., 1973), p. 30.
- ¹⁰Jack Chambers, Milestones 1 : The music and times of Miles Davis to 1960 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 197.
- ¹¹Goldberg, *ibid.*, p. 29.
- ¹²Monk, April in Paris/Live, Milestone M - 47060 .
- ¹³Monk, Brilliance, Milestone M - 47023.
- ¹⁴Monk, Thelonious Monk, I Grandi del Jazz - 60.
- ¹⁵Max Harrison, A Jazz Retrospect (London: David & Charles, 1976), p. 30.
- ¹⁶Miles Davis, Miles Davis and the Modern Jazz Giants, Prestige JOR 2036.
- ¹⁷Monk, Pure Monk, Milestone M - 47004.
- ¹⁸Hodier, Toward Jazz, p. 32.
- ¹⁹Goldberg, *ibid.*, p. 32.
- ²⁰Gunther Schuller, "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation", The Jazz Review (November 1958), 8.
- ²¹Monk, Complete Blue Note Recordings, Mosaic MR4 - 101.
- ²²Chambers, *ibid.*, p. 197.
- ²³Paul Chambers plays on Miles Davis, Kind of Blue, Columbia (CS 8163; John Coltrane, Blue Train, Blue Note BLP 1577; John Coltrane, Giant Steps, Atlantic 1311; and many other albums of the late fifties and early sixties.
- ²⁴Goldberg, *ibid.*, p. 29.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ²⁶Lee Jeske, "Interpretations of Monk" review, Downbeat: The Contemporary Music Magazine, vol. 49, no. 2 (February 1982), 57.

²⁷Globe Unity, Compositions, Japo 60027.

²⁸Steve Lacy, Evidence, Prestige MPP - 2505.

²⁹Martin Williams, notes to Miles Davis, Prestige JOR 2036.

2.3 Monk and the blues

Blues did begin in slavery, and it is from that "peculiar institution", as it was known euphemistically, that blues did find its particular form. And if slavery dictated certain aspects of blues form and content, so did the so-called Emancipation and its subsequent problems dictate the path blues would take. 1

Despite the fact that the origins of the blues are shrouded in obscurity for lack of early recorded evidence, by the time Monk was to come to grips with the form it was pretty much fixed in terms of its 12 - bar structure and its special melodic character incorporating the so-called "blue notes". Joachim Berendt ² has constructed a time-scale for the history of jazz style in which the blues forms the backbone, and it is a hallmark of the great composers and improvisers in jazz that they have revitalized the blues in various ways -- or conversely, no great jazz improviser in the American tradition has overlooked its fertility and range of possibilities. Musicians as diverse as Jelly Roll Morton, Sonny Rollins, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Basie, Miles Davis, Duke, Sun Ra, and , of course, Monk, have each brought new insight to this enduring and vital form.

It has profoundly influenced jazz and it is unlikely that jazz music would have followed the course it has, had it not been continually fed by the blues. Today the blues means, for many persons, the collective improvisation of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band or the unison work of Count Basie section; for others it is an extemporisation by George Lewis or Charlie Parker, the singing of Bessie Smith or Billie Holiday.. 3

Paul Oliver's indispensable essay on the blues, from which this quotation has been obtained, was first published in 1959, and thus cannot account for the developments within the blues carried out by the "free" players of the sixties, most notably Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry. These developments however only

go to confirm Oliver's point about the influence of the blues on jazz.

That the blues has been able not only to maintain its identity (despite the radical new viewpoints brought to it by the free players) but also to fertilize popular music following its rediscovery by the British rock musicians of the mid-sixties bears testimony both to its longevity and adaptability as a form.

In discussing the kinds of structure jazz musicians tend to draw on, Frank Tirro has this to say:

The jazz improviser works from a standard repertory of changes derived from popular songs, blues riffs, show tunes, and a few jazz "originals". As a well-constructed tonal melody implies its own harmony, these chord patterns imply their own pre-existent melodies. The implication is specific at any point in the progress of a piece, and consequently the educated and sensitive listener is at all times orientated with regard to the temporal progress of the piece. So is the performer, whether playing solo or in ensemble, whether playing chords, rhythm, melody, or counter-melody. 4

Part of the reason for the great versatility of the blues lies in the nature of its chordal / melodic implications. In spite of its simplicity structurally, the harmonic implications of the blues are more tonally ambiguous than those of the other forms mentioned above by Tirro. There are two reasons for this: (1) this very harmonic simplicity has allowed for a great deal of substitute chords ⁵ which have enriched the melodic options, and: (2) its basis in dominant quality, rather than tonic, harmony allows for the presence of "blue" notes, of which the alternation of diatonic and blue thirds especially serve to undermine its strictly tonal foundations, thereby creating emotional ambiguity.

To amplify the above points: the blues progression, whose basic form (I bars 1 - 4; IV - I bars 5 - 8; V - I bars 9 - 12) lends itself to expansion, gives rise to hundreds of minor variations. During the bop era, where musicians were concerned with expanding melodic, as well as harmonic, resources, the blues travelled a long distance from the basic form outlined above (what might be termed "classic" blues form).

Berendt discusses some of the melodic concerns of the bop era: "Later, when the bebop musicians introduced the flatted fifth, this note, too, became a "blue" note -- at first in the minor blues, then in all kinds of blues music -- equal to the blue notes of the third and seventh steps". ⁶

While it seems questionable to assert that the bop players "introduced" the flatted fifth, which as the tritone forms the basis of the dominant seventh chord and thereby the foundation stone of most of common practice harmonic theory, it is true that the bebop musicians used this interval in such a way as to emphasize its structural importance.

The preponderance of this interval can also be seen as the result of the new scales being developed by such as Monk, Parker and Bud Powell, to name a few. Apart from its normal occurrence in the mixolydian mode (major scale with flatted seventh), it is also found in the following: the altered scale, mixolydian scale with flatted fifth, minor seventh scale with flatted fifth, the lydian mode and related derivations, whole tone scale, and so on. In the latter examples, it occurs between the root and the fifth.

Bebop was to emphasize these new scales largely as a result of its new harmonic vocabulary, to which new impetus was given by Parker's famous break-

through in 1939 (the same year as Hawkins' "Body and Soul"):

I remember one night before Monroe's I was jamming in a chili house on Seventh Avenue between 139th and 140th. It was December, 1939. Now I'd been getting bored with the stereotyped changes that were being used all the time at the time, and I kept thinking there's bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes, but I couldn't play it.

Well, that night, I was working over "Cherokee", and, as I did, I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them up with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I'd been hearing. I came alive. 7

Now the distance between the diatonic "higher intervals" and the chromatic ones is but a short step; under the fingers of the beboppers the ninth became flattened and / or sharpened, as did the fifth. This usually took place over dominant harmony and eventually gave rise to the altered chord per se (G 7 alt) in which all the higher intervals are chromatically inflected.

The importance of Parker's discovery for the resources of bebop cannot be stressed enough. It shows how much further that revolution went than the mere re-discovery of the flattened fifth. In fact, Parker's insight was to provide chromatic impetus which can be traced right through into contemporary saxophone in the work of Michael Brecker and Evan Parker and many others.

In the discussion of Parker's "Cool Blues" above, we commented on the asymmetry of Parker's phrases during his solo. This is especially striking in view of the structure of the tune itself which parallels the archetypal AAB "vocal" blues form. This 3 - line shape divides the blues progression into three equal parts of 4 bars each, as in this example from Robert Johnson:

"My poor father died and left me, and my mother done the best that she could, /

My poor father died and left me, and my mother done the best that she could, /

Every man loves that game you call love, but it don't mean no man no good". ⁸

The third line is often a commentary on, or summation of, the sentiments expressed in the first two lines in vocal blues; by contrast instrumental blues often shows a close similarity between all three lines as seen in the Parker example.

Monk's September 22, 1954 session (with Percy Heath and Art Blakey in attendance) just before he left Prestige for Riverside featured the first airing of his non-classic blues, "Blue Monk". Joe Goldberg has called it "an indisputable masterpiece" and goes on to say: "Not a 'modern' blues in structure -- the fourth bar has no rest -- it is close to the blues of Yancey, and Monk makes it into a capsule history of jazz piano". ⁹

Handwritten musical score for Monk's "Blue Monk" in 4/4 time. The score consists of three staves. The first staff is the melody with notes and rests, and chord symbols Bb , $Eb7$, Bb , $F7$, Bb , $Bb7$ above it. The second staff is the piano accompaniment with notes and rests, and chord symbols Eb , $Eo7$, Bb , B , $F7$, Bb below it. The third staff is the bass line with notes and rests, and chord symbols $F7$, Bb , and a circled $(F7)$ with a "3" below it. The key signature is Bb and the time signature is 4/4.

Fig. 2.3.1 Monk "Blue Monk" (Monk)

The 1954 version of the tune dispenses with any introductory material, a fairly unusual procedure for Monk. It is also played with a great deal more freedom than this lead sheet ¹⁰ indicates. The tune displays remarkable economy in construction, being made up out of only two figures, marked A and B in the example above. A is a chromatic figure filling in the space between the third and fifth of the chord (except for bar 6 where it spans the diminished fifth and diminished seventh of the E diminished seventh); B is an expansion of A rhythmically at least in that it consists of eight eighth-notes as opposed to A's original four. The chromatic material between the 2nd and 3rd beats of B (F -- E-flat -- E-natural) can be seen as a retrograde of some of the material of the first occurrence of A as can the material in bar 4 (the "tail" of the first B phrase). The only material that is "foreign" to these two phrases is that between the fourth beat of bar 8 to the end of bar 9 (designated as C).

The structure of the tune, if represented in tabular form, works something like this:

TABLE 2

PHRASE STRUCTURE IN MONK'S "BLUE MONK" (EXPOSITION)

The diagram shows the phrase structure of the first nine measures of the 'Blue Monk' exposition. It is organized into four staves, each representing a different voice part. The first staff, labeled '1', shows the first voice part with phrases A, A, B, and 'Tail of B'. The second staff, labeled '5', shows the second voice part with phrases A, A, B, and C. The third staff, labeled '9', shows the third voice part with phrases B and B. The notation uses horizontal lines with arrows to indicate the duration of each phrase across the measures.

This representation clearly indicates the tune's affinity with the three-line vocal structure. The first two phrases (A + A + B) are virtual mirror images

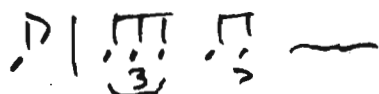
of one another, while the third line, based almost entirely on the material from B, represents a true commentary on the previous two lines. In bars 10 - 12 Monk repeats the B figure which in its second appearance is delayed a full beat ; this, plus the anticipation of the C figure by a beat creates a subtle but important tension, thereby avoiding any "four-squareness" in the piece.

In his actual execution of the tune Monk also goes further to dispel this; the first two A's appear with upbeats before, the tail of B is rhythmically compressed, the second A, (second line) is delayed by an eighth-note, C is given an upbeat on first appearance, and so on. Virtually the only material that is not different from the "standard" reduction is that of bars 10 - 12; it is as if Monk does not wish to tamper with the material so as to weaken its effect.

Monk's fifteen choruses on the tune do not stay as close to the original material as might be expected, perhaps; what he does, however, is invest the triplet figure of bar 8 and the octave relationship in bar 9 with thematic significance. No less than four of Monk's choruses (nos. 6,8,10, & 11) are based on triplet or sextuplet figurations, and are echoed by Blakey as they appear. Let us however examine the more interesting choruses in order, beginning with Monk's third chorus.

The alternation of regular rhythmic figures for the first eight bars with higher-register lines for the last four in this chorus harks back to the original AAB three-line structure already referred to; thus despite the lack of overt melodic relationships in this chorus, the original phrase-structure of the piece is covertly maintained.

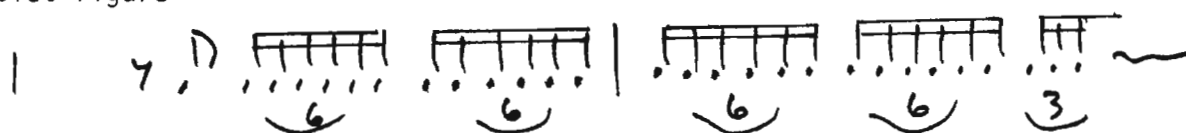
In the fifth chorus, this structure is reversed becoming ABB. Monk achieves this by introducing this figure between bars 4 and 5:



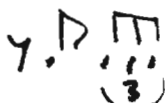
which forms the rhythmic germ of the next eight bars. This little figure is derived from material in the previous chorus in which the figure is part of a larger phrase which occurs in the fifth bar of the previous chorus.

We have already commented on a similar procedure with regard to "Reflections" in which the same figure crops up in exactly the same place in each chorus; Monk's grasp of structure is almost uncanny at times.

Halfway through the sixth bar of the sixth chorus, Monk introduces this sextuplet figure



This figure clearly derives from the "foreign" (triplet) material of C in the tune and consists of repeated F's (the triplet figure in rhythmic diminution). It seems that Blakey for one (as before in "Misterioso") grasps this relationship immediately, for he answers it with the 3:2 figure which has already been described as one of the foundations of African drumming. One should mention the relaxed atmosphere and strong support given Monk by this sympathetic and alert rhythm section.

The eighth chorus re-introduces the  figure of the fourth and fifth choruses. This figure which is so prevalent in Parker's improvisations deserves by virtue of its ubiquity the status of a bebop hallmark; Monk situates it in a strong metric position by beginning each A-phrase with it, and introducing new material for the last four bars.

The ninth chorus obeys this structure with a figure which could well be found in a Basie saxophone section. In Monk's hands it also resembles a boogie-woogie right-hand figure minus the busy accompaniment. This material is used for the first eight bars, whereupon it is once again supplanted by new material. It is significant that Monk ends the piece by making use of a highly condensed version of this "boogie-woogie" idea.

Virtually every drum fill that Blakey executes in these two choruses is based on the aforementioned 3:2 idea, as is much of his drum solo which follows Heath's two choruses. The rest of Monk's chorus is largely based on the exploration of the AAB phrase structure and the triplet figures. Whether the faint echoes of "boogie-woogie" style via Yancey¹¹ justify Goldberg's description of the chorus as "a capsule history of jazz piano"¹² remains to be seen; Monk's solo pieces with their strong stride overtones and quotations from popular songs of the twenties and thirties seem much more definite examples of this approach.

Some remarks of Collier's regarding what he calls "primitive" pianists shed some light on Goldberg's idea. Collier contrasts these primitives with the stride players like Johnson whose roots and aspirations for that matter are much closer to the European concert tradition than are those of Yancey, Pine Top Smith, Cow Cow Davenport, and their colleagues.

The music of these people, both audience and players, grew from black folk music, and by the early part of this century, the pianists among them were working principally with the blues. What they were doing was substituting the piano for the guitar or banjo that the early blues singers used to accompany themselves with. 13

Much of the material of Monk's third chorus seems to be a pianistic attempt (as does that in the ninth) to re-create the sound of the early blues guitar, complete with the bent notes, as the primitives did. Some of his choruses also imitate this primitive procedure outlined below:

Right hands also ran to strings of single notes sketching out melodic fragments, or to simple repeated figures that could also be set going at various points on the keyboard as the chord changes dictated. One of the classic and most characteristic of these figures was produced by the player simply drawing his finger through a black key and the white note in front of it once each beat. Done on the proper notes, this produced not only a tension-building repetitive figure but an imitation of the sound of the blue notes. 14

Now all these procedures both in Monk and in the primitives clearly hark back to the very beginnings of the blues. Blues itself (and by extension those elements which jazz has annexed from it) sprang not only from the meeting of African and European social/cultural elements but from the clash of two entirely different concepts of temperament. The microtonal elements in the playing of the blues harpist Sonny Boy Williamson and the guitarist / singer Lightnin' Hopkins serve a vital expressive purpose which could not be as subtly brought out in a well-tempered system and in turn may be traced back to the vocal music of the African slaves.

Monk's split notes and clusters (so often cited as questionable examples of his poor technique) have nothing whatsoever to do with self-conscious "modernism"; on the contrary, as any attentive listener will immediately perceive, they are grounded in a deep respect for the tradition and its expressive possibility, a respect nonetheless transmuted by Monk's unique musical intelligence and sense of form. These notes and dissonances are a unique way of

expressing microtonal shifts on an instrument whose fixed tuning forbids such things which are perfectly possible on saxophone or guitar for instance. Monk's attitude of respect for the tradition, and his virtually encyclopaedic knowledge of some of its more obscure aspects, is embodied in his fondness for quotations. Gary Giddins, in discussing a Monk solo on "Well you needn't" recorded in 1964, has this to say:

He begins the second chorus with telescoped references to three unlikely folk tunes, a spiritual ('Happy Am I with my Religion'), a cavalry song ('The Girl I Left Behind Me'), and the West Indian piece Charlie Parker called 'Sly Mongoose'. 15

Monk's penchant for quotation is not by any means restricted only to "foreign" material. He will often use fragments of his own music as material during an improvisation. During his solos on both "Blue Monk" (1954) and "Straight, No Chaser" (1951) he quotes fragments from his earlier "Misterioso", which of course is also a blues. One's impression of Monk's quotations is never that they are contrived or corny, like George Taitt's incessant harping on "Stranger in Paradise" during the Monk November 1947 Blue Note session; there is never a sense of overkill because Monk clearly has conceived them as integral parts of his improvisational approach.

Monk's blues masterpiece, "Straight, No Chaser", the recording of which antedates "Blue Monk" by some three years, grows out of a single cell-like motive which is in turn expanded, contracted, displaced both ahead of and behind the downbeat so as to be a virtual conjugation of its melodic possibilities.

The tune is introduced by a Blakey drum solo, the last two bars of which contain respectively a version of 2 bars from the melody and 2 bars of 6:4

between high-hat and snare, apparently a favoured Blakey device.

Fig. 2.3.2 Monk "Straight, No Chaser" (Monk)

Lawrence O. Koch has analysed the structure of the piece ¹⁶ in a way that appears fundamentally correct, but which does not account for a number of important structural factors in the Blue Note performance. After the drum introduction, Monk plays the tune with the rhythm section and is then joined by Sahib Shihab and Milt Jackson, who play the melody in unison. Jackson's cluster-like accents which are also present in the saxophone line recur in the head out so must be considered as fixed elements/constituents of Monk's orchestration. These are indicated as arrowheads in the example above and are only hinted at during Monk's initial statement of the theme.

If Monk is using these accents, which fall before each (but one) occurrence of the middle C which forms the first note of each A motive (A being the first five notes of the tune) to indicate or even reinforce the phrase-divisions,

then Koch's analysis of the piece allowing for three equal divisions of four bars cannot hold good. Starting from the middle C in bar 8 as it does, the third phrase clearly is anticipated by $1\frac{1}{2}$ beats and does not start on the downbeat of the ninth bar as one would expect.

His method of analysis also overlooks the virtually entire chromatic scale between middle C and B-flat in bars 9 and 10, clearly an expansion of part of A (the last three notes) rather than of A as a whole. The melodic freedom embodied here was to have a telling effect on such musicians as Ornette Coleman of whom Frank Tirro has stated:

With the onset of Free Jazz, the blues have become less used, but ["Bird Food"], a tribute to Charlie Parker by Ornette Coleman, demonstrates how aware the listener must be of the standard twelve-measure period to perceive that this distorted structure combines both blues and pop-song form. The overall form is AABA, but each A is a blues variant. After a two-measure introduction, the first A uses the first nine and one-half measures of a blues chorus, the second A uses eleven measures; and the last uses ten. 17

From the irregular phrase-lengths of Parker's improvisations via the irregular phrase lengths in Monk's pieces to unevenly barred blues chorus as in "Bird Food" surely is charted the line of development that bears fruit in free jazz. Steve Lacy's two albums of Monk's music and his "Bemsha Swing" as recorded by Don Cherry and John Coltrane are proof of the respect accorded to the composer by the free jazz musicians during the fifties and sixties,¹⁸ an acknowledgement of his influence, so to speak. Cherry also plays a Monkesque piano version of "Bemsha Swing" in the eighties on his duet album with Ed Blackwell; it is no accident that they are both alumni of the Ornette Coleman Quartet. Hodeir's comments in this regard are most illuminating:

The pioneers of jazz borrowed from Occidental folk music a sense of symmetry and the principle of regularly recurring structures. With these ideas as a starting point, jazz, like every other form of music inspired by Occidental folklore, grew up according to a fixed, stereotyped, formal principle which stopped developing almost entirely once jazz ceased to be folk music. In the meantime, the notions of symmetry and continuity in musical discourse were being destroyed by Debussy, Schönberg, Stravinsky, and Webern, and replaced, in the works of the major contemporary composers - Barraqué, Boulez, Stockhausen -- by a completely different conception. If a twelve-tone score like Séquence or Le Marteau sans Maître bears as little resemblance to a classical symphony as a Klee abstraction does to a Corot landscape, it is because the world of music is now based on the notions of asymmetry and discontinuity. Thelonious Monk is to be hailed as the first jazzman who has had a feeling for specifically modern aesthetic values. 19

What is particularly striking about Monk's music is the way in which this feeling for modern values is balanced by a strong sense of history. When Monk incorporates elements from stride and the early blues in his playing, these are not only satirically intended but also autobiographical in much the same way as are Ives' quotations from American folk music in the Second Symphony. It should also be borne in mind that Monk, like Coltrane, was born in North Carolina, which perhaps accounts for the elements of primitive blues piano that surface from time to time.

New evidence ²⁰ about Monk's early years suggests that he was picking out melodies on the piano at the age of five or six, and his academic and musical precocity would certainly account for his absorbing influences like a sponge. In a similar way, the influences of regional rhythm and blues can certainly be heard in the music of Ornette Coleman, who hails from Texas.

Such apparently "out of character" oddities as his arrangement of the hymn "Abide with Me" ²¹ can be traced back to Monk's early musical experience.

While still in my teens, I went on the road with a group that played church music for an evangelist. Rock and Roll or Rhythm and Blues. That's what we were doing. Only now they put different words to it. She preached and healed and we played. We had trumpet, saxophone, piano and drums. We travelled around the country for about two years. 22

This information surely accounts for the somewhat anomalous presence of this chorale-like piece in the oeuvre of someone who perhaps drew least of all his contemporaries from the European musical tradition.

Monk was working, probably not with any conscious deliberation, but simply because of his circumstances and because he has always been a self-feeding artist, on a music that came, to a greater extent than that of any musician of his times, completely from within jazz. Most other important composer-pianists -- Morton, Ellington, Waller, John Lewis, Cecil Taylor -- have borrowed with varying degrees of successful assimilation, from formal European music. This gives the listener an unconscious feeling of ease and familiarity with their work, but there is no such convenient handle for Monk. 23

His only other through-composed piece, the breathtaking "Crepuscule with Nellie", written for his seriously ill wife, has been described as follows by Steve Lacy: "It's not an improvisation. It's his little symphony. He just plays it, and then that's it".²⁴ For a highly schooled and literate musician like Lacy to use the word "symphony" is, one feels, neither fortuitous nor pretentious; in addition, their programming on "Monk's Music" ("Abide With Me" as opener and "Crepuscule" as closer) serves as a kind of prologue and epilogue to the Monk "standards" ("Well, You Needn't", "Ruby, My Dear", "Off Minor", and "Epistrophy") which they enclose, something like a well-chosen frame complementing a painting. "Crepuscule with Nellie" manages to convey tender emotions without descending into triteness or sentimentality and contains blues elements like the alternation of diatonic and blue thirds so essential to Monk's conception of it.

His solo piano rendering of "I Should Care" (1957) demonstrates that he has absolutely no time for sentimentality per se. The alternate and master takes of the piece were first recorded by Monk in 1948 with the services of one Kenny "Pancho" Hagood, "a baritone of sometimes faulty intonation who was a mainstay with the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band from mid '46 to mid '48".²⁴ Hagood's sententious delivery surely inspires Monk's later ferocious mauling of the theme which serves as a kind of frenzied antidote to the schmaltz and sentimentality of the tune as earlier rendered. "As avant garde as anything that Luciano Berio or Roscoe Mitchell might write tomorrow, it is a slow, out of meter dissection of the raw materials of a tune. It is a feat akin to cutting up a Van Gogh canvas and reassembling it as a Picasso".²⁵

This importance of Monk's structural innovations for free jazz has already been discussed with reference to Ornette Coleman, it is also true, however, of the other leading saxophonist of free jazz, John Coltrane, that he learned a great deal from his association with the pianist.

Working with Monk brought me close to a musical architect of the highest order. I felt I learned from him in every way -- through the senses, theoretically, technically. I would talk to Monk about musical problems, and he would sit at the piano and show me the answers just by playing them. I could watch him play and find out the things I wanted to know. Also, I could see a lot of things that I didn't know about at all. 26

It is unfortunate that recorded evidence of the Monk/Coltrane quartet only comprises three tracks with Shadow Wilson replacing Philly Joe Jones on drums. Their reputation rests on these recordings and a brief sojourn at New York's Five Spot Café during summer 1957.

The leader and the saxophonist had exceptional emotional rapport. Technically they were something of a contrast. John Coltrane's techniques are obvious; Monk's piano techniques more subtle. And at the same time that Coltrane, with showers of notes and sparser "sheets of sound", seemed to want to break up jazz rhythms into an evenly spaced and fairly constant succession of short notes, Monk seemed to want more complexity, subtlety, and freedom. Monk is a melodist; his harmonies are intrinsic but his playing is ultimately linear and horizontal in its effect. Coltrane played vertically; he found harmonic stimulation in Monk's music, and he seemed to know where Monk was headed, as well as where he was, as very few players did then. But he also knew, as the recording of Ruby, My Dear shows, that Monk's melodies are strong and that it isn't enough merely to run their chords. 28

These different conceptions of musical space worked very well together, with the sparseness of Monk's accompaniment throwing into relief Coltrane's long strings of notes. Coltrane's incipient experiments with the "sheets of sound" are brought out sympathetically in the group's version of Trinkle Tinkle where Monk is heard to bounce some of Coltrane's phrases back to him for discussion as it were; yet Monk is also willing to lay out and give the saxophonist breathing space where necessary.

Monk got a variety of textures from his four pieces, by playing with the saxophonist, by playing contrapuntally against him, by "laying out" and leaving him to the bassist and drummer: sometimes to one of them predominantly, other times equally to both.

On their version of Nutty, Coltrane having strayed further and more elaborately into the harmonic implications of the piece, the composer typically enters for his own solo with an eloquent reestablishment of the theme in paraphrase. 29

Coltrane, whose approach is less horizontal than that of, say, Sonny Rollins, can be said to have benefitted from his stint with Monk less in the area of thematic development, the evidence of "A Love Supreme" to the contrary, than in a more highly developed sense of texture. That this feeling for texture

is then carried through and applied to his searching, incandescent approach to the demands of free jazz is, after all, a logical progression:

Even in the face of all the ecstatic, unrestrained freedom of this recording [Ascension], form and structure were achieved through a consistently applied alternation between collective and solo improvisation -- the solo crystallizing from the collective improvisation, to again give birth to a new collective: a principle of form immediately adopted by a number of other free-jazz musicians. 30

The use of alternating textures as an organizational principle is also found in Coltrane's four-part suite "A Love Supreme". In this piece, however, textures are organized and contrasted along orchestrational lines. "Resolution", the second part of the suite, is introduced by a solo from Jimmy Garrison on bass, into which the rest of the quartet suddenly leaps, thus creating not only an alternation between soloist and ensemble but also considerable dynamic contrast.

The influence of Monk (and Charles Mingus) can be seen at work here and in fact can be traced back to Duke Ellington, to whom both musicians have acknowledged their indebtedness. It is an approach that typifies the arranger's concerns rather than those of the improviser sui generis.

The brief collaboration between Monk and Coltrane during 1957 was certainly decisive for both their careers. Coltrane was to rejoin the Miles Davis group and thereby be caught up in the trumpeter's modal experiments which had lasting and stylistic implications for Coltrane's future; Monk's career was finally beginning, thanks to the Coltrane group and the success of his breakthrough Riverside recording Brilliant Corners, to be hailed by critical recognition and concomitant financial success.

"Generally agreed-upon aesthetic judgements about jazz music", in the words of Martin Williams, were finally turning in Monk's favour; Coltrane was 31, Monk 40.

The pattern that emerges from those judgements would be a Hegelian pendulum swing from the contributions of an innovative, intuitive improviser (Armstrong, Parker), who reassessed the music's past, gave it a new vocabulary, or at least repronounced its old one, and of an opposite swing to the contribution of a composer (Ellington, Monk), who gave the music a synthesis and larger form--larger, but not longer. 31

Surely the description above does not fully account for the implications of the Hegelian synthesis which is fully achieved by such great composer/improvisers such as Monk and Ellington. In both these musicians' work, the distinction between composition and improvisation has been obscured; this is perhaps more obvious in Monk, who preferred the group setting to the big band one. Moreover it is clear that the intuitive element played a vital role in Monk's improvisations, in which a high degree of interplay and sharing of ideas have already been noted.

Monk's degree of adherence to the tradition has also been discussed in terms of his allegiance to the Harlem stride school and the "primitive" blues pianists, and in his fondness for archaic or incongruous quotations.

If we accept the fundamental swing of the bebop era as being in the direction of instrumental virtuosity (Parker, Gillespie, Powell), Monk clearly and consciously chose to regard this as a creative blind alley. He himself has disavowed this connection in stating with reference to the bebop musicians' choice of harmonic structure:

They think differently harmonically. They play mostly stuff that's based on the chords of other things, like the blues and I Got Rhythm. I like the whole song-- melody and chord structure -- to be different. I make up my own chords and melodies. 32

Monk certainly was not averse to the bebop procedure of writing a new tune over predetermined changes, as his recasting of "Blue Skies", say, in the shape of "In Walked Bud" demonstrates. His tendency, though, as he says, was to aim at a complete recasting of as much of the structural implications of a tune as possible. Ran Blake has talked about "the strangely refracted blues feeling" ³³ that animates much of his work, and his tune "Bemsha Swing" represents a synthesis writ large of both the elements of Rhythm changes (minus the bridge) with the blues.

While Monk's oeuvre contains many treatments of the blues and if not necessarily Rhythm changes, then 32-bar AABA song-form variants, his most enduring achievement rests on his ability to weld plausible, "natural" compositions out of asymmetrical phrases and bizarre-sounding clusters.

Steve Lacy, in discussing the structural difficulties Monk's tunes present to the improviser, had this to say:

They're extremely logical, they just figure, and even when some of his tunes might have eight bars, seven bars and seven bars, twenty-two bars altogether, yet they're the most natural thing in the world after you get used to them, and they're just right. There's another tune that has a three-and-a-half bar bridge, and if you try to figure it out and count it out you'll get as lost as hell, but if you just relax and give in to it, it's perfectly natural. His tunes are very old-fashioned, really, in a lot of ways. He obviously knows the popular music of the twenties and thirties very well, because the structures of his pieces, when you get down to what they are underneath, they're very simple and old-fashioned, and yet they're as new as today. 34

One of Monk's tunes which fully synthesises these new and old formal elements is called "Pannonica". It is certainly one of Monk's structural masterpieces and represents an instance of one of the composer's collaborations with an influential saxophonist in the shape of Sonny Rollins. (This forms the basis of the next chapter).

Footnotes : 2.3

- ¹ LeRoi Jones, Blues People (New York: Morrow, 1963), pp. 50 - 51
- ² Joachim Berendt, The Jazz Book, ed. and trans. Dan Morgenstern (paperback ed., St Albans, U.K.: Paladin, 1976), p. 4.
- ³ Paul Oliver, "Blues to drive the blues away", in Nat Hentoff & Albert J. McCarthy, eds., Jazz: New perspectives on the history of jazz by twelve of the world's foremost jazz critics and scholars (New York: Rinehart, 1959; paperback reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), p. 85.
- ⁴ Frank Tirro, "Constructive Elements in Jazz Improvisation", Journal of the American Musicological Society 27 (1984), 287.
- ⁵ Dan Haerle, Jazz/Rock Voicings for the Contemporary Keyboard Player, 2nd ed., (Lebanon, Indiana: Studio P/R, 1974), p. 35. Haerle shows 17 basic variants of the blues phrase, which, by substitution, may be expanded into the hundreds.
- ⁶ Berendt, *ibid.*, p. 138.
- ⁷ Shapiro and Hentoff, Talkin' To Ya, p. 354.
- ⁸ Robert Johnson, "Drunken Hearted Man", from King of the Delta Blues Singers, vol.2, Columbia C 30034.
- ⁹ Goldberg, Fifties, pp. 31 - 32
- ¹⁰ The Real Book, 19th ed. (n.p., 1986)
- ¹¹ 'Jimmy' Yancey (c. 1894 - 1951), a self-taught pianist, played publicly from the turn of the century to 1925 and then became a groundsman for the Chicago White Sox. He became a celebrity thanks to the pre-war interest in boogie-woogie and played throughout the 1940's in Chicago. His activities were hampered by diabetes during the last years of his life.

Information condensed from John Chilton, Who's Who of Jazz: Storyville to Swing Street, 4th ed., (London: Macmillan, 1985; paperback ed., London: Papermac, 1985), p. 368.

- ¹²Goldberg, *ibid.*, p. 32.
- ¹³Collier, Making of Jazz, p. 206.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 207.
- ¹⁵Gary Giddins, "Weather Bird: Brilliant Corners", Village Voice (February 7, 1984), 73.
- ¹⁶Lawrence O. Koch, "Thelonious Monk: Compositional Techniques", in Dan Morgenstern et al., eds., Annual Review of Jazz Studies 2 (New Brunswick, U.S.A.:Transaction Books, 1983), 69-70.
- ¹⁷Tirro, "Constructive Elements", 292.
- ¹⁸Steve Lacy, Evidence, Prestige MPP-2505; Reflections, Prestige MPP-2500; John Coltrane and Don Cherry, The Avant-Garde, Atlantic 1451.
- ¹⁹Hodeir, Toward Jazz, p. 164.
- ²⁰Michael Cuscuna, notes to Complete Blue Note Monk, p. 1. There is controversy about Monk's birth date; Cuscuna has 1917, while Goldberg and Collier have 1920.
- ²¹Monk, Monk's Music, Riverside 12 - 242.
- ²²Cuscuna, *ibid.*
- ²³Goldberg, *ibid.*, p. 27.
- ²⁴Cuscuna, *ibid.*, p. 7.
- ²⁵*Ibid.* André Hodeir (Toward Jazz, p. 166) has said of the 1957 piano version of this tune:

One may wonder what remains of the theme of I Should Care after this acid bath, and, in fact of the ballad in general, considered as an essential element of jazz sensibility. Personally, I am delighted at this transmutation, which is in keeping with the breath of fresh air brought to jazz, in my opinion, by his own original themes.

Monk's ferocious clusters and virtually ametrical treatment of this ballad are somewhat akin to a large cat playing with a small and terrified mouse. The incongruous effect of playing the Blue Note versions and immediately following them with the 1957 version elicited gales of laughter from two

musician friends who were quick to respond to Monk's savage debunking of the theme.

²⁶Goldberg, *ibid.*, p. 198.

²⁷There is also a drummerless version of Monk's Mood dating from April, 1957.

²⁸Martin Williams, The Jazz Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970; new and revised paperback ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 166.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 167.

³⁰Berendt, *ibid.*, pp. 383 - 84.

³¹Williams, *ibid.*, p. 5.

³²Cuscuna, *ibid.*, p. 3.

³³Ran Blake, "The Monk Piano Style", Keyboard (July 1982), 26.

³⁴Goldberg, *ibid.*, pp. 30 - 31.

**DREAM
PANNONICA
NO CHANGES**

Slow Ballad tempo

Musical score for the first system of 'Pannonica'. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff is the treble clef with a melodic line. The second staff is the bass clef with a bass line. The third and fourth staves are grand staff notation. Chord symbols are placed below the bass line: Cmaj9, Ebm9, Dm7, Bb7, Ebmaj7, Eb7, Abm7, Db7, Gbmaj7, F7+, Ebm7, Ab7, G7, Dbmaj7.

Musical score for the second system of 'Pannonica'. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff is the treble clef with a melodic line. The second staff is the bass clef with a bass line. The third and fourth staves are grand staff notation. Chord symbols are placed below the bass line: Gm7, C7+, Cm9, F7, F#7, B6, Dm7, G7+(b9), Cmaj9, Gm7, C7(b5), Bm7, E7, A7(b5), D7+, G7(b9), Cmaj9, Ebm7, Ab7, Dm7, Bb7, Ebmaj7, Eb7, Abm7, Db7, Gbmaj9, F7+, Ebm7, Ab7, G7, D7, Dm7, G7, Dbmaj9. The word 'Fine' is written at the end of the fourth staff.

Fig. 2.4.1 Thelonious Monk "Pannonica" (Monk). Theme. Source: Bob Houston, *Jazz Masters: Thelonious Monk* (London: Wise Publications, 1977), pp. 27 - 28.

A)

B)

ANTICIPATED NOTES

A2)

Fig. 2.4.2: Thelonious Monk "Pannonica" (Monk). Piano (and celeste) solo. Sources: Bob Houston, Jazz Masters: Thelonious Monk (London: Wise Publications, 1977), p. 29 (bars 1 - 16). Author's transcription (bars 17 - 33).

2.4 Thematic connections in "Pannonica"

"Pannonica" was one of three new pieces Monk wrote for his first album of originals for Riverside, "Brilliant Corners", which was released in 1957. The other tunes were "Ba-lue Bolivar Balues - are" and "Brilliant Corners". The album received a great deal of critical acclaim; Nat Hentoff gave it 5 stars in a review in Downbeat. At last Monk's star was in the ascendant and with the restoration of his cabaret card at the beginning of 1957, he was able to begin working in clubs again, something he had been barred from doing since 1951.

1957 was the year of his highly successful collaboration with John Coltrane at the Five Spot, some aspects of which have been discussed above. "Pannonica" was actually recorded in December 1956, a couple of months before the Five Spot engagement and features another of Monk's most successful combinations, that with Sonny Rollins.

The title is derived from the first name of the Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter, a great benefactress of the arts who helped numerous jazz musicians, including Monk, Parker, and Horace Silver, among others.

The tune is played by a quintet consisting of Ernie Henry, alto sax, Rollins, tenor sax, Monk, piano and celeste, Oscar Pettiford, bass, and Max Roach, drums. Joe Goldberg has stated with regard to the relationship between Monk and Rollins: "Rollins has a greater affinity for the pianist's rhythmic and harmonic ideas than any hornman with the possible exception of Coltrane".²

"Pannonica" itself (Fig. 2.4.1) has a fairly straightforward structure, with

one unusual feature: the last A ("Pannonica" being an AABA form) is extended by one bar to form a nine-bar phrase. Thus the piece consists of 33, and not 32, bars.

Monk introduces the slow ballad tempo ($\text{♩} = 63$) with 4 bars of material based on the first 4 bars of the tune. He plays this on piano (left-hand) and celeste (right-hand) at an octave higher than the saxophones when they enter. Monk apparently came to play the celeste more or less accidentally; he noticed it in the studio and liked the effect of it on "Pannonica".

Monk is very aware of textural contrast as has been observed with regard to his ways of accompanying other soloists; he manages in "Pannonica" to make the best use of the different tone-colours of the two keyboard instruments. The disparity between the delicate chiming of the celeste and the somewhat mournful quality of the tune played by the saxophones together is of major textural importance.

Except for bar A8, where the run is played by Monk, the tune is divided between the alto (which plays the upper part, stems up) and the tenor (lower part, stems down).

Relative to the introduction, Monk plays the celeste an octave down, which tends to mask its reinforcement of the alto line. It occasionally emerges from the background as in bar A4 where Monk hammers out the octave D-flats as a kind of commentary on the saxophones' held notes.

It is significant that Monk's interjections take place in the relatively

"empty bars" of the tune, that is, in bars A4 and A8. What is also significant is how the whole first sixteen bars is constructed out of the first four notes (the descending figure B--A--G--E).

In fact, the only bar which does not bear a close resemblance to the above figure is bar A7, and this is precisely the figure Monk uses to begin the bridge. The triplet figure of the second half of bar A3 also crops up in the bridge in bar B6, which for the rest is mainly derived from the material of bar A1 (first four notes) as mentioned above.

The last 9 bars of "Pannonica" display a close relationship to the first sixteen, with the obvious exception of the extra bar. Monk's procedure here is to use a version of bar A7 from which the last eighth-note has been removed; the extra bar (A16) recapitulates the rhythm of the A7 bar, but re-harmonized.

Monk's "commentaries" in the empty bars of the last A are somewhat different, indicating that he did not consider them as necessarily fixed elements of the accompaniment. In fact, the materials used in all these places (that is, bars A4, A8, A12, A17) assume considerable importance during the course of Monk's improvisation in the piece.

Monk's piano solo is preceded by Rollins' which is well-constructed and rhythmically complex. Roach doubles the time from the outset, maintaining brushes throughout, and this lift seems to have inspired Rollins. Gunther Schuller³ has commented on the harsh and out-of-tune saxophone sound of the tune, but this seems to be mostly on account of Ernie Henry, who is not one of Monk's most inspired sidemen. Once Rollins takes over, the intonation improves dramatically, which somewhat bears this out.

Rollins does not stay very closely with the melody during his solo; in the first eight bars, for instance, he only refers to the material once, which takes place in his seventh bar, where he alludes to A7 of the original. In Rollins' second eight, Monk quotes a variation of "Tea for Two" during the fifth and sixth bars. He had recorded the tune for his previous Riverside album. ⁴

The relationship between Rollins' material in the last (irregular) A to Monk's solo, which immediately follows it, is very important. In bar A26, Rollins plays a figure repeated four times which is carried over into the next bar (A27) where he alludes to it in a transposed form. He immediately follows this figure with a fairly direct reference to the corresponding place in the melody.

Monk once again quotes a more telescoped version of "Tea for Two" in the same place as before (bars A29 - A30), whereupon Rollins once again returns to the melody in bar A31.

The first phrase of Monk's solo (Fig. 2.4.2, bar 1) is a combination of Rollins' figure (from A26) with the melodic figure (B -- A -- G -- E) of the tune. Monk displaces the earlier figure by a sixteenth, treats it in diminution, and then adds onto it a replica of Rollins' run (which had occurred seven bars earlier, in Rollins' A26). This is not only a prodigious feat of memory, but reveals Monk's striking ability to integrate old (the melody) and new (Rollins' phrase) materials not only seamlessly, but in the right place.

Monk accompanies Rollins' solo only with fairly sparse chords and occasional brief melodic figures on the piano, and in his own solo the celeste, accompanied by piano, returns in bar A4. Before this, however, in bars A2, he plays a trans-

posed and anticipated version of the A1 phrase on piano.

Bar A3 is a version of the corresponding bar in the tune which Monk treats with considerable rhythmic freedom; and next, in A4, the celeste returns halfway through the bar (over the E-flat 7 chord) playing a variant of the repeated D-flat figure which had emerged so startlingly in the same place in the exposition. The figure is now treated as a broad triplet with a sixteenth-note pickup, where originally it had been two sixteenth-notes followed by a dotted quarter.

The material of bars A5 - A8 integrates some of the melodic material from before with a phrase in sixteenth-notes beginning halfway through A7. The major part of the solo, beginning halfway through A4, is played on celeste, until the piano takes over in bar A2) 25.

Monk's second A (beginning A9) begins in the low register of the celeste, an intriguingly dark sound, which was also used in the accompaniment to the exposition. The opening motive is once again treated in sixteenth-notes and displaced, starting this time on the fourth sixteenth of beat 1.

In bar A11, Monk displaces the original phrase by a full quarter and treats it in double-time. The second half of this bar bears an exact correspondence to its piano equivalent earlier(A3). The repeated D-flat figure of bar A4 (the first celeste entry) in the following bar returns, now in the guise of two eighth-notes followed by a sixteenth and a dotted eighth.

A13 - 16 reveals close relationship to its precursor eight bars earlier in a

fairly strict adherence to the melody followed by a shorter sixteenth-note figure this time.

In the bridge Monk introduces a new figure (2.4.3a). This consists of a sixteenth-note followed by a thirtysecond-triplet, and can be seen as a diminution of a favourite bop cliché (2.4.3b). This appears first "ghosted" on the last eighth of bar B17, in the same place in the next bar, on the second half of the third beat in B20 and finally on the second half of the second beat in B21.

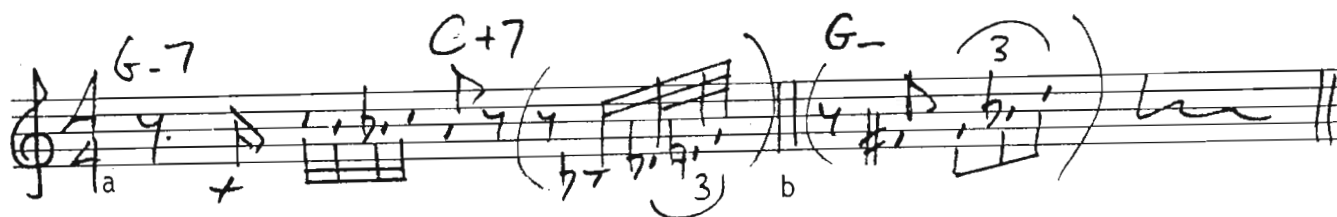


Fig. 2.4.3 a,b "Pannonica" bridge, bar b1 Bebop cliché: Charlie Parker
"Marmaduke" (Parker) solo, bar 23

The bridge begins with a double-timed and displaced version of the material of the tune, which as demonstrated above was derived from bar A7 of the melody. The answer to this phase is preceded by the ghosted figure of 2.4.3a and is rather more obliquely related to the original fabric.

Between B18 and B21 Monk plays another figure preceded by the cliché. This is followed by a run in sixteenth-notes, yet another instance of the cliché and then in bar B21 Monk plays the half-notes G and F-sharp of the tune as crotchets, interpolating between them the cliché figure. Most of the material of the last

half of the bridge (bars B21 - B25) shows a close relationship to the original structure.

For the last A, Monk returns to the piano. This change of timbre acts as a line of demarcation, another element of formal organization within the solo. This instrumentation lasts from A2) 25 till the D-flat dotted eighth (last beat of A 2) 28) where the celeste once again comes to the fore. These four bars (A 2) 25 - A 2) 28) are devoted to the fuller exploration of Monk's opening material (A1), which is a synthesis of Rollins' figure and the melodic variant, as discussed above.

The celeste re-enters at virtually the same spot as in Monk's first A (over the E-flat 7 chord), which demonstrates Monk's uncanny awareness of musical space. The three bars (A 2) 29 - A 2) 31) show close adherence to the original melody and are rounded off by a two-bar run (mostly in sixteenths) which concludes the solo.

In all, the solo is a masterpiece of construction. Apart from the wealth of thematic connections as discussed above, Monk uses timbral contrast, register, synthesis of original and spur-of-the-moment elements (the repeated D-flats, Rollins' run, the triplet cliché) to create a solo that demonstrates a very high degree of coherence and inner logic.

Space in music consists, after all, not only of what is left out, but where one places that which is essential. McCoy Tyner, who was very important to the success of the "classic" John Coltrane Quartet, has said: "I think that Thelonious Monk was an inspiration. He didn't lock a person in. He would

leave a lot of space".⁵

It is hard to assess Monk's legacy for the future, as he is very much a sui generis figure in American art, in the company of such as Ives, Wallace Stevens, Emily Dickinson and so on. In addition to which, Monk was (very much) a private man, who rarely gave interviews and virtually gave up public performance during the last eight or so years of his life. The eighth-century Sufi master, Hasan al - Basri, has said: "He that knows God loves Him, and he that knows the world abstains from it".⁶

Monk's influence on "free jazz" and such musicians as Coltrane, Steve Lacy, and others has been discussed above, but this is less direct than taking on a conceptual, or metaphysical form, to do with ideas regarding space, phrasing and organization.

It seems fitting to give the final say in this matter to Steve Lacy, who more than anyone seems to have understood the difficult and courageous stance Monk took up.

A jazz musician is a combination orator, dialectician, mathematician, athlete, entertainer, poet, singer, dancer, diplomat, educator, student, comedian, artist, seducer, public masturbator and general all-around good fellow. As this diversity indicates, no matter what you do, some people are going to like it, and other people not. Therefore, all you can do is try to satisfy yourself, by trusting the man inside. 7

Footnotes: 2.4

- ¹The transcription does not include Monk's left-hand voicings as they consist mostly of single notes or bare fifths and are of no great structural importance to the solo. The recording was re-issued on Brilliance, Milestone M - 47023.
- ²Goldberg, Fifties, p. 96.
- ³Gunther Schuller, "Thelonious Monk", in Martin Williams, ed., Jazz Panorama (London: The Jazz Book Club, 1965), p. 226.
- ⁴The Unique Thelonious Monk, Riverside 12 - 201, re-issued as The Riverside Trios, Milestone M - 47052.
- ⁵John Diliberto, "McCoy Tyner: Piano Visionary", Downbeat: For Contemporary Musicians, vol. 51, no. 2 (February 1984), 22.
- ⁶Quoted in J.C. Thomas, Chasin' The Trane: The Music and Mystique of John Coltrane (New York: Doubleday, 1975; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), p. 215.
- ⁷Bobbie Lacy, "Introducing Steve Lacy", in Williams, ed., Jazz Panorama, p. 270.

Appendix: List of recorded examples

In view of the comparative rarity of some of the items mentioned herein, it was felt that it would be useful to provide a cassette containing the less easily accessible examples. These are listed below, together with their corresponding pages in the text. For ease of location five seconds of silence has been inserted between each item.

Side A

1) Bessie Smith, "St Louis Blues" (Handy).....	27
2) Coleman Hawkins, "Body and Soul" (Green).....	32
3) Charlie Parker, "Cool Blues (take 4)"(Parker).....	40
4) Steve Kuhn Quartet, "Confirmation" (Parker).....	51
5) Monk, "Jackie-ing" (Monk) (live version).....	55
6) "Jackie-ing" (1959 version).....	58
7) "Jackie-ing" (1971 solo piano version).....	60
8) Miles Davis, "The Man I Love (take 1)"(Gershwin).....	62

Side B

1) Monk/Rollins, "Reflections" (Monk).....	64
2) Globe Unity, "Reflections" (Schoof).....	68
3) Steve Lacy, "Let's Cool One" (Monk).....	69
4) Monk, "Blue Monk" (Monk).....	76
5) Monk, "Straight, No Chaser" (Monk).....	82
6) Monk, "Abide with me" (W.Monk, arranged T.S.Monk).....	85
7) Monk, "Crepuscule with Nellie" (Monk).....	86
8) Monk, "I Should Care" (Cahn/Stordahl/Weston) (1948 master).....	89
9) "I Should Care" (1957 solo piano version).....	89
10) Monk, "In Walked Bud" (Monk).....	91
11) Monk, "Pannonica" (Monk).....	95

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