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**Review**

# Robert Hodson, *Interaction, Improvisation, and Interplay in Jazz*. New York and London: Routledge, 2007.

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In *Interaction, Improvisation, and Interplay in Jazz*, Robert Hodson joins a growing list of scholars who insist upon the centrality of interaction in jazz improvisation. Dissatisfied with analyses of improvised solo lines extracted from the context of their accompaniments, Hodson offers a corrective that explains improvisational decisions in terms of ensemble interaction. Instead of the narrow focus on syntactical structure found in much analysis of jazz, Hodson seeks to 'explore the ways that improvising jazz musicians balance the constraining factors of the structural, syntactical aspects of the composition they are performing with the dynamic, interactive processes that take place between the members of the ensemble' (21).

Hodson's focus is primarily on post-World War II small-group jazz performance, though he does claim that the interactive processes he describes also apply to earlier styles. He begins by reformulating Jean-Jacques Nattiez's three-dimensional model of the musical work to describe jazz performance (Nattiez 1990). For Nattiez, the musical work consists of some 'poietic' process (e.g., composition), a 'trace' (e.g., a score or some resultant sound product), and an 'esthetic' process (i.e., reception). In jazz, Hodson explains, the poietic process and the trace are essentially coterminous:

> Since jazz is substantially improvised in performance, the poietic process and the performance occur at the same time in the same person—in other words, the musician composes and performs simultaneously without the intermediate step of writing the improvisation down. (15)

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More importantly, the esthetic and poietic processes are linked in a feedback loop: 'the jazz musician decides what to improvise, plays it, hears the other musicians improvising, at which point the process starts all over again, in almost immediate succession' (15–16). To elaborate this process, Hodson provides an overview of the conventional 'head arrangement' that serves as a basis for a great deal of small-group jazz performance. He describes the functional roles and responsibilities of each member of the rhythm section in support of an improvising soloist and illustrates some of the ways in which their input can affect the course of the solo. Improvisation, for Hodson, seems to be a kind of ongoing interactive process of call and response between a soloist and his or her accompaniment. The musicians respond to one another's musical calls, and these responses in turn become calls inviting further response.

What kinds of things do jazz musicians interact about in the context of performance? Many things, of course, but Hodson places special emphasis on harmony and form. Jazz musicians are seldom content with the chord progressions of the tunes they appropriate for their repertoire. Indeed, novel reharmonization has been among the central markers of the 'progressive' in jazz since the bebop era, and the ability to navigate complex chord changes and spontaneous chord substitutions in the context of live performance is a basic component of jazz professionalism. Using the 12-bar blues and the 32-bar AABA 'rhythm' changes as examples, Hodson details an assortment of conventional jazz harmonic practices ranging from interpolated dominant-function harmonies to tritone substitution. Hodson proposes a 'generative theory of jazz harmony', derived loosely from Chomskian linguistic theory, to model the processes of harmonic elaboration that characterize jazz performance practice. He identifies a 'deep structure', which he defines as 'a simplified abstraction, a mental map or network that lies *beneath* the chord changes' (61, original italics). It consists of the most basic, foundational chord changes (or harmonic functions) for defining a tune as an example of a particular progression. For instance, a 12-bar blues exhibits a deep structure consisting of tonic harmony at the outset, the arrival of a subdominant in m. 5, a return to tonic usually in m. 7, and a dominant-to-tonic progression in mm. 9–12. Above the deep structure lies first the 'shallow structure', which for Hodson 'consists of all the possible harmonic progressions that can be generated from [the] deep structure', and then the 'surface structure', which is 'one specific manifestation of such a harmonic progression' (61). Hodson shows a variety of possible shallow structures for both the 12-bar

blues and 'rhythm' changes and illustrates the interactive processes by which jazz musicians choose varying surface structures in the midst of performance.

With respect to form, Hodson argues, jazz musicians interact in the context of performance either to clarify or obscure structural and phrase boundaries. A variety of permutations is possible in this regard:

> [I]f the soloist is strongly defining the form, the rhythm section may (1) follow the soloist's lead and further reinforce the form by emphasizing the boundaries of formal units, or (2) relax into a more neutral definition of the phrase structure to balance out the soloist's emphasis on the form. Similarly, if a soloist's improvisation de-emphasizes a tune's form, the rhythm section may respond by (3) strongly emphasizing the form in order to provide a solid background against which the soloist's explorations can be heard and understood, or (4) 'go along for the ride' and blur the formal boundaries along with the soloist, creating a performance that feels more liquid and less parsed into even, predictable, four- or eight-measure spans. (98)

Hodson provides some excellent analyses to illustrate these possibilities. His comparison of the rhythm section's different approaches in their accompaniment of Miles Davis and John Coltrane on 'Blues By Five' is exemplary. In his first solo chorus, Davis plays simple four-bar phrases on the trumpet that clearly articulate the form of the tune, prompting a fairly neutral response from the rhythm section. By contrast, Coltrane's saxophone phrasing is highly irregular, which motivates comping patterns in the piano and drums that clearly delineate the four-bar phrase structure.

Finally, Hodson explores the opportunities available for musical interaction in an assortment of late-1950s and 1960s styles ranging from 'standard-practice jazz' to free jazz. His analyses deftly reveal the different demands placed on musicians by the varying harmonic and formal constraints of this music. The flexible form of Miles Davis's 'Flamenco Sketches', for example, requires a kind of communication not necessary in earlier styles of jazz to negotiate movement from one section into the next, while Ornette Coleman's 'Free Jazz' and John Coltrane's 'Ascension' both demand heightened interactions among the musicians simply to determine the direction the music will take from one moment to the next. In general, the more free the structure, Hodson astutely proposes, the more active the interaction will have to be.

Hodson's insistence on this greater context for the analysis of jazz improvisation follows similar appeals made by Paul Rinzler (1988), Ingrid Monson (1996), Paul Berliner (1994), John Murphy (1990), Tor Dybo

(1999), and others, and he is one of the few music theorists to have followed through wholeheartedly on this project. Readers will be pleased to find many detailed transcriptions of improvised solos with their rhythm-section accompaniments in this book.[1] From the perspective of the analyst, this is not a trivial matter, as anyone who has attempted to transcribe piano comping, walking bass lines, and drum parts from jazz recordings knows well—it isn't easy! And yet, how can we possibly claim a comprehensive perspective on jazz improvisation outside of this context? Indeed, it seems bizarre that so much jazz analysis treats the solo in isolation from its accompaniment. Surely, no one would think it adequate to analyze a violin concerto by considering only the violin part against a roman-numeral analysis. Crucial aspects of orchestration, texture, rhythm, and phrasing would be left out of consideration. Why should jazz be any different?

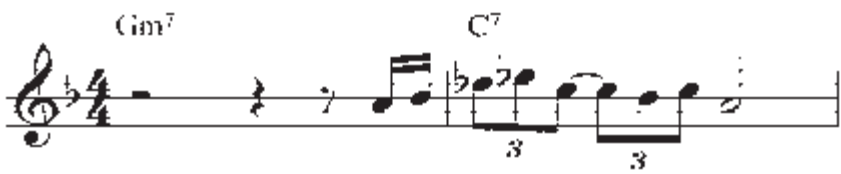
Perhaps the reason jazz analysis typically concentrates on the solo line abstracted from its accompaniment is that most analysts are themselves performing jazz musicians who take for granted the interactive processes identified by Hodson because they are more interested in discovering what scales or licks another musician employs over a given set of chord changes. In other words, they do analysis not for an esthetic appreciation of the jazz recording as a kind of musical object, but to uncover improvisational strategies they themselves can use. In this respect, poietic purposes override the esthetic orientation of analysis. Hodson's emphasis, by contrast, is very much centered on the relationship between the poietic and the esthetic, the illumination of which requires transcription of all parts for analysis.

As the study of jazz enters the mainstream of music theory—and the publication of this book itself suggests that such a process is well underway—one might expect jazz analysis in general to turn increasingly away from poiesis to esthetics. Music theory as a discipline had largely made this turn by the early twentieth century, when theory pedagogy had become profoundly disengaged from the practical concerns of composers (Wason

1. One cautionary note, however: In his transcription and analysis of Cannonball Adderley's performance of 'Groovin' High', Hodson situates Adderley's improvised melodic line in the wrong key. The pitches of the transcription are correct, but the passage is in the key of D♭ major, not E♭—the band plays the head in E♭, but modulates to D♭ for the solos. Though this might invalidate the analytical claims Hodson wishes to make on this particular passage, it does not undermine his larger thesis that jazz musicians listen carefully to one another and interact in the context of performance.

1985). In the late twentieth century, the esthetic wing of the discipline has turned increasingly to the cognitive sciences to explain how it is that music generates its effects.[2] What is odd, then, is that while explaining how jazz musicians' esthetic responses constitute an imminent component of their poietical processes—the core of the interactional model he proposes—Hodson does not draw on any theory of music perception. Indeed, in formulating his 'generative theory of jazz harmony', Hodson goes right to Chomsky rather than to the premier adaptation of Chomskian linguistics to music theory: Lerdahl and Jackendoff's *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (1983). This is unfortunate because it leads him on occasion to make some dubious analytical claims that would be avoided with a more rigorous understanding of cognition. His analysis of Charlie Parker's 'Now's The Time' is a characteristic example.

'Now's The Time' is a 12-bar blues in the key of F. In the 10th bar of his first solo chorus, Parker plays the phrase shown in example 1 over the dominant ($C^7$):




Example 1: *Charlie Parker, 'Now's The Time', mm. 29–30*

Hodson notes Parker's use of the ♭9 ($D^♭$) on the downbeat, and explains this decision in terms of an interaction with Dizzy Gillespie, who happens to be the pianist on this track:

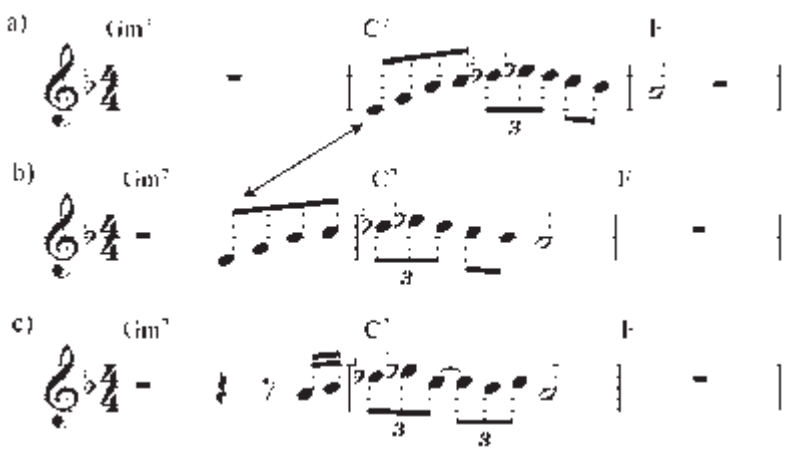
> Charlie Parker may have been influenced both by Dizzy's voicing of $C^7$ with a flatted-9th and by the resulting chromatic voice-leading: Parker emphasizes the flatted-9th ($D^♭$) on the downbeat of m. 30, and the primary motion of his line through the rest of the measure is motivically based on a descending half-step figure. (51)

For this to be true, Parker, who begins his phrase at the same moment Gillespie strikes his chord at the end of m. 29 (Gillespie anticipates the downbeat), would have had to hear this chord while playing sixteenth

2. The many comprehensive theories of music perception include Meyer 1956, 1973; Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983; Narmour 1990, 1992; and Temperley 2001, among others.

notes on his saxophone, assess its quality as altered (i.e., ♭9 and ♭5), and then change the course of the phrase he had already planned and was in the midst of—all within the span of a single eighth note, a short swing eighth note, at that! I clock the tempo of this performance at 128 bpm. The duration of a straight eighth note at this tempo is about 235 ms, which would put the duration of the shorter, offbeat-swing eighth note at under 200 ms. London (2004) puts the minimum duration for metric subdivisions at about 100 ms—beneath that level, human beings are unable to group successive events into higher-level metrical structures. If we grant that Parker needs at least 100 ms simply to perceive the chord Gillespie has struck, then he has only about 100 ms to respond before the ensuing downbeat. Hodson is thus asking Parker to do an awful lot in a span of time precariously close to a well-established limit of human perceptual faculties.

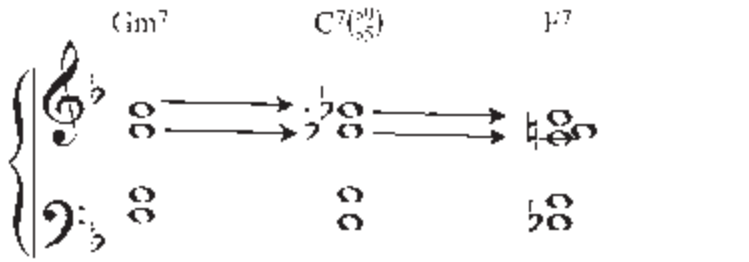
I think it is more likely that somewhere in the middle of m. 29, Parker decided to play a variant of one of his common phrases, or 'licks', over the $C^7$ in m. 30. The prototype of this formula is shown in example 2a.[3] It is shifted in example 2b to begin two beats earlier, such that the ♭9 (the D♭) arrives on the downbeat—not an uncommon tactic for Parker. Example 2c shows the variation of this pattern as it is played in 'Now's The Time'. The derivation, I believe, is fairly straightforward.




Example 2: *Transformation of the 'Donna Lee' lick*

3. This is the 'Donna Lee' lick. It occurs several times in Parker's tune 'Donna Lee'.

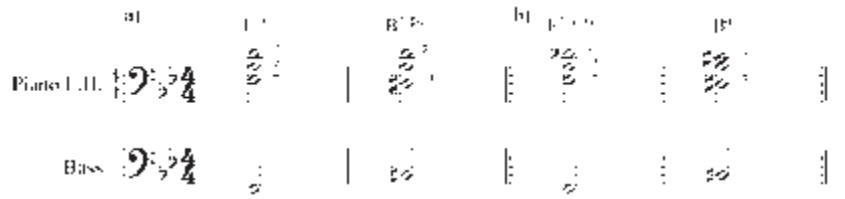
Gillespie's use of an altered voicing for his C$^7$ chord in 'Now's The Time' stems, as Hodson notes, from chromatic voice-leading, as shown in example 3.



Example 3: *Gillespie's voice-leading, mm. 29–31*

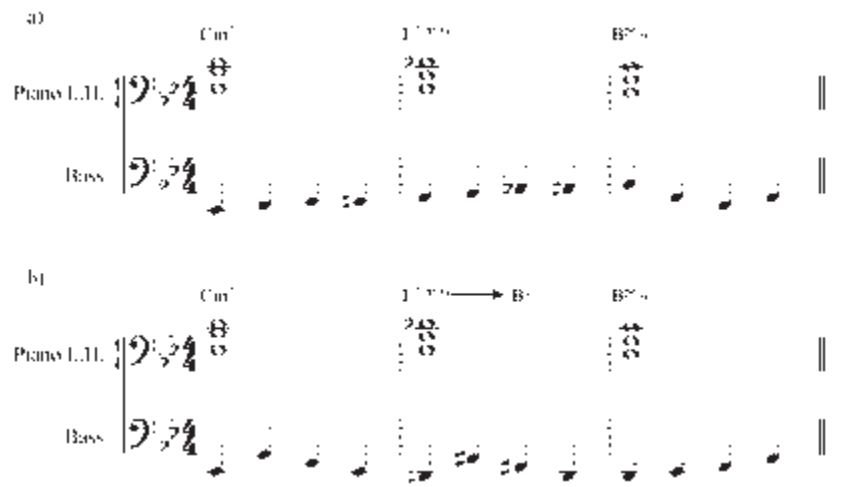
The coincidence of his ♭9 with Parker's ♭9 is just that—coincidence. If Parker had opted for a melody that employed a ♮9 instead, I doubt listeners would notice. After all, we expect some degree of dissonance over the dominant. More important, I believe, is the coherence of each part over the course of a phrase. In this regard, the continuity of Gillespie's voice-leading from mm. 29–31 overrides any correspondence (or disjunction) between any particular chord voicing and the saxophone part. What matters is their conjunction over tonic harmony at the end of the phrase—that is where the tonality comes into better focus.

Hodson's emphasis on interaction occasionally leads him to over-interpret harmonic convergences in this way. This is not to say that jazz musicians do not have significant interactions about harmony in the midst of performance, but cause and effect may not be as instantaneous as Hodson often suggests. Harmony is complicated—it takes time for even the best musicians to perceive and process harmonic information and more time still to formulate an appropriate response. Hence coincidence may play a larger role than Hodson would care to acknowledge. Take tritone substitution, for example. It does indeed happen in the midst of a performance, and there is often a remarkable convergence between soloist, pianist, and bassist in choosing to implement a substitution at a particular moment. But incongruity is just as common, and the standard left-hand voicings used by pianists since the 1950s have been designed to accommodate either the root of a dominant seventh chord or the flattened fifth in the bass, as shown in example 4.




Example 4: *Left-hand piano voicings in tritone substitution*

The same left-hand voicings work with either F or B in the bass. The bass note merely changes the quality of the harmony from unaltered (♮13) to altered (♯9) and vice versa (♭13 to ♮9). This means a pianist can go one way and the bassist can go another without adverse harmonic consequences, as shown in example 5:




Example 5: *Tritone substitution in a ii-V-I progression*

Here, the same left-hand voicings are used over different bass lines. Would we say in example 5b that the pianist opted for an altered voicing of the $F^7$ because the bassist seemed to be veering toward the tritone substitution? In other words, is the choice of voicing here a consequence of musical interaction? I think not. Rather, both pianist and bassist aim to move from $Cm^7$ to $B^{\flat 6/9}$. They take different paths to get there, both of which are coherent in terms of linear processes, irrespective of vertical correspondences.

Beyond issues of timing and perception in the negotiation of harmony, Hodson's emphasis on interactive processes in jazz improvisation occasionally blinds him to more plausible explanations of the decisions musicians make in the midst of performance. Nowhere is this more evident than in his detailed analysis of the Bill Evans Trio's 1959 performance of 'Autumn Leaves'. Hodson focuses on an improvised musical dialog between pianist Bill Evans and bassist Scott LaFaro that follows the opening melody chorus. Their phrases dovetail one another every two to three measures, and Hodson seeks in his analysis to show how these musicians 'structure and organize their improvised performance by continually responding to the gestures and motives of both their own improvised solos as well as those of the others in the ensemble' (135).

To be sure, there is a lot of motivic interplay going on between the musicians here and some genuine cases of imitation—see, for example, mm. 1.23–1.24 or mm. 1.32–1.33 in Hodson's transcription (figure 4.8, pp. 129–34). But it seems to me that Hodson's enthusiasm for his method sometimes gets the better of him, forcing an interpretation in terms of interaction when better options are available. In mm. 1.10–1.12, for example, Evans plays a zig-zagging, arpeggiated melody that outlines a descent from F to B♭ during a pause in LaFaro's bass line (see Hodson's figure 4.12, p. 137). Within this phrase, Hodson discerns a descending D-C-B♭ motive. He does not include the preceding F and E♭ in this motive apparently because 'Evans uses this embellished D-C-B♭ descent motivically throughout the rest of his improvisation, frequently to signal the ends of phrases' (137). True enough, but at this point in the solo, LaFaro would have had no way of knowing that and no reason for identifying this motive as more salient than a scalar descent from F to B♭. Nevertheless, when Evans concludes his phrase in m. 1.12, LaFaro returns and, according to Hodson, 'responds to Evans's descending D-C-B♭ motive by *ascending* through the same pitches in m. 1.12, even incorporating Evans's C♯ chromatic lower neighbor to D' (137). This analysis seems rather dubious to me. For if LaFaro did indeed seek a motivic correspondence between his new phrase and Evans's freshly completed one, why did he not take his melodic line up to E♭ and F? Hodson nevertheless continues pushing this interpretation:

> The rest of LaFaro's phrase also seems influenced by Evans's closing gesture. On beat 3 of m. 1.12, LaFaro descends through D-C-B♭; he then plays a line that revolves around the pitches B♭ and G, the final pitches of Evans's phrase. The transition between Evans's and LaFaro's phrases in this excerpt is almost seamless: LaFaro not only develops ideas that Evans had introduced just moments before, but

> also enters on the exact same pitch—B♭—that Evans is playing. The resulting musical effect is that of a single improvised melody split between two different instruments.

Is this really what is happening here? Does the line LaFaro plays in mm. 1.12–1.13 really derive its melodic material from Evans's phrase from mm. 1.10–1.12? It seems to me much more plausible that LaFaro completes a phrase at the outset of m. 1.11, takes a breath, and begins a new phrase in m. 1.12. This new phrase does *not* take its cues from any motive played by Evans in the preceding measures. Instead, it is just a blues phrase. At the moment of transition between the keys of B♭ major and G minor, LaFaro works his line up and down a blues scale coherent in both. It is not that there is no interaction taking place between the two musicians here. Rather, their musical interaction is more a matter of taking turns than a self-conscious process of motivic imitation, as Hodson claims.

These criticisms aside, Robert Hodson has written a very engaging and provocative book that will be of considerable interest to music theorists seeking more 'situated' analyses of jazz performance. It will prove useful classroom reading for detailing the basic functional roles of members of the rhythm section in standard-practice jazz and illuminating some of the common interactive processes at play every time jazz musicians perform together. Perhaps most significantly, however, Hodson has provided a basic interpretive framework for understanding the improvised jazz solo. His analyses reveal the crucial importance of evaluating improvisational options in light of a field of interactive possibilities. It can only be hoped that jazz analysts follow his lead to develop our understanding of the ways in which musical interactions guide and shape the direction of improvised performance.

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