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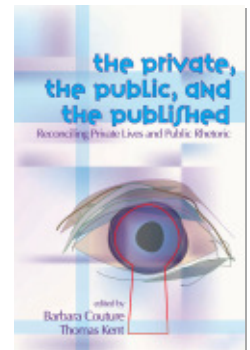
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VIRTUOSOS AND ENSEMBLES

Rhetorical Lessons from Jazz

Gregory Clark

Reconciling our desire for individual freedom to act with our practical need to establish and maintain with others a working consensus might well be the foundational project of human sociality, and it is certainly the reason for rhetoric. Particularly in a democratic society, this binary structures the experience of social interaction and, consequently, rhetorical practice. It structures conventional rhetorical practice in the form of a conflict that is resolvable only when one element of the binary concedes to the other, or, at its most democratic, when each relinquishes enough to the other to effect a momentary compromise. Conventionally, then, we use rhetoric to manage the ongoing confrontation of two conflicting aspirations. The familiar conflicts between individual and collective, private and public, autonomy and consensus, so pervades our experience that the very suggestion of fully reconciling the two seems at least to be naive. By almost every definition we have, rhetoric is a method for engaging, not reconciling, that conflict.

However, one definition does seem to admit that possibility, offered some time ago by John Poulakos as a “Sophistic” definition of rhetoric: “Rhetoric is the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible” (26). Absent from the terms of this definition is any reference to that persistent conflict between our desire for individual freedom and our need to build and maintain consensus that traditionally gives rhetoric its form and function. Instead, these terms suggest the general shape of a discursive practice that joins people together in activities of collectively beneficial innovation. Rather than reconciling competing interests, the purpose of the discourse defined here is to move its participants more or less together from what Poulakos calls “the sphere of actuality” to an altogether new sphere, “a place in that of potentiality” (26). Functionally,

this notion of rhetorical practice seems to structure an alternative relationship between individual and collectivity. What, exactly, might this relationship be? Beyond conflict, what sort of relationship between the two is possible?

Poulakos envisions a rhetoric that would be “ultimately more persuasive” than the familiar rhetoric of conflict (29). Functionally, what he seems to describe is an aesthetic act within which those engaged in discourse together leave the realm of the actual to imagine a new realm comprising their common potential. But such a process remains difficult to envision using the language of the rhetorical tradition. Perhaps Kenneth Burke came the closest when he reconceived rhetoric in terms that rely heavily on aesthetic experience. But the problem that remains is that the concept of *persuasion* is itself constituted of this conflict of autonomy and affiliation. Using rhetorical terms, we can hardly conceptualize any other sort of discursive exchange.

But there is another set of terms, these derived from another sort of communicative practice in which the contending opposites of autonomy and affiliation seem, indeed, to be reconciled. That practice is the ensemble performance of jazz music. Its reconciliation of this conflict is observed, though not analyzed and explained, by the dean of twentieth-century jazz critics, Martin Williams, in his history of jazz performance, *The Jazz Tradition*. The book concludes with this description of what that music can teach:

The high degree of individuality, together with the mutual respect and cooperation required in a jazz ensemble carry with them philosophical implications that are so exciting and far-reaching that one almost hesitates to contemplate them. It is as if jazz were saying to us that not only is greater individuality possible . . . but that such individuality, far from being a threat to a cooperative social structure, can actually enhance society. (253)

And Williams himself hesitates to contemplate that possibility, offering this observation only at the end of his book. But his chronicle of great jazz performances documents this reconciliation of autonomy and affiliation in action. In jazz performances, neither the virtuosity of the soloist nor the unified authority of the ensemble is subordinated to the other. Rather, the two are inextricably interwoven and absolutely interdependent. In Williams’s descriptions, the more individually unique and expressive the solo, the more powerful the performance of the

ensemble. And, at once, the more cohesive and intense the music of the ensemble, the more each soloist is enabled to perform as a virtuoso. In jazz, the virtuoso performance is the moment when the private is made public. The individual performer brings the resources of skill and feeling to a moment of public expression, and in jazz that moment is most powerful when the individual performance is deeply embedded in the performance of a group.

In the best jazz performances, the individual and the collective interact in relationships of collaboration. But *collaborate* is a very weak term for describing what happens in an ensemble performance of jazz. What I hope to explore here is the possibility of finding in jazz performance some better terms to describe the possibilities for a positive relationship between individuals and collectives, a relationship in which private individuals can join in a powerful public expression, together, of their individuality. Some terms that describe this aesthetic practice that, at its best, enacts a seamless joining of individual and collective, might help us envision ways that the contentious competition of autonomy and affiliation might be transcended in rhetorical interaction. Specifically, this “new language” for collaboration in communication may help us envision a rhetorical practice in which collectives are created by a project that enables the individuals who share interest in that project to thrive. It renders rhetorical practice a pragmatic social context in conflicts between the private aspirations of individuals and the public performance of the group where these conflicts can be rendered productive.

DEFINITION

Poulakos’s definition suggests that considerable rhetorical power is wielded by collective aesthetic effort in which people work together using resources available in “opportune moments” to construct images of “that which is possible.” And that, to most jazz critics, commentators, and performers, is precisely the power of jazz music, a music they treat as wielding considerable rhetorical power. At the end of his book, Williams hesitates to contemplate the “philosophical implications” of the stunning reconciliation of individual and collective that he witnesses in a good performance of jazz, but he does contemplate in detail its rhetorical effect. Art, he writes, “does not reflect society and environment and consciousness so much as it tells us what environment and society and conscious do not know.” In other words, art “reveals to us

that there are other, perhaps opposite, but still tenable ways of looking at things, of feeling about things. Art tells us what we do not know or do not realize,” presenting us with “resolutions to the problems of paradox” (253). In particular, the art of jazz

not only exalts the individual finding his own way, it also places him in a fundamental, dynamic, and necessary cooperation with his fellows. It handles paradox—the paradox of emotion but also the paradox of thinking and doing—in ways that perhaps no other music has. It does not deal with absolutes, and it does not deny the relative function of time. (256)

The individual finding his or her own way within a “fundamental, dynamic, and necessary cooperation” with others and individuals working together through shared paradoxes, using the resources made available by a particular place and time, together constitute jazz performance. However, they also constitute rhetorical practice, at least by its more dialogical definitions. And in that sense, rhetoric functions aesthetically in the same way that, according to Williams, jazz does. Although rhetorical interactions merely reflect “society and environment and consciousness,” they can also produce innovations that, as he puts it, tell “us what environment and society and conscious do not know” as, like jazz, they reveal “other . . . ways of looking at things, of feeling about things” (253).

Like rhetoric, jazz is perhaps best defined in terms of its functions rather than its forms. By *function*, I mean both how the practice itself—whether rhetoric or jazz—prompts people to interact as well as the effects of those interactions on their participants. This focus on function is readily apparent in many definitions of jazz—those, for example, from one of the most articulate of contemporary jazz musicians, Wynton Marsalis. When asked by an interviewer to define the *essence* of jazz, Marsalis first listed three central elements that, he noted, “have nothing to do with music.” The first is “play”—that primarily aesthetic experience of making something new from something else. The second, which immediately follows from the first, is a “desire to play with other people.” The third is what success in the second requires—“learning to respect individuality” (Scherman 30). And that is learned in the practice of improvisation, which, along with the rhythm of swing and the harmonics of the blues, is conventionally one of the three formal characteristics of jazz music. “Classical music doesn’t prize improvisation,” Marsalis

notes. “It doesn’t place a premium on individuality. In jazz the point is to achieve your identity on your instrument, no matter what role you play” (31). However, that individuality is most fully expressed when jazz improvisation occurs within the common project of an ensemble where individuality must be made accessible to and usable by cooperating others. At its best, then, jazz improvisation “mediates” individualities but does not diminish them. Marsalis describes swing—that rolling rhythmic jazz feeling that resists any musical notation—as the “great mediator” of the individuality in a jazz performance as each participant both internalizes and expresses this common feeling (interview 2000). The crucial fact is that the ensemble swings best only when all of the participating individuals swing together.

Another definitional discussion of jazz—this one from Martin Williams—resonates more immediately with the terms of rhetorical theory. Also emphasizing its function over its form, Williams observes: “Jazz knows of no absolutes: there is no one ‘best’ way of performing a piece. Each day, each moment has its way, and hence its own meaning” (251). So a jazz performance is always contingent, always an expression of the situation within which it occurs. But within that situation, successful performers *function* as fully and integrally human: “To a jazz musician, thought and feeling, reflection and emotion, come together uniquely, and resolve in the act of doing.” That is because what jazz demands from each performer is a “spontaneous individual invention of new melody, individual articulation of emotion, and individual interpretation of musical sound.” Yet the success of the performance itself depends entirely “on group cooperation”—on the capacity of these performers to devote their individuality to “collective ensemble improvisation” (252). For Williams, as for Marsalis, jazz is more than music—it is an occasion in which individuals are at their best as they enact community by directing their private goals toward the public purposes enacted in an ensemble performance. For Williams, “jazz not only exalts the individual finding his own way, it also places him in a fundamental, dynamic, and necessary cooperation with his fellows” (256). For Marsalis, who tends to define jazz in rhetorical terms, jazz is participation in a conversation (Scherman 35); specifically, it creates “harmony through conflict, like a good, hot discussion”—one in which individuals are both transformed and unified by each other’s influence (Marsalis and Stewart 146).

Jazz, like rhetoric, does the aesthetic work of inventing new ideas through collective interaction. Like participants in a rhetorical exchange, performers in a jazz ensemble are cooperative and competitive at once in ways that render the two complementary. But unlike rhetoric, in the best jazz, the separate work of those individuals is almost perfectly coherent, suggesting that the conflicts of autonomy and affiliation that are inherent in most social encounters might be rendered productive for the individuals *and* the collectives that comprise them. That is what seems to happen when a great jazz ensemble performs. As Martin Williams explains, “It is as if jazz were saying to us that not only is far greater individuality possible to man than he has so far allowed himself, but that such individuality, far from being a threat to a cooperative social structure, can actually enhance society” (252–53). Ralph Ellison was more specific about what that process would entail:

True jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment . . . springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest, each solo flight, or improvisation, represents . . . a definition of his identity as individual, as member of the collectivity, and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it. (36)

The language of Christian transformation is deliberate here. Ellison explains that after learning the fundamentals of the instrument and the music, the performer “must then ‘find himself,’ must be reborn, must find, as it were, his soul. All this through achieving that subtle identification between his instrument and his deepest desires which will allow him to express his own unique ideas and his own unique voice” (60–61). That language seems to exalt the private individual—but it is a private individual already rendered public. The unique self expressed by a fully formed jazz musician is not the autonomous self that first entered the ensemble. That self has been transformed by the experience of the ensemble’s performance. Writer Albert Murray describes how this transformation happened to the members of Duke Ellington’s orchestra, an ensemble where “each solo participant fulfills a role that is as immediately distinguishable as a character in a story.” That could only occur, however, after each was transformed by what Murray calls “the Ellington process.” Playing in that ensemble “did not reduce musicians to robots.”

Instead, as he says: “[It] brought the very best they had in them. Indeed, in almost every instance, the musician found himself being featured before he himself realized that he had something special to offer” (111).

Students of rhetorical theory will detect elements of Kenneth Burke’s very important redefinition of rhetoric in this description of what happened to the individuals who joined Ellington’s ensemble. As a cultural critic and social theorist, Burke—a contemporary and compatriot of jazz music—lived through all but the last seven years of the American twentieth century. It was a century that saw countless wars, more acts of genocide than anyone would care to count, and the creation and use of weapons capable of ending human existence altogether. Burke witnessed all that. By the third decade of the century he had already defined his lifelong project of articulating a communicative method that would enable people to move themselves toward “the purification of war,” as he put it at midcentury in the epigraph to *A Grammar of Motives*. Simply put, he worked to describe a mode of interaction that would render human conflicts constructive rather than destructive. Summarizing the method at midcentury as “dialectic,” a concept and term borrowed from classical philosophy and rhetoric, he described interactions that would encompass both “the competition of cooperation, or the cooperation of competition” (*Grammar* 402–03). The outcome that would follow from that sort of exchange is, in his preferred term, “transcendence.” In one of his more precise descriptions, transcendence is “the building of a *terministic bridge* whereby one realm is *transcended* by being viewed *in terms of* a realm beyond it” (“I, Eye, Aye” 151). For Burke, that aspiration to build a bridge from *what is* directly to *what might be* is universally human. We all have a need to “stretch forth our hands through love of a farther shore”—a place where we might consider things “in terms of a broader scope” than our own (163). That entails a transformation of individual identity and private ambition, as people leave interactions with others understanding themselves and their place in a shared world differently than they had before.

Rhetoric redefined in this sense extends well beyond a discursive genre to encompass a kind of interpersonal relationship. In this sense, rhetoric describes relationships in which selves are mutually transformed by the influence of each other. This is what Burke meant by *rhetoric*—a mode of relationship that enables the transformation of self that follows from a dialectical encounter with others. Here is Burke’s redefinition:

If I had to sum up in one word the difference between the 'old' rhetoric and a 'new' . . . I would reduce it to this: The key term for the old rhetoric was "persuasion," and its stress was upon deliberate design. The key term for the new rhetoric would be "identification," which can include a partially "unconscious" factor in appeal. "Identification" at its simplest is also a deliberate device, as when the politician seeks to identify himself with his audience. In this respect, its equivalents are plentiful in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. But "identification" can also be an end, as when people earnestly yearn to identify themselves with some group or other. Here they are not necessarily being acted upon by a conscious external agent, but may be acting upon themselves to this end. ("Rhetoric" 203)

The term *persuasion* suggests one individual dominating another, the sort of relationship assumed by traditional rhetoric. But the term *identification* suggests a genuine sort of intimacy shared among interacting individuals—even, it seems, a momentary experience of communion. That is the place at which Burke's revisionist rhetoric is distinctly different from the traditional. "In such identification," he continues, "there is a partially dreamlike, idealistic motive, somewhat compensatory to real differences and real divisions, which the rhetoric of identification would transcend" ("Rhetoric" 203). Living through the twentieth century, Kenneth Burke saw unthinkable destruction caused by difference and division, as well as by the most insidious of communions. So he focused his attention on the project of explaining how individuals are transformed by a community. This, he hoped, would enable them to seek the right sort of communions. That is the "idealistic motive" that directed his work.

Burke's definition of rhetoric significantly expands the category. In his *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950), he described as rhetorical any encounter that prompts a "persuasion 'to attitude'"—a description that extends the term beyond the traditional concept of "persuasion to out-and-out action" by treating attitude itself as "an incipient act." It also extended formal notions of what counts as rhetoric, noting that defining rhetoric as "persuasion to *attitude* would permit the application of rhetorical terms to purely *poetic* structures" (50). Indeed, for Burke, the "simplest case of persuasion" is more precisely a kind of human relationship than it is a rational argument: "you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his" (55). So rhetoric remains a matter of persuasion, but the experiences it includes are so diverse and pervasive

that the term is hardly useful. Essentially, rhetoric is what happens when individuals interact and, through the influences of that interaction, come to understand themselves and their connections to others differently. The consequence of rhetoric is a new identity, individual and collective. This outcome constitutes the experience of playing in a jazz ensemble that Ellison described, and of the “Ellington process” that transformed individuals into virtuosos by integrating them into the ensemble. This process seems to be what Marsalis was getting at when he said that “the ultimate achievement in jazz music is the interplay of distinctive personalities through . . . a musical form [within which] the group establishes its identity” (Marsalis and Stewart 148).

For Burke, then, rhetorical power resides in the full range of relational experiences that comprise a life in society, life constituted of “rhetorical situations” that shape the identities of those who share them. The shaping forces there are those others who are “participants in a common situation” as well as “the words one is using *and* the nonverbal circumstances in which one is using them” (“Rhetorical Situation” 263; my emphasis) that together provide a common set of “resources of identification” (267). Simply put, individual identity is constituted from the resources of social experience as the private self is continually re-created in response to engagement with the public other. In Burke’s words, it “may involve identification not just with mankind or the world in general, but with some kind of congregation that also implies some related norms of differentiation and segregation” (268). And the experience of jazz performance suggests that it is in the context of this congregation that individual identity becomes most rhetorically powerful and socially productive.

IMPROVISING IDENTITIES

Kenneth Burke’s redefinition of rhetoric as identification rather than merely persuasion entails a particular definition of identity: “Personal identity comes to a focus in the complex of attitudes . . . that constitute the *individual’s* orientation (sense of ‘reality’ with corresponding sense of relationships)” (*Permanence* 309–10). For Burke, identity both encompasses and expresses an individual’s role in the social world. And rhetoric is always about transforming that identity—for better or for worse. For Burke, the study of rhetoric is the study of “the rhetorical constitution of the subject” within human relationships (Wess 136). That is the

project of inquiry into the origin of human motives that he developed as “dramatism.” Dramatism focuses on the actions and social roles of individuals, a study Burke extended when he began to explore “constitutional relations” as a way of understanding the mutual influences of individuals and groups. The aging Burke once briefly explained this aspect of his project in these terms:

. . . I having gone from my first book of critical theory (*Counter-Statement*), built around the subject of literary form in such texts as the plays of Shakespeare to my realization that our Constitution is a literary form. And quite as Shakespeare’s literary forms were “enacted” in historical situations largely non-literary, so the Constitutional principles, or ideals, or wishes involve enactments in the largely and ever-changingly extra-Constitutional situation. (letter)

Indeed, near the end of his life (for example, his 1989 talk at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, titled “Speaking on Language and Power”), Burke was locating this study of constitutional relations at the center of his lifelong project of envisioning a more constructive engagement of individual and collective.

Burke defined a constitution as “an enactment of human wills” (*Grammar* 323) that addresses a collective for the purpose of establishing the common ground upon which the individuals who comprise it will interact. Consequently, constitutions are intensely rhetorical, functioning primarily as “hortatory” (332) assertions of a collective identity that demands something of the individuals addressed. In effect, they constitute identity, individual as well as collective. As Burke put it, “in actual point of fact, a Constitution is addressed by the first person to the second person” (360), and when people adopt a constitution—when they acknowledge individually its address and in that process accept the identity it imputes (Charland 138)—they “in their present person . . . address commands to their future person” (*Grammar* 361). Burke uses the U.S. Constitution as his primary example of that fundamental sort of rhetorical act.

The first words of its preamble, “We, the People,” demonstrate that the primary rhetorical function of the Constitution is to articulate to a collective of individuals their identity as a community. That is the task of a constitution, to unite diverse people in a common identity that is at once philosophical and practical. A constitution addresses the people whose individual and private identities it makes public by attributing to

them all the collective identity of “the people.” As one rhetorical theorist puts it, “the people” is a rhetorical reality that remains in existence only so long as the rhetoric that describes it has force (McGee 345). Burke’s work suggests that this constitutional function can follow from many communicative forms—from policy documents, shared narratives, even nondiscursive social practices. Whatever the form, each reconstitutes individuals by addressing them as a part of a “people,” an address that asserts a “new version of collective life” with which they should aspire to identify (*Grammar* 347). So this sort of rhetoric addresses individuals in ways that reconstitute them as members of a community that shares perspectives, values, commitments, and projects. And that constitutional process is necessarily ongoing.

In the case of the U.S. Constitution, that ongoing process proceeds, as Kenneth Burke and contemporary jazz critic Stanley Crouch both observe, through the process of amendment. Crouch notes that by mandating a mechanism for its own revision, “the Constitution recognizes that there may be times in the future when what we now think of as hard fact might be no more than nationally accepted prejudice” that needs to be eliminated from national policy (*All-American Skin Game* 10–11). That rhetorical process of amendment, central to the survival of that Constitution and the nation it constitutes, mirrors the practice of improvisation in which the conflicting identities of individual and group are rendered complementary in the performance of jazz music. As Crouch puts it, “perhaps no society so significant has emerged over the last five centuries that has made improvisation so basic to its sensibility” (15). And it is probably not coincidental that the culture that has sustained itself into a third century by an amendable constitution is also the culture that created jazz music. When Crouch writes that “jazz is an art in which improvisation declares an aesthetic rejection of the preconceptions that stifle individual and collective invention” (16–17), that “jazzmen” provide a model for “how freedom and discipline could coexist within the demands of an ensemble improvisation” (17), and that what characterizes jazz virtuosity above all is “the ability to *make musical sense* during the act of playing” with a group, he describes a sort of civic interaction to which the structure of their constitution invites U.S. citizens to aspire.

Essentially, improvisation in a successful jazz ensemble enacts a practical ideal of democratic citizenship. It requires people to work constructively

with paradoxes, uniting the dichotomies of tradition and innovation as well as of individual and collective. “The demands on and the respect for the individual in the jazz band puts democracy into aesthetic action,” writes Crouch.

Each performer must bring technical skill, imagination, and the ability to create coherent statements through improvised interplay with the rest of the musicians. That interplay takes its direction from the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and timbral elements of the piece being played, and each player must have a remarkably strong sense of what constitutes the *making* of music opposed to the *rendering* of music. (15)

In the process of jazz performance, then, individuals can confront and resolve conflicts that construct human experience in general and are perhaps intensified in an American experience. At least, they can resolve them “aesthetically.” In jazz, writes one of its scholars, “expressions tending toward complete formal freedom have always been placed within well-respected structures,” one demonstration of its “successful joining of invention and order” (Lichtenstein 229). An aesthetic resolution is not actual, practical resolution. But it can be instructive, suggesting what reality might become. Indeed, the aesthetic explores alternative futures that address present needs and aspirations. And in jazz, innovation is born out of the aesthetic resolution of problematical opposites—freedom and discipline, virtuoso and ensemble, invention and order, private and public.

TOWARD A JAZZ RHETORIC

But jazz is not rhetoric. Jazz, as Stanley Crouch recently put it, “is an art, not practical politics” (interview). And practical politics, as Aristotle and many others have observed, is precisely what much of rhetoric is about. Given that definitional disjunction, is there any value in this project of looking to jazz performance as a model for an alternative sort of rhetorical interaction? I think that depends on how we define *art*. When Albert Murray writes about jazz as an art, he draws upon Burke’s definition and describes art as a particular kind of “equipment for living,” one that provides “images, representative anecdotes, emblems that condition us to confront what we must confront, and it disposes us to do what we must do.” For Murray, then, jazz fits that functional definition of art, and he concludes that the sort of interactions that produce jazz music in a “jam

session” may be the best “representative anecdote” for life in the United States, a term he borrows directly from Burkean rhetoric (112). In that situation, “the musician is always engaged in the dialogue or a conversation, or even argument. . . . He achieves his individuality by saying ‘yes and also’ to that with which he agrees, and by saying ‘no,’ or in any case, ‘on the other hand,’ to that with which he disagrees” (113). This rhetorical vocabulary is being used to describe the art of jazz. Jazz is not politics, but it is an intensely collaborative art that models modes of individual interaction that have a potential to improve our social and political life. Consequently, it is worthwhile to examine jazz and to do so in terms of how it is made. As the pianist Bill Evans once put it: “Jazz is not a ‘what,’ it’s a ‘how,’ and if you do things according to the ‘how’ of jazz, it’s jazz” (Mehegan 150).

Jazz is made democratically. Its varied and infectious rhythms, its simple and memorable harmonies, its canon composed largely of the familiar melodies of American popular song rendered anew for each new situation—all draw upon resources of common experience. And jazz is democratic in its social functions. For Wynton Marsalis, that function is to reach people at a common root of rhythm and song and invite that part of them to a “gathering place” (interview 2001). There, those who have the skill and experience improvise an expression of themselves as a productive community using the resources they find available at the time and place of their gathering. And there, those without the skills gather to listen, transcending their inherent isolation and separation as they share together a very accessible and inviting aesthetic experience. They not only listen to the music but also move along with it, once filling dance floors and now, much more subtly, nodding heads and tapping feet and fingers all together.

Jazz enacts a mode of sociality that intensifies individuality and, at the same time, propels the process of creating community. But that, ideally, is precisely what rhetoric would do. A great jazz performance prefigures a rhetorical interaction that would enable people to encompass and transcend the conflicts of competing selves in order to create from the potential chaos that is inherent in any group of individuals something unified in beauty and order that is satisfying to all. And jazz does that in the moment that this creation is needed, and using the resources at hand. Jazz improvises order out of chaos, cooperation out of conflict, art out of the everyday. That improvisation is what every jazz musician must

be prepared to enact. And it is also, increasingly it seems, what every citizen must be prepared to enact as well. Especially in a time when new situations continually surprise us. In an hour, the crime of hijacking became a mode of genocide and, for millions, the world changed. This new world required individuals actively to become a society, and it required that society immediately improvise ways to return order and meaning and direction to the common life that the individuals who compose it must share. Perhaps now more than ever before we need to learn the civic lessons that jazz can teach. Now, more than ever, we need to attend to, in Crouch's words, "what jazz has done, with its improvising attention to the details of memory, imagination, experience, passion, and design." What it has done "is make the velocity of creation equal to that of destruction" (*All-American Skin Game* 144). Now rhetoric and politics must do that as well.

This attempt to find in jazz a set of terms we might use to recast our concept of rhetorical interaction in ways that will enable us to do that has produced only one term, *improvisation*. And it is a very general term with much implicit within it. But it offers a starting point for thinking about resolving the conflict of individual and community in ways that conventional terms of rhetoric don't allow. But thinking that through will be difficult. It is difficult for the best of jazz musicians. Bill Evans was a piano virtuoso whose trio aspired to an improvisational ideal that would transcend the turn-taking exchange of most of his contemporaries. "I'm hoping the trio will grow in the direction of simultaneous improvisation," he wrote, "rather than just one guy blowing followed by another guy blowing. If the bass player, for example, hears an idea he wants to answer, why should he just keep playing a background?" (liner notes, "Portrait"). He envisioned "the very provocative revelation of two, three, four, or five minds responding simultaneously to each other in a unified coherent performance" (liner notes, "Conversations"). But this ideal was unstable in practice, perhaps because it is finally difficult for individuals to "respond simultaneously to each other in a unified coherent performance." In fact, this statement of Evans's vision is from the liner notes to a recording in which three pianos improvise together, each played by Bill Evans on overdubbed tracks.

Occasionally, Bill Evans's trio achieved the ideal of "simultaneous improvisation," but it may have been, finally, inadvertent, in the moments when these three custodians of their separate egos each lost

themselves at once in their ensemble performance. But it clearly was *not* for those moments that Bill Evans preferred playing in trios. Late in his career, when asked about that preference, he replied:

Well, for me it's a very pure group. But primarily, I'm more in control of the music. I can shape the music and I state the theme, I keep the flow going . . . and it becomes a totally musical experience for the group and also the audience. If I just added a horn—now, I enjoy playing with horns; I record with horns frequently—but that's the main reason. Even if I use one horn, it changes the whole concept, because then, the thematic statements and all are out of my hands. (interview)

Yet for me, one of Bill Evans's most powerful performances of jazz is given that power precisely at the moment when a horn takes all that out of his hands. The performance begins with his solo piano playing his poignant composition, "Waltz for Debbie," a song about a beloved little girl grown up and gone. I was alone when I first heard it, listening during a long day of driving, and lamenting the loss of my own little girls to adulthood—until Cannonball Adderly's saxophone, backed by a bass and drumset, picked up the song from Evans's piano and he joined their ensemble in an swinging testament of gratitude for the past and hope for the future that entirely transformed my mood. Evans was a virtuoso whose lovely opening solo prompted me to lonely reflection. But when the ensemble took the song out of his hands and he was no longer playing alone, I found myself moving to the music and thinking about how and when to get together with my daughters again.

The aesthetic experience of listening to this jazz performance was, for me, a powerful rhetorical experience as well. And Kenneth Burke's claim that rhetoric is primarily an experience of identification suggests that the aesthetic and rhetorical are not entirely different experiences. Indeed, Burke's first book, *Counter-Statement*, was written to counter conventional notions of the aesthetic by examining the rhetorical functions of the sort of "art" that "deals with life for a great many people" by "symbolizing" for the individuals it addresses "such patterns of experience as characterize a great many people" (191). Some twenty years later, his *Rhetoric of Motives* similarly countered conventional notions of rhetoric, described there as that vast "intermediate area of expression that is not wholly deliberate, yet not wholly unconscious"—an expansive realm of communicative symbols that occupy an intentional space "midway

between aimless utterance and speech directly purposive” (viii). Clearly, jazz performance does not provide a usable model for argumentation or a practical method for conflict resolution. It does not teach us very much about the rhetorical formation of public policy. But it does teach us something about how private intention can be rendered publicly useful. And it does model interactions—and attitudes toward interaction—that acknowledge the extent to which individuals are necessarily interdependent, and the extent to which their success is dependent upon their cooperation as they make their separate ways together in the world.