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The origins of this volume are obscure, going back at least to the 1960s, when Bruno Nettl, stimulated by his study of Persian music, first began giving occasional seminars on improvisation and marveling at the diversity of the world's improvisatory systems and practices. Serious planning began in 1994. Melinda Russell joined the project in 1995 as research assistant at the University of Illinois and remained as associate editor after joining the faculty of Carleton College in 1996.

We are grateful for the support of the Research Board of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which provided funds for editorial help from 1995 to 1997, and to the School of Music for a variety of kinds of support. We thank Joanna Bosse, research assistant during 1996–97, who was helpful in a variety of areas but particularly in the preparation of musical examples. We are grateful, as well, to the administration of Carleton College for providing a grant to support the preparation of the index.

We also thank the editorial and production staffs of the University of Chicago Press for their professional expertise and their humane patience in dealing with an unusually complicated and heterogeneous manuscript; and the readers who provided helpful criticisms and suggestions. We wish to express our appreciation to Curtis Black for his excellent copyediting of a complex manuscript.

Last, and most, we wish to express our appreciation to the authors of the studies in this collection. We thank them for permitting us to include their work, and we want particularly to acknowledge their patience and good humor in the face of our frequent and sometimes seemingly inconsistent demands, and the inevitable but unforeseen delays, in what has sometimes been a slow but hopefully rewarding process.

B.N.
M.R.
CHAPTER TWELVE

A Sense of the Possible: Miles Davis and the
Semiotics of Improvised Performance

CHRIS SMITH

My greatest tribute to Miles would just be to be aware.

—Keith Jarrett

Between 1949 and his death in 1992, Miles Davis was one of the most influential figures in Black American music. His musical innovations, performance conduct, and public persona excited extensive comment, imitation, and castigation. Moreover, a vast majority of the important jazz musicians and band-leaders who came after Miles either went through his band or otherwise came under his tutelage, and virtually all of these individuals have cited their time with Miles as crucial to their musical development. Yet the specific nature and details of his influence have proven remarkably resistant to analysis.

In this paper, I argue that Miles Davis’s particular genius was centered in an ability to construct and manipulate improvisational possibilities, selecting and combining compositions, players, musical styles, and other performance parameters. Specifically, my goal is to explore Miles’s manipulation of what Eero Tarasti described as “cultural semiotic” or “the ‘possible’ world of [a performance’s] community” (Tarasti 1987, 167). This cultural semiotic, which in Miles’s approach was manifested as a unique “sense of the possible,” is recognizable in the symbolic techniques which he developed for leading and shaping improvised performance.2

The following anecdote is a classic illustration of the ambiguity inherent in Miles’s procedures, and of their resistance to traditional communicative analysis: “For ‘Aida’ [1980], he told [bassist Marcus] Miller to play an F and G vamp, but when Miller stuck resolutely to the chords, Davis stopped the band. ‘Is that all you gonna play?’ he asked. ‘I heard you was bad. You ain’t playin’ shit.’ So Miller filled in his vamp ornately on the next take, and Davis stopped the band again. ‘What are you playin’?’ he asked Miller. ‘Just play F and G and shut up’” (Chambers 1987, 303–4).

Miles’s technical vocabulary was not arbitrary or sadistic, but it was subtle and complex, and for this reason has proven resistant to conventional identification and analysis. In fact the subtlety and ambiguity were intentional, Miles’s preferred mode of musical interaction being dependent upon the invocation of a very particular kind of attention from his players. I suggest the following:
(1) Miles’s artistic interest was the creation and manipulation of a symbolic “ritual space.”

(2) Miles enacted this semiotic environment because he believed that certain musical objects (performances, improvised compositions, etc.) and musical processes could only come out of a richly ambiguous symbolic experience.

(3) Miles intentionally supplied, withheld, and distorted performance information because of a quality of attention that such an environment evoked from his listeners, some of whom nevertheless recognized his motives and the dynamic perspectives from which they derived: “Miles is a boxer, and he thinks like a boxer when he talks. If the other person is someone who might pick up on what he’s doing, it’ll be like parrying” (Keith Jarrett, quoted in Keepnews 1987, 96).

(4) Moreover, his techniques for creating this ritual space were intentional, consistent, and susceptible to analysis, as Miles himself acknowledged: “What we did on Bitches Brew you couldn’t ever write down for an orchestra to play. That’s why I didn’t write it all out, not because I didn’t know what I wanted; [but because] I knew that what I wanted would come out of a process and not some prearranged stuff” (Davis and Troupe 1991, 300. Emphasis added).

What Miles bequeathed his colleagues and musicians was an enhanced ability to create and respond in a symbolic interpretive space, dedicated to the enactment of what has been described as the “experiential possibility of music as a vivid and continuous present” (Kapferer 1986, 198). With this insight, we can view Miles Davis’s improvisational procedures through the lens of contemporary performance theory.

Miles wanted a quality of attentive musical flexibility that would lift his players to the level of co-composing interpreters; that would encourage them to respond to the improvisational moment with his own alert flexibility. Communicating in an intentionally ambiguous and nonverbal fashion meant that Miles’s players were forced to engage with him by interpreting what they thought such communication demanded. As Miles explained: “See, if you put a musician in a place where he has to do something different from what he does all the time, then he can do that—but he’s got to think differently in order to do it. He has to use his imagination, be more creative, more innovative; he’s got to take more risks. . . . So then he’ll be freer, will expect things differently, will anticipate and know something different is coming down. . . . Because then anything can happen, and that’s where great art and music happens” (Davis and Troupe 1991, 220).

Of course there is a paradox here: the semiotic techniques Miles used to create the improvisational environment (ambiguity, visual and sonic cues, etc.) often had the secondary effect of centering the players’ attention upon him. So there is an implicit tension between Miles’s decentering actions and the players’ learned and habitual attention, which was itself heightened by these actions. Thus Miles was obliged to manipulate the ambiguity still further; as his players became familiar with certain cueing techniques, he constantly replaced those techniques. As a result, subtle sonic and visual gestures took on layers of associational meanings, in turn demanding further responses. But, as Schieffelin acknowledges, this is a profoundly involving and fertile space in which to create performances: “[Such an] experience of inconclusiveness and imbalance gives people little choice but to make their own moves of creative imagination if they are to make sense of the performance and arrive at a meaningful account of what is happening. In so doing. . . . they complete the construction of its reality” (Schieffelin 1985, 721).

So the deliberate incompleteness of Miles’s directions was itself the element which, through the attention and response it elicited, enacted the completion of the creative process. Record producer Teo Macero described Miles’s impact on his musicians in the studio this way:

[His] influence was so potent and so strong every time they went in [the studio] that [they] couldn’t afford to screw around. . . . and, in fact, none of the musicians do. When they’re in the studio it’s like God coming—“Oh, oh, oh, here he comes.” They stop talking, they tend to business and they listen, and when he stops, they stop. When he tells the drummer to play, the drummer plays. When he tells the guitar players to play, they play and they play until he stops them. . . . They get more out of him than they have given to him. He is the teacher. He’s the one who’s sort of pulling the string. (Chambers 1987, 159; emphasis added)

Such a process could only come from interaction within a ritual space that took the participants out of their usual mode of perceiving, interpreting, and reacting.

Symbolic Vocabularies

In analyzing the technical means by which Miles made the music react to the improvisational context, I choose to focus on visual and sonic evidence from two phases of his career, the so-called second great quintet and the postretirement bands.

The first performance excerpt examined (on audio tape) comes from 1967, and features Miles, saxophonist Wayne Shorter, pianist Herbie Hancock, bassist Ron Carter, and drummer Tony Williams (Davis 1986). This quintet developed a performance style based on a modal repertoire, sparsity, and highly flexible rhythm, dynamic, and textural juxtapositions, as well as extensive and very sophisticated interaction. Their musical communication was marked by its complexity and immediacy and by the degree to which it appeared almost instinctive. Visual cues between players were extremely subtle, almost invisible to outsiders, and contrasting performances from one night to the next showed that the shifts, contrasts, and juxtapositions were not precomposed, yet were accomplished with a cohesion as seamless as if they had been carefully rehearsed.
This group interaction was a product of a sophisticated mode of hearing and interpreting performance cues developed by this group of players. In the following description, therefore, the most important performance cues are sonic: small, highly significant bits of musical information which the players use to instruct and forewarn one another of impending shifts, and to comment on musical events as they occur.

The sequence opens with a drum solo by Tony Williams in a style influenced by free jazz, emphasizing polyrhythms, interaction with the horn players, and a rejection of the traditional time-keeping role. The solo sets up the opening theme statement of “Gingerbread Boy” (1964), a twisting chromatic line played twice in unison by trumpet and tenor saxophone.

The solos open with four trumpet choruses. The accompaniment is similar to that used for the composed melodic theme, or “head”; drums are furiously interactive; piano offers sparse, carefully ambiguous modal voicings; and double bass retains the outline of the composed bass line and its implicit tonalities. Although the texture and rhythm are broken up, subdivided, and altered, the duration of each tonal center (the “underlying tempo”) remains essentially the same. Hence the tune’s form itself is essentially, though loosely, retained.

Under Herbie Hancock’s piano solo, the rhythmic groove quickly mutates and breaks down. Together, pianist, bassist, and drummer cue one another into a looser, less beat-oriented feel. The tonal durations remain approximately the same, and the underlying tempo remains essentially constant, but the impressionistic texture is more radically explored; Williams continues a furious but largely free rhythmic commentary.

Approximately halfway through the third chorus of the piano solo, on an octave scale passage that specifically outlines a Phrygian mode, Hancock drastically slows the internal rhythm of the melodic line, thus bringing the tempo to a complete standstill.

Seizing the opportunity, Miles enters with a descending C minor scale in a radically different key, tempo, and rhythmic feel, as shown in example 12.1. By the fifth beat (that is, the second measure in the new 4/4 meter), bassist Ron Carter responds to Miles’s cue, identifies and adjusts to the new key, tempo, and groove, and begins playing steady quarter-note lines in C minor under Miles’s new solo; Williams joins him.

In the next 48 beats, Miles conveys a lot of information, all of it consistent and musically interpretable to his players, and to which they respond: (1) Miles clearly subdivides the rhythm to yield twelve bars of 4/4 accented time. Williams joins him in this. (2) In the first, fifth, and eighth bars he clearly outlines the chords of a C-minor blues. Hancock follows harmonic suit. (3) As a pickup to bar 12 (the last of the form), Miles plays a descending figure (3b–4b–G), with a slowed “fall-off” from the last pitch, effectively cueing a held chord to which the whole ensemble then joins in.

Over this held chord, Miles plays the opening figure of a new tune, the 6/8
C-minor blues "Footprints" (1964). By the repeat of the four-bar phrase (measure five of the blues form), Shorter has recognized the tune, and waiting for a musically appropriate entrance point, he joins Miles with the new tune's harmonized saxophone part (ex. 12.2). The rhythm section retains characteristics of the earlier rubato, but shifts smoothly to the new tune's key and tonal centers.

Then, under the repeat of the melody, Williams sets up a new groove which drives toward the solos. As the first soloist, Miles plays four choruses, but leaves his improvisation unresolved, ceasing to play at an unexpected point before the end of the fourth chorus. Wayne Shorter emphasizes the intentionality of this pause by delaying his entrance until measure seven of the next chorus.

Under Shorter's continuing solo, the rhythm section begins to dismantle the groove: the accompaniment becomes sparser and more interactive and conversational. Tonal durations are retained, but they are concealed or even left unplayed. Shorter responds with a solo that becomes progressively more disjunct, speech-oriented, and nonlinear.

By the fourth chorus, the tonalities, while maintained, are barely implied. Tonal, rhythmic, and tempo ambiguity are foregrounded; drums do not play. Shorter ends his eighth chorus with a melodic phrase which closely recalls the original melody, and which marks the entrance of the piano solo (ex. 12.3).

The rhythm section retains the consistent tonal durations under Hancock's first chorus; however, he quickly takes radical steps to override the harmonic continuity. He plays a harmonized phrase in the eighth and ninth measures of his first chorus which echoes the melody and fits the chord progression. But then he plays it again, and a third time. This carefully chosen figure so clearly
outlines the underlying harmony that when Hancock repeats it, bassist Carter
follows, breaking the tune's sequential chord progression.

In jazz common practice, what Hancock and Carter have just done is really
quite radical: by removing the unvarying succession and consistent durations
of the tune's tonal centers, in essence they have stopped the form in its tracks.
This forces a different sort of interaction, in which, rather than leading the
sequential and rhythmically repetitive progression of chords, the accompanists
shift harmony only after Hancock does, essentially following his lead. Hancock
completes the chorus and continues to a second and third, but the du-
temporal pause he has signalled to his bandmates allows his note choices, rather
than specific temporal durations, to dictate when the tonality shifts.

By the third chorus, Carter has relinquished any propulsive or harmonizing
function at all: he is simply bowing a sustained bass note figure. Williams
has suspended the drum part almost entirely, playing only very occasional,
norhythmic commentary on cymbals. Gradually Hancock slows and quiets
his solo, coming to a virtual rhythmic standstill, poised over Carter's sustained
pedal (shown in ex. 12.4).

Then Hancock plays a cue in the original tonality and rhythm—an octave
motif which unmistakably recalls the head—and Miles and Shorter enter on
the top of the melody (ex. 12.5). They play the head twice through and end with
a collectively improvised coda over the bass's repetitive figure. Here, where
jazz common practice might end the piece, the rhythm section holds the tonic
chord. In soloistic "cadenza fashion," Miles plays an ascending D Phrygian
line (ex. 12.6), holding a fermata—first on a high G and then on a high (chromatic) Ab—and cuing a rubato on a Bb-Ab trill. As the bass enters on the new
rubato, Miles plays a quick two-bar motive (ex. 12.7) quoting the end of "The
Theme," a bebop standard which all players recognize; they join Miles for the
set-closer's final cadence.

There is very subtle sonic communication going on here, as is evidenced by
the frequency and minimalist nature of the cues which players share with one
another. The presence in Miles's band members of the extraordinary aural at-
tention necessary to recognize and react creatively to these cues as they pass
"on the fly" is powerful evidence in favor of Miles's choice to limit directions
to his players in ways which actually stimulate creativity.

Signifying Intimacy
By the mid-1980s, in contrast to the various '60s bands' emphasis on sonic
interplay, Miles's repertoire of visual signals had grown enormously. This was
partly a result of the larger performance spaces and higher volumes the band
was utilizing, in which larger and more visible gestures were effective, and
partly the result of an apparent relaxation of Miles's earlier aversion to inter-
acting with the audience. However, the gestural results had become tightly
interwoven and both sonically and visually highly significant: "In one adven-
Example 12.5. Piano cuing the melody, Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis, and Wayne Shorter, "Footprints," 1967 (from Davis 1986).

time very approximate

tuesome exchange with [Kenny] Garrett, [Miles] reached out and put his hand on the saxophonist’s chest; Garrett immediately stopped playing, and the pause proved an eloquent accent on the rhythm” (Goodman 1989, 12).

The first example of an integrated sonic/visual cue recurs in several performances of the Michael Jackson tune “Human Nature.” In one example performance, recorded at the 1986 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival (Davis 1986), Miles’s arrangement opens with a syncopated chordal figure played by keyboards over the 2/4 groove (ex. 12.8), and this is succeeded by the A theme of the piece (ex. 12.9), played with trumpet as the top voice, which is repeated. The B theme moves into a higher register, incorporates more syncopation, and is framed by a more lush and sustained chordal accompaniment (ex. 12.10). As it begins, Miles steps close to soprano saxophonist Bob Berg; hunched over, heads almost touching, instruments parallel and pointed at the floor, the two play the line together (fig. 12.2).

This is a highly affective gesture because in American culture, and especially perhaps in the sometimes hypermasculine arena of jazz performance, such a close posture signals unusual intimacy; moreover, the intentionality of the gesture is confirmed by the way in which it has been recognized and framed by the video’s editors. The “intimacy cue” is also reflected in the melodic unison of trumpet and soprano sax, the first time this texture has been employed in the piece.

In a version of the same tune recorded in Paris in 1989 (Davis 1990), the signifying behavior has been repeated and enhanced. This time it is “lead bass” player Foley (Joseph “Foley” McCrea, who goes by the single nickname) who stands close to Miles, playing an improvised, rapturously counterpointed, which closely follows the trumpet lines. The rehearsed, intentional, and “signifying” nature of this visual behavior is made clear when Miles moves: as he walks to stage left, Foley moves with him, maintaining the close posture, shadowing Miles physically as his bass line shadows Miles’s part musically (shown in fig. 12.3).

It should be reiterated here that this behavior, in its visual, repeated, “intentional” aspects, is not solely directed at signifying to the audience. In the ritual environment which Miles created among his players, close physical and musical proximity on his part commanded even greater attention on theirs.

**Signifying Humor**
An example of sonic and visual “signifying humor” comes during the 1989 concert’s version of “Amandla” (Davis 1990). In the midst of a sequence of call-and-response solo exchanges between Miles and flutist Kenny Garrett, Miles plays a simple blues figure and inadvertently cracks a note in the middle of it. Garrett immediately repeats the line, mimicking it exactly, even to the cracked note (see ex. 12.11). Miles punches him gently in the chest, and Garrett, laughing, momentarily stops playing (see fig. 12.4). The comic aspects of
Figure 12.2. Miles Davis and saxophonist Bob Berg play the harmonized B section of "Human Nature" in intimate physical proximity (from Davis 1986).

Figure 12.3. Bassist Joseph "Foley" McCreary follows Miles Davis physically and musically while playing "Human Nature" (from Davis 1990).
Kenny’s literal interpretation of Miles’s unintentional “wrong” note are clearly dependent on insider knowledge, deriving meaning from and shaped by the signifying environment in which the two are operating.

Signifying Failure
The conscious and constructed nature of these signifying vocabularies is additionally demonstrated by Miles’s reaction when they seem to have failed. Late in the Paris concert’s version of “Tutu” (Davis 1990), Miles is soloing and has moved back center stage, and he has cued Foley downstream with him. They stand facing each other, Foley watching him closely: it appears that Miles is about to initiate another call-and-response duet. But the bent-over posture, and perhaps Miles’s earlier don/doff choreography, has left his signature sunglasses perched precariously on his nose; as he bends into his first phrase, they fall off. Foley is so attentive that he catches the glasses as they fall and hands them back to Miles, who immediately stops playing (see fig. 12.5). Almost instantly, without any other further signal, Foley turns to head back to his usual station, and Miles stops playing, walking upstream toward the drumset.

Now, more is going on here than simply the adverse reaction of a performer to a moment of onstage chaos. The metaphorical weight of the sunglasses, the degree to which they quite literally represent a personal mask for Miles, has been established earlier in this concert: when Miles wants his players to look directly at him to start a tune or when he wants to acknowledge the audience after a tune, he removes his glasses. But during solos they stay on, implanting
the message that Miles is playing the notes first of all for himself. Thus, when the mask quite literally falls off his face, he reacts by acknowledging a moment of failure and aborting the solo.

**Signifying Music**

I would like to conclude this exploration of Miles’s sonic and visual vocabulary of the 1980s with two examples of cuing in which sonic, musical, and behavioral aspects are integrated, and indeed become part of the expressive fabric. The first example is from the Paris concert’s version of “New Blues” (Davis 1990). In the arrangement of the tune, provision is made for Miles to cue the rhythm section to double-time, lending intensity and giving the sensation that the tune itself is moving twice as fast. Toward the end of bass player Foley’s lengthy solo, which follows the general outline of a crescendo, Miles plays the simple descending figure which cues the double-time section.

Then, glaring at drummer Ricky Wellman over the masking sunglasses, Miles hits the cue again, reinforcing its intensity by playing it on trumpet with one hand and keyboard with the other. As Wellman picks up the double-time, Miles nods abruptly at him, with an emphatic hand gesture (see fig. 12.6). The sheer force of this cue virtually demands an intensified response. Even we, who unlike Ricky Wellman are distant from the gesture by time and intervening electronic media, can feel Miles’s kinesthetic communicative intensity.17

The second example comes from the Paris concert’s version of “Amandla” (Davis 1990): Toward the end of his first solo, Miles is standing at extreme stage right, facing into the large speaker columns that flank the stage. He turns back toward center, walking from the left of the video frame toward the right, the camera panning with him. As he passes the keyboard station, Miles turns slightly toward Kei Akagi, raises his horn for a moment, and plays a final seven-note phrase. At this cue, Akagi begins his keyboard solo, spinning out variations based on an exact repetition of the improvised melodic idea with which Miles signalled him (see ex. 12.12).

Akagi is obviously listening hard and responding to what he hears, but the implications travel further: the keyboardist not only begins with Miles’s last phrase, but constructs his entire solo using that phrase as his thematic material. Thus Miles has supplied an integrated visual/sonic cue which directs not only the start but also the motivic content of the keyboard solo. An entirely new compositional section has grown out of the interaction of the players’ attention and Miles’s improvised material in this ritual space.

The mutual interaction and “shared sense of the now” was considerably more complex and centralized in Miles Davis’s band than is the case with most performing musical ensembles. Of course, focus on the improvisational “now” is to some extent a mandatory aspect of every performance situation: even in fully notated music, a conductor needs attentive response from the orchestra. But such focus is particularly essential in a musical genre such as jazz, which so directly foregrounds improvisational practices.

**Conclusions**

Miles made his musical process especially dependent upon ambivalent ritual space, by setting up performance situations which demanded unique improvisational attention. He brought it into the studio, made it the main topic of musi-
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cal discourse, and developed virtuosic skills in the subtle art of manipulating signs in the service of performance.

Most profoundly, Miles developed a basic musical building block out of a heightened sensitivity to the interaction of all signifying elements: players, tunes, performance parameters, and cues. The interactive process was allowed to take place because Miles recognized its centrality and understood the means of its creation, and he was willing to tailor standard jazz practices sufficiently to permit, indeed to demand, that it occur.

I have suggested that Miles Davis’s artistic interest was in the creation and manipulation of a ritual space, in which gestures could be endowed with symbolic power sufficient to form a functionally communicative, and hence musical, vocabulary. The intentional ambiguity of this vocabulary and the perceptual frame in which it was employed made it more potent in impact, but also more resistant to conventional analysis. Yet the techniques, their method, and their results can with the right tools be recognized and analyzed.

Finally, I have suggested that Miles utilized these techniques because the musical experiences which resulted could only come out of a process which was intimately engaged with the improvisational “now” Kapferer put it this way: “Art and ritual share potentially one fundamental quality in common: the Particular and the Universal are brought together and transformed in the process. . . . The Universal ‘is given a focus, an experiential content, in the immediacy of the individual’s situation’” (Kapferer 1986, 191, quoting Natanson).

Miles’s performance tradition emphasized orality and the transmission of information and artistic insight from individual to individual. His position in that tradition and his personality, talents, and artistic interests impelled him to pursue a uniquely individual solution to the problems and the experiential possibilities of improvised performance. Miles deployed these techniques specifically in order to highlight the interplay of musical procedures and the communicative moment, resulting in the sense of heightened creative possibility which is common to all ritual behaviors.

It was this “sense of the possible” which profoundly influenced generations of jazz musicians who played with Miles. It is no coincidence that, in paying tribute to Miles’s influence, these players uniformly allude not to issues of technical or compositional approach but, more profoundly, to a way of hearing and responding, and encouraging others to do the same; to the cultivation of a unique capacity for attention. This allows us to situate Miles’s approach and his role as leader in the broader context of ritual performance.

Miles Davis came from an African-American performance tradition which focused on individual expression of communal feeling, empathic interaction among participants, and creative response to shifting contexts. The ritual music space that he constructed offered a literal, experiential manifestation of this model. Music educator Christopher Small calls it “that ideal society, those rela-
tions between human beings, that can enable each one to feel, in a literal sense, in tune with all the others and with the world" (Small 1988, 483). This potent legacy is manifested again and again, in the music he initiated, performed, and recorded, in anecdotes and reminiscences about him by his players, and in musical endeavors inspired and influenced by him. Miles emphasized and constructed a specific ritual performance context. And the behavior he demanded within that space evoked a centered, focused sensitivity to the enormous creative possibilities of the ever precious, ever fleeting, present moment.

Notes
This paper is a revised version of an article that appeared in The Drama Review 39, no. 3 (Fall 1995). The epigraph is from Doerschuk 1987 (66).

1. In this paper I will follow the convention of referring to Miles Davis by his given name only. Within the jazz community, certain artists are named in "shorthand fashion": "Monk" (Thelonius Sphere Monk); "Bird" (Charlie "Yardbird" Parker); "Diz" (John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie). In its own way, it is a gesture of respect.

2. The term "improvisation" is utilized here with a limited definition, the one which is most commonly intended in jazz terminology. In this construction, "improvisation" connotes musical procedures that depend upon the selection, sequencing, and juxtaposition of musical elements, which selection is done in the moment by the players. It does not necessarily mean the spontaneous composition of completely new material, a process more often referred to in jazz as "free improvisation." Preexistent material may include chord sequences, favorite motivic/melodic ideas, quotations, common-practice conventions of accompaniment or arrangement (familiar introductions, endings, accompaniment patterns, etc.), in addition to new materials. But the specific selection and combination is improvised in the moment, and is a response to the specific performance situation.

3. Specifically I employ this definition of "ritual": "a code or system of rites... any practice done or regularly repeated in a set precise manner so as to satisfy one's sense of fitness and often felt to have a symbolic or quasi-symbolic significance" (Webster's New International Dictionary, 3d ed. Emphasis added).

4. "Performance [constructs a social reality] by socially constructing a situation in which the participants experience symbolic meanings as part of the process of what they are already doing" (Schieffelin 1985, 709).

5. Keyboardist Chick Corea described this process: "With Miles, there was never any sitting down and discussing the music: 'Hey, I'd like you to play a little more of this or that.' No instructions, no analytical conversation. There were grunts, glances, smiles, and no smiles. Miles communicated, but not on a logical or analytical level" (Lyons 1983, 261). Corea played with Miles in 1969 and 1970, at the end of the first style period to be discussed ahead.

6. Comments from keyboardist Adam Holtzman, who worked with Miles in the second style period we will examine, confirm this: "He keeps you watching him, keeps you on your toes, so you don't just become a player in the band, playing a tune. He doesn't want you to think you know what's going to happen" (in Dery and Doerschuk 1987, 82-85).

7. In most interview situations, musicians who have played with Miles have shown a marked propensity to avoid analytical language and simply to tell stories about him.

8. "Art forms provide protected situations, categorized by high walls of excitement, in which 'disorientation' or the 'discontinuity of experience' can be savored... Art thus permits humans to experience chaos symbolically and without danger; it provides the novelty which is necessary to break up old orientations" (Hanna 1979, 68).

9. Jay D. Dobbins's discussion of ritual symbols is particularly relevant here: "The building blocks... are symbols. Symbols are simple articles, gestures, spaces, or times that—in a ritual context and by convention—stand for something else... More important than a definition of symbol is its dynamic or function, which explains how ordinary articles and gestures are believed to achieve extraordinary results... Hence, there is a latent ambiguity about symbol, and this ambiguity allows the ritual symbol to be open to many meanings, or to be multivocal" (Dobbins 1986, 99).

10. I regard the video and audio sources employed in this study as historical documents, not as omniscient or comprehensive records of "all that occurred." The process of recording video or audiotape is necessarily selective: in "framing" certain elements or events, others are ignored or lost. My analysis proceeds with this selectivity in mind. However, in this respect audiovisual material is no different than manuscript scores, letters, or descriptions—all of which, as records of events, are equally selective and incomplete.

11. This group was dubbed the "second great quintet" in hindsight to distinguish it from the so-called "first great quintet/sextet" of 1956 to 1960, which included saxophonists John Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley, pianists Red Garland or Bill Evans, double bassists Paul Chambers, and drummer Philly Joe Jones.

12. These groups tended to have much more flexible personnel rosters. Miles formed particularly close playing relationships with drummers Al Foster and Ricky Wellman, keyboardist Adam Holtzman, bass guitarists Darryl Jones and Joseph "Foley" McCreary, and saxophonist Kenny Garrett. These players in particular tended to remain in contact with Miles over longer periods of time than other band members of the period.

13. The term "modal," in jazz parlance, refers to a composition or improvisation built on scales other than those of common-practice European diatonic music. In the West, most listeners associate certain modes with certain ethnic music: the Phrygian mode with flamenco, the Dorian mode with Celtic folk music, etc. In jazz improvisational practice, these modes offered a range of tonal colors and an escape from bebop's dense and frequently changing chord progressions.

14. "Chorus", in jazz parlance, refers to a single repeat of the sequence of chords (often twelve, sixteen, or thirty-two measures) which accompanies the composition's melody. The term itself derives from the fact that jazz musicians often opt to improvise on the chord progression of a song's chorus only, leaving out the verse. In practice, jazz musicians tend to conceive and assign solo durations in terms of multiples of choruses ("I'll take two choruses; you take four," etc.).

15. By "tonal durations," I mean a musical situation in which a chord's duration may...
be fixed (that is, it may last for a relatively consistent length of time), but the usual rhythmic matrix of regular and even beats has somehow been altered.

16. It is worth noting in this performance instance not only the interaction of a visual cue (Miles placing his hand on Garrett's chest) and its sonic result (Garrett momentarily ceasing to play), but also the particular connotations that gesture invokes. In the context of a jazz band onstage, Miles laying his hand over Garrett's heart is an extremely intimate gesture, carrying implications we shall explore in later examples from the '80s bands.

17. That the physicality of such a response is a real phenomenon is consistent with ideas from dance theory: "Motion has the strongest visual appeal to attention, for it implies a change in the conditions of the environment which may require reaction" (Hanna 1979, 68).

18. One of the skills of the great jazz bandleaders was their ability to create great ensembles and ensemble approaches simply via selection of players. This is why jazz critics and historians tend to speak of the "first great quintet" and "second great quintet" in language which conflates the individual personalities, the individual approaches, the bandleader's vision, and the historical results. In this context Duke Ellington, Art Blakey, Jelly Roll Morton, and Charles Mingus may be cited, among others.

19. "Any meaningful activity is a conjunction of preexisting constraints (or rules, or structures, or laws, or myths) with the present, the unpredictable, particular now" (Becker 1979, 213).

20. John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Joe Zawinul, Chick Corea, John McLaughlin, and many others went on to important and influential careers as bandleaders.

21. "One of the most important skills [of the ritual's director] was the ability . . . to control the focus of everyone's attention and maintain the right unity of mood throughout the performance" (Schieffelin 1985, 713).

References


