

Listening in Double Time: Temporal Disunity and Structural Unity  
in the Music of John Coltrane 1965-67

Marc Howard Medwin

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Music.

Chapel Hill  
2008

Approved by:

David Garcia

Allen Anderson

Mark Katz

Philip Vandermeer

Stefan Litwin

©2008  
Marc Howard Medwin  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## **ABSTRACT**

MARC MEDWIN: Listening in Double Time: Temporal Disunity and Structural Unity  
in the Music of John Coltrane 1965-67  
(Under the direction of David F. Garcia).

The music of John Coltrane's last group—his 1965-67 quintet—has been misrepresented, ignored and reviled by critics, scholars and fans, primarily because it is a music built on a fundamental and very audible disunity that renders a new kind of structural unity. Many of those who study Coltrane's music have thus far attempted to approach all elements in his last works comparatively, using harmonic and melodic models as is customary regarding more conventional jazz structures. This approach is incomplete and misleading, given the music's conceptual underpinnings. The present study is meant to provide an analytical model with which listeners and scholars might come to terms with this music's more radical elements.

I use Coltrane's own observations concerning his final music, Jonathan Kramer's temporal perception theory, and Evan Parker's perspectives on atomism and laminarity in mid 1960s British improvised music to analyze and contextualize the symbiotically related temporal disunity and resultant structural unity that typify Coltrane's 1965-67 works. I also filter all of this through my experience as a listener. My investigation treats, separately, Coltrane's solos of the period 1965-1967 as well as temporal and structural complexities in Coltrane's deployment and expansion of a jazz rhythm section; I then demonstrate, based on new historical research, the manifestation of similar but hitherto unexplored modes of

expression in today's jazz and classical avant-garde as a way to begin to gauge Coltrane's long-term impact on improvised music that exists outside the "jazz" canon.

In Chapter 1, I present my bipartite analytical model of soloistic atomism and rhythm section laminarity, relating these to Kramer's concepts of multiply-directed linear and vertical time respectively. I then explore Coltrane's own words concerning his final music and regarding unity and disunity as he conceived them. Chapter 2 constitutes an examination of atomism in Coltrane's solos, in which I demonstrate that atomistic features increase in Coltrane's late works; this soloistic atomism is one component of my analytical model. Chapter 3 explores rhythm section laminarity, demonstrating the abandonment of tempo and pulse in favor of a more minimal aesthetic. Chapter 4 is devoted to a study of the way in which the innovative structural principals in Coltrane's final works are used by improvising composers Anthony Braxton and Paul Dunmall. As with Coltrane, both artists' compositions blur the boundaries between jazz and classical music, their work representing two transgenerational approaches to Coltrane's legacy.

The sound examples in chapters 1, 3 and 4 can be found attached as accompanying wave files.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter	
I. ANTECEDENT	
Introduction.....	27
Evan Parker, Jonathan Kramer, Time, and the Atomism/Laminarity Dichotomy.....	30
Coltrane's Conception of Unity through Diversity.....	42
II. SOLOISTIC ATOMISM	
Introduction.....	52
Coltrane's Atomism.....	53
Atomism in Coltrane's Apprenticeship.....	56
Atomism under Miles' Tutelage.....	58
Atomism in Coltrane's Compositions 1957-65.....	65
1965: Transition and Discontinuity.....	70
Saxophone Influences on Late Coltrane.....	73
Atomism in Coltrane's Late Solos.....	75

III.	RYHTHM SECTION LAMINARITY	
	Introduction.....	86
	External Musical Influences.....	87
	The Classic Quartet.....	95
	1965: The Classic Quartet’s Disillusion.....	100
	The Final Works.....	106
	Immediate Influence.....	121
IV.	COLTRANE’S LEGACY	
	Introduction.....	125
	Anthony Braxton.....	127
	Paul Dunmall.....	143
	CONCLUSION.....	161
	APPENDIX A.....	167
	APPENDIX B.....	178
	DISCOGRAPHY.....	182
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	185

## INTRODUCTION

“You can go into that later. But I think it’d be better if we keep it pressing, so just keep a thing happening all through ...” said John Coltrane to pianist McCoy Tyner in one of the rare instances of studio chatter associated with what would come to be known as the Classic quartet.<sup>1</sup> August 1965, during which this pithy fragment and the accompanying Sunship sessions were recorded, saw the quartet of Coltrane, pianist McCoy Tyner, bassist Jimmy Garrison and drummer Elvin Jones in its fourth year, a considerably long time for any jazz group to be in existence. Consequent to the largely improvisational nature of the Sunship sessions, verbal communication was necessary only to outline the bare essentials of any given musical structure, the details coming to continuously altered fruition in each performance. Jointly, the heads, or melodies, that Coltrane was bringing to these summer 1965 sessions, whether his own or not, were as sparse, fragmentary and tantalizingly suggestive but elusive as the above quotation. The musical idea that forms the issued take of “Dearly Beloved” seems to begin midstream, Tyner assenting readily and immediately to Coltrane’s all but unspecified instructions as the saxophonist emotes over the steady layers of sound emitted by the rhythm section.

This dissertation examines the above quotation’s implications for Coltrane’s music over the succeeding two years. It examines Coltrane’s radical approach to the soloist/rhythm section hierarchy associated with a conventional jazz quintet. However, the final quintet’s music seems purposefully disunified where rhythm, mode and meter are concerned. The two

---

<sup>1</sup>John Coltrane, *The Classic Quartet: Complete Impulse Studio Recordings* (Impulse! IMPD8-280, 1998).

elements, soloist and rhythm section, will be examined separately to demonstrate Coltrane's innovative approach to rhythm section deployment and how it serves as a contrast to his soloistic language.

The "thing happening all through," from the above quotation, is vital, a key element in the music to issue from Coltrane's prolific group sessions and concerts over the next two years. "Dearly Beloved" — the Sunship track under discussion here, seems to follow through on Coltrane's wishes, initially presenting a full-sonoritized quasi-modal soundscape that is diverse on a fundamental structural level; it is one of those that begins a trend of music that exists somewhere between meterlessness and polyrhythm. In other words, temporal concerns demonstrate a new degree of multileveled elasticity as would befit late Coltrane's trademark aesthetic. While Tyner's multifarious figurations on "Dearly Beloved" will be discussed in Chapter 3, it should be noted here that Coltrane's instruction opens the distinct possibility that some planning on his part, even if momentary, was an integral component of the emergent group sound; inherent in the quotation is a plan for a soloist/group dialectic which would itself serve to establish a new kind of structure in a music that was based increasingly on a unique combination of interpersonal freedom supporting, and supported by, the underlying jazz convention of the soloist/group relationship.

While it will never be possible to know the full scope of Coltrane's compositional intentions, a purposeful and structural disunity seems to be at the heart of his compositional aesthetic of 1965-1967. The present study traces one path through the many complexities in Coltrane's final works, examining temporal disunity and structure resulting from the disconnect between Coltrane's soloing and his rhythm section's simultaneous activity. Examined separately, Coltrane's soloing and rhythm section deployment are revealed to be



some of the most radical of the period, necessitating a much different analytical approach than has been afforded by jazz scholarship.

Coltrane was not among the very first-wave inventors of free jazz, a New York-based group that included Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp and Ornette Coleman. Yet, Coltrane's innovative approach to soloing beginning around 1955 influenced these musicians to rethink the potential of the soloist in group context. Indeed, Shepp states that Coltrane was among his primary influences.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, these musicians would ultimately impact Coltrane's eventual diversion from conventional approaches to tonality, meter, and to the very fabric of the stereotypical jazz group itself. Far from being a clone or simply a follower however, Coltrane maintained a dogged refusal to adopt wholesale any other musician's approach over his own long-cherished vision. Ekkehard Jost makes a brilliant case for the reciprocal nature of Coltrane's relationship with this group of free-thinking artists, whose careers he went to great lengths to foster; their contributions to his last works can not be overestimated.<sup>3</sup> However, his "free" music sounds very little like the work of saxophonist Ornette Coleman, whom he revered,<sup>4</sup> and the most demonstrable relations to saxophonist Albert Ayler's music are found in Coltrane's increasingly thick vibrato and the increasing intensity of his group aesthetic, as will be discussed, respectively, in the second and third chapters. What I hope to portray is a man whose singular approach to his instrument predated and yet encompassed what came to be called the "New Thing" or the "New Black

---

<sup>2</sup>Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (Graz, Austria: Universal Edition, 1974; reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), p. 107.

<sup>3</sup>See Jost, *ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>4</sup>Coltrane recorded many of Coleman's compositions in 1960, accompanied by Coleman's sidemen; see Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s* (New York: Pathfinder, 1998), p. 266.

Music.”<sup>5</sup>

As is well known to even the most casual observer and fan, Coltrane was following what he labeled a spiritual path dating back to an elusive but undeniably powerful spiritual awakening or revelation in 1957, one whose hold on him increased as the years passed; this will be discussed in Chapter 1. Spirituality eventually dictated every aspect of the works from his final period, especially, as we shall see, the compositional titles. An instructive comparison would be with Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), another composer whose mystic visions manifested themselves in music that strayed ever further, despite academic titles to his final piano works, from conventional form and tonality. In Scriabin’s youthfully Chopinesque compositions, we hear, in hindsight, early use of tritone substitutions and tonal vagaries; these seeming aberrations would ultimately be transformed and give way to the all-encompassing mystic chord, a construct that pervaded many of his final pieces. The mystic chord was a musical representation of Scriabin’s passionate obsession with theosophical concerns, a consciously unifying manifestation of a focused vision, given the evidence of his obsession with it, that straddled the line between radicality and lunacy.<sup>6</sup> Coltrane was not, as far as we know, in the habit of articulating his thoughts with anything approaching Scriabin’s frequency and vehemence. However, like Scriabin, he unified his late works with musical quotations and the verticality of the rhythm section sound (see Chapter 3), all to represent more completely his vision of the spiritual world.

At the same time he weighed his musical choices against the expectations of the jazz industry which often resulted in an artistic struggle that can be traced, via his recorded output,

---

<sup>5</sup>For the term “New Black Music,” see Kofsky, *ibid.*, p.431.

<sup>6</sup>For a fascinating discussion of the mystic chord and its multivalent and indeed multi-colored implications, see Faubian Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), pp. 203-205.

throughout his career. He proved himself over and over to be a player rooted in jazz and popular music traditions, mastering bebop, post-bop, early R and B and ballad style to great effect and in the employ of many of the best players of his time. Yet, there was always a degree of critical confusion about his playing, from the moment he joined Miles Davis' first quintet in 1955.<sup>7</sup> The reasons for this treatment, ranging from non-acceptance to grudging admiration, can be traced to the motivic, harmonic and rhythmic developments that formed his style of soloing, which will be discussed in Chapter 2. Suffice it to say for now that Coltrane's constant search for new forms of expression did not win the hearts of a largely conservative listening public until those innovations themselves were adopted by many mainstream jazz musicians of the early 1960s. Indeed, his national and international acceptance, especially after the surprise 1960 hit "My Favorite Things," would go far in explaining the consternation with which his forays into "free" music were met in many public and critical circles.<sup>8</sup>

An elucidation of Coltrane's approach to musical "freedom" is entirely impossible to gauge without a cursory examination of his reactions to public/critical perspective, as he was intimately and often painfully aware of such concerns. It might be useful to envision Coltrane's approach to what would be defined as free jazz as a series of increasingly incautious encroachments and contemplative retreats, one stylistic trope or easily categorizable technique always abandoned or assimilated in short order. In 1960, Coltrane gave an interview in Stockholm in which he describes a series of harmonic devices that he

---

<sup>7</sup>See George Avakian's fascinating comments in Carl Woideck, *Coltrane Companion: Four Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), p. 217.

<sup>8</sup>See Eric Nisenson, *Ascension: John Coltrane and His Quest* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993; reprinted by New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), p.176.

uses while soloing to take him away from any pre-established chord changes.<sup>9</sup> He might have been referring to the now-infamous phrase “sheets of Sound,”<sup>10</sup> his three-chord-on-one approach to scalar soloing, or to devices that he employed after the abandonment of such a stereotypically arpeggiated approach to soloing. The fact that he was then at the end of a tour promoting Miles Davis’ classic modal album *Kind of Blue* probably helped Coltrane to expand his soloistic palette and to gain the fresh insight and perspective on his playing that is so evident in the interview. The following year and a half, culminating in the Village Vanguard concerts of November 1961, found Coltrane away from the protection of Davis’ employ and fronting his own groups, as he would do from then until his death. It was a time of increased experimentation, both in terms of group instrumentation and regarding the material Coltrane would compose and perform. His groups ranged in size from a quartet to a big band, sometimes employing an extra bassist or wind player in smaller combinations. The equally infamous and currently revered Village Vanguard concerts of November 1961 presented these tendencies in stark distillation, as the group sound, soloing and compositional forms changed from night to night. Often, forms were abandoned for long stretches of time in favor of what might be described as high-volume high-energy “free” blowing, and while the underlying rhythm, or drumwork, was still in the post-bop “swinging” tradition, there was a breathless experimentation throughout the proceedings that can not be easily explained or

---

<sup>9</sup>See the Coltrane interview with Carl-Erik Lindgren from *Miles Davis: In Stockholm 1960 Complete* (Dragon Records, DRCD 228, 1992).

<sup>10</sup>This term was first coined by Ira Gitler in October 1958 issue of *Downbeat*. In retrospect, it seems to be an attempt, by a bemused critic, to come to terms with a nascent form of what I will call “atomistic linearity,” about which more will be said later. The arpeggios inherent to the sheets of sound are in fact crystallizations of harmonic moments, far from the means-to-ends chromatic linearity of bebop rhetoric. The fundamental difficulty was not that Coltrane could not play over any given changes, as held by critical opinion of the day, but that a new harmonic and temporal soloistic language was being crafted, possibly even without Coltrane’s absolute awareness. See Woideck, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

categorized. The new compositions recorded on these evenings might be seen as the furthest logical extension of modality, or as a conscious deconstruction of traditional jazz forms, and these tropes will be discussed more fully in succeeding chapters.

Critical response to these experiments was increasingly hostile, even causing Coltrane and multi-instrumentalist Eric Dolphy to publish an answer in *Downbeat*.<sup>11</sup> It has long been conjectured and debated that Coltrane's more conservative 1962 albums for the newly formed Impulse! label resulted from the critical attacks.<sup>12</sup> Despite these concessions, seminal works such as "Alabama" and "After the Rain," both recorded in 1963, demonstrated a new metric freedom, even abandonment, which far exceeds anything from the Vanguard concerts. If any meter exists in these tracks — debatable from moment to moment — it is certainly non-traditional and eventually disappears altogether in favor of a soloist-lead dialogue in which group interaction supports the soloist while perpetuating a fresh take on collective improvisation. These events prefigure the developments of "Psalm," the final movement of *A Love Supreme* (1964), in which, as Lewis Porter has made clear, a poetic text by Coltrane is the driving compositional force.<sup>13</sup>

The long-term success of *A Love Supreme* probably stems, in large part, from the fact that the music itself is never overly confrontational, in keeping with much of the stylistically solid but ultimately palatable 1962 recordings. True, the form is novel and the playing

---

<sup>11</sup>See "John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Jazz Critics," from Woideck, *ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>12</sup>These albums include *Ballads*, *Coltrane* and the collaborations with singer Johnny Hartman and Duke Ellington. It is a strange period in Coltrane's biography, and he himself is unclear, even contradictory, concerning his musical ventures of the period. On the one hand, he is indignant about his treatment at the hands of established critics. On the other, he blames his radical shift in musical direction on a malfunctioning mouthpiece caused by his desire to alter it. Recently rediscovered interview fragments, with Michiel de Ruyter, have served only to add additional layers of confusion to the problem, re-enforcing the reed scenario.

<sup>13</sup>See Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 244.

suffused with energy, and Coltrane would return several times to the suite as a viable formal option, but the music on *A Love Supreme* is an extension of modal practice and extended instrumental and rhythmic techniques, without the “free” components of the Vanguard sessions. However, *A Love Supreme*’s unqualified success may have allowed Coltrane to pursue experimental tendencies that had become dormant, which he proceeded to do over the next two and a half years. The music gained tremendously in intensity and in energy, and as we will see in Chapter 3, melody and conventional harmony again became blurred.

Even given Coltrane’s growing acceptance and iconic status, by 1967, audiences were once again becoming less tolerant of his chosen modes of expression, and the posthumously released *Stellar Regions*, along with “To Be” from *Expression*, demonstrates that a quieter more traditionally contemplative musical language might have been in the offing. Far from refuting or denying Coltrane’s “free jazz” credentials, however, these reductions in volume, if not in intensity, allow for a fresh perspective on what otherwise might be considered extremely difficult music.

Coltrane’s apparent desire to maintain a level of audience acceptance and the musical communication it entails assures a dialectic between tradition and innovation, the results in turn demanding new modes of examination and interpretation. To that end Coltrane’s recordings have been revelatory where my own work is concerned.<sup>14</sup> My methodological approach derives, first and foremost, from my experience with the music as a recorded document. Years of listening to the Coltrane material in circulation have led me to my

---

<sup>14</sup>In this study, I use recordings strictly as a documentary representation of the group sound Coltrane would have sought in any performative situation. Unlike the late 1960s music of Miles Davis, producer and engineer intrusion is kept to a minimum in Coltrane’s work. Therefore, as important as Rudy van Gelder’s role in capturing the Classic Quartet’s sound might have been, the process of recording and mixing itself, interesting as inquiries of this nature may be regarding other musics, is not discussed here. Even the strange mis-assemblage of “Alabama,” comprising two takes that were not meant to go together, is beyond the scope of this study.

understanding and presentation of his final works. This has involved a study of his complete discography, both as leader and as sideman. Furthermore, and more importantly, I have had access to many hours of unreleased material, in the form of radio and television broadcasts, rehearsal fragments and audience recordings of club and concert performances. As with composers' sketches in the Western European art music tradition, these unreleased recordings document Coltrane's developing compositional method in ways that the commercially-released recordings do not. Exploration of such sources is absolutely mandatory for the interested scholar, as Coltrane's later work is still in need of what Jost fittingly labels a style portrait.<sup>15</sup> In the introduction to his indispensable book on free jazz, he explains that to understand this music beyond a superficial level, it is necessary to compile a series of particulars before beginning to attempt a stylistic overview. As I have encountered no book-length studies of late Coltrane, I am attempting a style portrait, one based on my experience as a listener and analyst.

To that end, and to supplement my analysis and interpretation of Coltrane's recordings, I engaged in many hours of conversations, most of them informal, with several of Coltrane's associates, including Amiri Baraka, Rashied Ali, Cecil Taylor, John Tchikai and Bill Dixon. These musicians enabled me to understand and contextualize the broader philosophical and performative elements in play at the time these recordings were made, enabling me to reassess Coltrane's late style in light of how it was viewed by those artists that formed the circles in which he traveled.

It is the aim of this study to present an analytical model that will enable interested listeners to approach the music in a way befitting its innovative and non-conventional structure. The secondary literature I chose to frame my analysis, taken equally from scholars

---

<sup>15</sup>Jost, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

and performers, resonated with me because of my reactions to the recordings themselves rather than the literature shaping my initial understanding of the music. Drawing on several theoretical sources, collated from both within and external to the hugely diverse corpus known as improvised music, my goal is to recontextualize, through analysis, the various elements that form the narrative structure at the heart of the aforementioned dialectic, as it is manifested in Coltrane's final works.

My analytical model comprises three elements; I have drawn upon music theorist Jonathan Kramer's writings concerning the temporal perception of music, most notably his ideas concerning multiply-directed linear time and vertical time. I combine these constructs with a similar dichotomy in British saxophonist Evan Parker's writing about 1960s British improvisation. In discussing the stylistic differences between the groups AMM and Spontaneous Music Ensemble, Parker invokes the dichotomy of atomism and laminarity, which I believe to be analogous to Kramer's two perceptual concepts; more will be forthcoming concerning both constructs in Chapter 1. Suffice it to say, for now, that Kramer and Parker complement each other in that they are speaking of similar listener-perceived phenomena from both the theorist's and performer's perspective, from the Western art music tradition (Kramer) and the improvised music tradition (Parker).

I have filtered these constructs through my experience as a listener, the third component of my analytical model, and I have found that precisely the disunity described by both Kramer and Parker is evident in the music of Coltrane's final period.

By "final period" or "late works," I am referring to the material that Coltrane recorded between May of 1965 and April of 1967. While earlier material will be explored in this study, it is only to provide context and some continuity for the superficial but definite



change to come. From *Ascension* onward, many conventional structural elements are subverted or eradicated altogether. Coltrane's idea of "the group" was also in a constant state of flux, mainly involving a quintet but by no means limited to that configuration. *Ascension* involved eleven players, the *Meditations* suite was performed by a sextet, and Coltrane's 1967 sessions were often augmented by additional musicians.

Essentially, I am reacting, in this study, to what seems to be injustice and neglect concerning the last works of John Coltrane. While his status as one of the tenor titans is secure, his still-growing reputation spawning new biographies and analysis on a regular basis, attention to his accomplishments is clearly focused on the period 1955-1964. Multiple reasons inform the neglect of his 1965-1967 work, and these will be outlined below in the context of their representatives' views.

When Coltrane's final works are discussed at all, they are treated either in article form or in a book chapter. At the time of this writing, to my knowledge, there are no book-length studies or dissertations on the last two years of John Coltrane's life and music. The few book chapters and articles that involve discussion of the period treat the music, when at all, from a sociological, journalistic or spiritual perspective. Only composer/performer John Schott's well-written and thoughtful chapter on chromaticism in Coltrane's work treats the late works in musical terms, and he is still a lone voice.<sup>16</sup> In large part, the earliest efforts were not written by scholars in the traditional sense. Consequently, a fan's perspective informs many of the first attempts to come to terms with music that is still controversial forty years after the fact. When scholars from several disciplines finally began to address Coltrane's music, the last works, especially those following *Ascension* were generally

---

<sup>16</sup>John Schott, "We are Revealing a Hand That Will Reveal Us: Notes on Form and Harmony in Coltrane's Work", in *Arcana: Musicians on Music*, ed. John Zorn (New York: Granary Books, 2000), pp. 345-366.

ignored; yet, each includes relevant and insightful comments that could be applicable to the period under discussion.

Of the sociological writings on Coltrane's music, that of Frank Kofsky is still of primary importance. His writings are among the first in which the Amiri Baraka - coined term "New Black Music" is used, and he places Coltrane at the forefront of what he labels a jazz revolution, implying a substantial disconnect from more conventional musical forms. While Kofsky mentions, repeatedly albeit briefly, the membership of the final Coltrane quintet, he offers no analysis of its music. Any mention of the later music is purely descriptive, completely forsaking the sociological commentary so prevalent concerning other pieces.<sup>17</sup> However, several of his more general comments were among the first to attempt an explanation of how the "new" music was constructed. Of *Ascension*, he writes:

Such a score, of course, will not be anything like that for a bebop composition; rather, it may contain a set of general directions — play in a certain register, at a certain volume, in a certain key — together with some cues about when to move from one part of the piece to the next. In Coltrane's composition, *Ascension*, for example, according to Archie Shepp, "the ensemble passages were based on chords, but these chords were optional. What Trane did was to relate or juxtapose tonally centered ideas, along with melodic and non-melodic elements. In those descending chords there is a definite tonal center, like a B-flat minor, but there are different roads to that center. In the solo-plus-quartet parts, there are no specified chords. These sections were to be dialogues between the soloists and the rhythm section."<sup>18</sup>

Such structural ambiguities would inform much of the music to follow over the next two years, from Coltrane's group and in the New Black Music as a whole. It is to Kofsky's credit that, unlike many in the critical establishment of the middle 1960s, he is both able and willing to perceive and document such musical concerns. While much of his study concerns

---

<sup>17</sup>See the brief passage concerning "My Favorite Things" as recorded at the Village Vanguard in Kofsky, *ibid.*, p. 376. Note that he is descriptive, stating what instruments are heard, but no effort is made to address texture, phrasing or ideological/philosophical motive.

<sup>18</sup>Kofsky, *ibid.*, p. 315.

critical adversity to the music, Kofsky is clearly listening, his own tenure at *Downbeat* informing his knowledge of improvised music's history.

Much more recently, Scott Saul has followed the trails blazed by Kofsky some thirty-five years previously. Chronological distance allows Saul a broader view of Jazz's influence on 1960s culture, and integral to his vision is what he calls "Black awakening."<sup>19</sup> His rendering of Coltrane's music is less militantly revolutionary than Kofsky's but derived equally from cultural considerations. Unlike Kofsky however, Saul invokes the language of African-American spirituality and infuses it with the drama of 1960s cultural upheaval to create his metaphorical descriptions:

His [Coltrane's] music testified loudly to his story of conversion, fueling an aesthetics of honesty in extremes, and in this way he pulled jazz away from the ironic hipsterism that infused bebop and much jazz before 1960. Coltrane discovered and refined a style that he imprinted as his own, a style whose authority seemed purchased through the publicly performed anguish of his concerts and recordings. He pursued freedom not for the hell of it, but for the heaven of it—and he did so by creating settings of musical purgatory that forced him to confront his own limits. His classic quartet thrived by inventing and reinventing a thrashing drama of confusion and self-purification, errancy and ultimate reward.<sup>20</sup>

Such a view of Coltrane's work must, of course, have *A Love Supreme* at its fulcrum, and the legendary 1964 album is where Saul ends his analysis. He is no less critical of the critical establishment than is Kofsky, and it is here that we gain some of his valuable insight into the new musical paths Coltrane was following:

His music confronted jazz critics with a considerable dilemma, one that electrified jazz magazines like *Down Beat* and *Metronome* in the early to mid-1960s, as critics fought over labels like "anti-jazz," "free jazz," "action jazz," "the new thing," and several others. The crux of the dilemma was this: could Coltrane's music be appreciated in terms inherited from earlier genres (matching

---

<sup>19</sup>Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the 1960s* (Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 209.

<sup>20</sup>Saul, *ibid.*, p. 212.

the elegance of swing, the virtuosity of bebop, the grit of the blues), or did it demand to be measured by a new set of aspirations, in which case jazz critics would have to broaden their vocabulary of judgment and praise, and perhaps even jettison the critical attitude itself?<sup>21</sup>

Such questions might also be posed to the scholarly community, but the importance of Saul's work transcends mere suggestion. He eschews the atheistic sociopoliticality of Kofsky to demonstrate the multifarious spiritual concerns of those to whom Coltrane's music would have had the most appeal. The above quotations are rife with poetic allusions to the myriad struggles associated with Black awakening, bringing Coltrane's work to life on the page. Even more important, he bridges the gap between the sociopolitical and the spiritual in an overt way that most writers have not achieved.

With the exception of Porter's 1997 biography, those studies dedicated to the life and works of Coltrane focus on the music in a much more visceral and vaguely spiritual fashion. When present, the sociopolitical issues so prized by Kofsky and Saul inform the method of presentation rather than comprising scholarly endeavor. One might view pioneering Coltrane biographer Dr. Cuthbert Ormond Simkins' interspersed poetry, for example, as symptomatic of the Black Arts Movement, as represented by the fiery utterances of Amiri Baraka or Jane Cortez. Simkins' use of dialogue is equally "authentic," the book taking on the affect of a novel or character study rather than a biography. The last quintet is represented as a barely cohesive and often directionless unit unable to agree on the precise nature and validity of the experiments Coltrane undertook. Simkins is, however, the first to report the famous "drone" dream of 1957,

---

<sup>21</sup>Saul, *ibid.*, p. 225.

to be discussed later, which was to set Coltrane on the path that prefigured and would result in his late works.<sup>22</sup> The music itself, however, is not discussed at all.

The same claims can be made for J.C. Thomas' contemporaneous work; he delves even deeper into a rather mythological précis of Coltrane's spiritual encounters. Here though, we get an enticing, if possibly inadvertent, summary of Coltrane's late style:

The feeling he is receiving is beyond feeling itself; the communication being delivered to him is indescribable. And, awakening from this profound meditation with its paradoxical emphases on exultation *and* melancholy, he knows that from this moment forward the music he writes will reflect this duality, these contradictions, as his life reflects them every day that he awakens from his short night's sleep.<sup>23</sup>

Paradox and contradiction, in listener perception, are indeed at the heart of Coltrane's final works, resulting from temporal disunity. Yet, Thomas does no more than Simkins where actually coming to terms with the music itself is concerned. Both authors rely on the anecdotal to demonstrate loss of audience and group strife, both even implying that Coltrane was unsure of his own direction.

If the late music is discussed at all, it is made so abstract as almost to warrant a modicum of distance and a degree of suspicion. The following quotation from Thomas sums up the complexity of contemporary attitude to Coltrane's last works:

Gravitational field brings a body or bodies into its orbit that fall into its sphere of influence, as Trane did to people who were similarly inclined. And there are the constantly changing structural values of his music as the notes are emitted from his horn; the effect is like that of light waves pouring out in searing, convoluted streams of pure energy, the matter of the man radiating them like a nuclear reactor. Time, too, was broken up by Trane, stretched and contracted; especially when he was taking a

---

<sup>22</sup> Cuthbert Ormond Simkins, *Coltrane: A Biography* (New York: Herndon House, 1975; reprinted by Black Classic Press, 1989), p. 87-88

<sup>23</sup> J.C. Thomas, *Chasin' the Trane: The Music and Mystique of John Coltrane* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1975), p. 186.

super long solo. How many people were cognizant of the length of time it took the saxophonist to thoroughly explore each composition, each improvisation? The fact is that the passage of time during the period that people listened to his music was fluid, plastic, and often caught them unaware; some might glance at their watches and say, "Is it *really* that late?"<sup>24</sup>

Endlessly fascinating is the semi-tacit assertion that Coltrane's music is absolutely scientific on the one hand, and yet it is somehow beyond time, beyond words and outside of the possibility of articulation. The doubleness implied in the statement, while misdirected, bespeaks the very real difficulties, arising from disunity and multileveled narrative that comprises the innovative qualities of Coltrane's final work.

Geographic doubleness, also a major ingredient of Coltrane's last works, forms the major component of Bill Cole's pioneering study. His work is unique for the time, as among the first wave of Coltrane specialists, he is the only one to attempt engagement of the music beyond visceralgia. An extremely active and accomplished musician, dedicating a long career to the New Black Music, he brings an insider perspective to his study of Coltrane's music. Cole does not shy away from the post-*Ascension* pieces, even attempting an analysis of the difficult *Om*:

*Om* is also his most representative world music piece and it is in *Om*, a Hindu chanting mechanism, that Trane brings out wooden flutes, bells, a thumb piano, gongs, and cymbals—distinctively a ritual piece done with the utmost reverence. It starts with the thumb piano playing a line of B—A—G—E—D, another pentatonic scale. Then the voices enter, uttering a chant. While this chant is being intoned a wooden flute is played in the background, giving a haunting feeling to the mood. Then the three horns—Sanders and Trane on tenor and Garrett on bass clarinet—begin playing together. Triplets emerge, spinning up and down through the scale. (One should take particular notice of how these lines connect up.) Then, as he always does, Trane comes emerging out of the ensemble playing as though out of the eye of a hurricane; and it is at this point—where all the creative mechanisms that he had learned come into play—that shapes, sounds, images, and visionary points of view come out of his playing.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup>Thomas, *ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>25</sup>Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1976), pp. 179-180.

Cole is certainly engaged with the music, and yet his comments often belie a critical rather than a scholarly tendency; there is little objectification in his clearly fan-based analysis, groundbreaking as it is in its inclusivity:

Pharaoh plays an incredible solo, moving into different levels of the horn—sounding like a string instrument at places, moving tremendously fast in tempo and with tremendous strength of articulation. He also takes the audience through different intensities and mood shapes. All the time this is happening, Garrison and Ali are keeping a sound almost like a drone, low in the musical spectrum.<sup>26</sup>

Phrases such as “intensities” and “mood-shapes” still imply that whatever the music offers, it is beyond conventional analysis and, therefore, beyond the need for articulation; while these emotive ingredients do exist in Coltrane’s music, they exist in all music and must eventually be articulated and categorized. Nevertheless, Cole’s work forms an important starting point for analysis in musical terms. It should also be noted that Cole is the first to discuss the fact that Coltrane quotes *Meditations* in his 1966 performance of *Leo*, taped in Japan. This observation will be relevant in Chapter 2, during the discussion of self-quotation in Coltrane’s work.

Of those, such as Cole, for whom the music is paramount, none has written of it with the eloquence and precision of Ekkehard Jost. Both a scholar and a player of consummate skill, he provides the earliest scholarly attempt to discuss the New Black Music as music, not as a social or spiritual phenomenon. Of recorded sound, especially relevant to my discussion of transcription below, he writes:

Only a recorded improvisation can be played as often as desired and thus be readily accessible to analysis. Musical impressions gained at concerts or other live performances can contribute only in a supplementary way to perceptions gained by analysis; they may be able to direct analysis toward a certain point, but they can never replace it. Fleeting,

---

<sup>26</sup>Cole, *ibid.*, p. 191.

unrepeatable impressions, and distortions caused by the leveling effect of memory, create a haziness regarding musical details that makes any statement about them suspect.<sup>27</sup>

His analysis of Coltrane's work, therefore, is based on the released recordings, and while his study ends with *Ascension*, his rendering of the piece is the most objective of its time. He speaks of the music as sonic complexes, outlining very specifically the foreground and background events that inform the work, both in conducted ensemble passages and in its improvised sections. His analysis is clear and concise, as represented by the following:

In *Ascension*, the formal disposition into collective improvisations and solos has a second framework superimposed on it, which is a source of structural differentiation, especially during ensemble passages. It consists of systematic changes of modal levels, and occurs with only slight deviations in all eight collective improvisations. The beginning is an Aeolian mode on B flat; a change to D Phrygian is usually coupled with a change of rhythmic structure; the closing sections of the collective blocks are in F Phrygian and lead into the solos that follow; these as a rule begin again in B flat Aeolian. The logic of this structural principle is evident in the tonal material of the modes: F Phrygian and B flat Aeolian contain identical tonal material, and differ only in their point of reference, the fundamental tone of the mode.<sup>28</sup>

While Jost does not eschew sociopolitical events—his portrait of 1965 New York is unparalleled—his aim is to elucidate the music, and in this, his work is still the yardstick by which all other analysis is measured. Equally notable is his desire to portray both *Ascension* and Coltrane's forays into the avant-garde as evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

While not specifically following Jost's lead, Lewis Porter's biographical contribution, completed in 1997 and still the definitive Coltrane biography to date, engages the music and the artist on a similarly scholarly level. It might best be compared with Alexander Thayer's definitive biographical study of Beethoven. Like Thayer, Porter attempts, removed as possible from overt fan or disciple mentality, to state the facts of Coltrane's history in as complete and as objective a manner as befit the materials available to him. Porter does

---

<sup>27</sup>Jost, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup>Jost, *ibid.*, p. 85.



include some musical analysis, but it is not to be construed as the sole purpose of his book. He clearly wishes to maintain a balance, music and biography creating a symbiosis to present as broad yet focused a picture of Coltrane and his epoch as possible. He approaches the music from a performing musician's perspective, and more than that, an insider perspective where jazz is concerned. While this fact does not guarantee authenticity, it allows for interpretation based on practical knowledge of relevant oral history, performance traditions and verbal rhetoric, all joining to create a picture based in and adherent to traditions associated with jazz. Beyond that, Porter is a scholar, and his is the first "scholarly" book on Coltrane's life, engaging the research practices, source studies and overall musicological documentation commensurate with the undertaking. Porter's book also contains what were then up-to-date discographies and annotated bibliographies, making the book the ground-breaking volume it remains. While Porter does not provide an in-depth analysis of Coltrane's final works, his lucid and focused elucidation of "Venus," recorded in 1967, puts to rest the prevalent view that Coltrane's faculties were slipping in his final years.

Porter's biography, as well as Carl Woideck's *Coltrane Companion* (Schirmer, 1998) and the newly published *Coltrane Reference* (Routledge 2007) have made primary source material much more widely available to those interested in studying Coltrane's music. Therefore, more journalistic endeavors, such as Valerie Wilmer's *As Serious as your Life* and Ashley Khan's book-length study of *A Love Supreme* have become important for other reasons than was initially the case. While Wilmer's study was among the first to document the disintegration of the Classic Quartet and the tensions caused by the late works, no musical discussion is included, and her pioneering work is no longer the primary source document it once was. However, both Wilmer and Khan have made a wider public aware of

the events leading up to his final two years, an enterprise whose value is really beyond estimation.

Much of the primary source material is collected in Carl Woideck's *John Coltrane Companion*. Viewed by its author as a companion piece to the Porter volume and resembling it in comprehensiveness, it collects fifty years of primary sources and organizes them in a way that is useful and engaging. Comprising articles, book chapters, liner notes, interviews and even the occasional survey, the volume is an invaluable source; it contains all of the interviews a beginning Coltrane scholar would need to begin forming a picture of the man, his music and the history that spawned it. As of this writing, it is the only source of its kind, another fact that speaks both to its value and to the infancy of jazz studies. The interview section is particularly complete, gathering almost everything, from a 1997 perspective, that was available of Coltrane in his own words.

While the literature concerning Coltrane offers little in terms of analytical discussion of his final period, it opens many fruitful avenues of inquiry far beyond the scope of this study. This dissertation is by no means definitive, nor do I hope it will be the last word. I wish only to continue the dialogue concerning what I believe to be some of the most important music created in the last fifty years. Yet, somehow, it has received only cursory discussion in the multiple and international improvised music contexts that birthed it and which saw the adoption of its principles.

Beyond the music itself though, an understanding of the social and sociopolitical milieu in which the music formed and flourished is essential to create such a portrait. At no point in the history of the United States have race, music and politics been more inextricably linked as they were in Black music of the late 1950s and 1960s, one of many

terms that was coined to describe improvised music of which African Americans were the chief innovators (other appellations will be discussed in due course). The music reflected the political aspirations and myriad frustrations of African-Americans determined to procure for themselves the rites and freedoms shared by more privileged US citizens. The interviews that I conducted — see above -- became an integral part of the process of coming to terms with the sociological implications of Coltrane's late works, allowing me to understand them in multiple contexts and through numerous vastly differing but equally enlightening perspectives.

Fortunately, many of the participants in 1960s improvised music are still alive, and the many hours I spent speaking with them, both formally and in less formal environments, has fostered a more complete understanding of the often contradictory components at the heart of Coltrane's music. Most important, and extremely difficult for me to comprehend from my perspective as a Caucasian male, is the contradictory nature of African-American involvement with what I will here oversimplify with the label Western culture. Every conversation and correspondence in which I participated brought home these artists' engagement with all forms of music, visual art, literature and politics. No matter how young or old, there seemed to be an insatiable urge to maintain perspective on current events and artistic developments and to make their opinions concerning them known in no uncertain terms.

However, any joy that informs these opinions seems to be tempered by anger and suspicion. The need to assert individuality or independence, or both, informs every statement. I can only conclude that it is symptomatic of long-endured and continuing oppression in the face of progress long-delayed and often insufficient and/or based in empty rhetoric. I now

have a better understanding, to cite only one example, of the reasons behind Charlie Parker's denial of "classical" influence on bebop while he could quote chapter and verse concerning Bartok and Varèse.<sup>29</sup> Conversely, Coltrane's assertion that the music played by his final group is "classical" music (see Chapter 1) is also illuminated by my interviews with his contemporaries.

On a very intuitive level, this dichotomy informs the music under discussion here. I have maintained my own suspicions concerning the emotional rhetoric that has dogged discussion of Coltrane's work, even though his own words, as we will see, encourage such ideas and sentiments. As with contemporaneous reviews of Beethoven symphonies, emotive language supplants analysis, possibly endangering the discussion of becoming too subjective.<sup>30</sup> Yet, it cannot be denied that Coltrane's music, the final pieces in particular, foster such reactions due to the overwhelming emotional content. They are absolutely suffused with energy, they exude simultaneous celebration and violence, or reflection and urgency. Such considerations may or may not be demonstrable by analysis, and such concerns are beyond the scope of the present study; however, the music's impact, both positive and negative, is undeniable, and my involvement with its practitioners suggests that the African-American struggle for independence is indeed at the music's heart, or goes a great distance toward defining its soul. Verbally inarticulate and perhaps ultimately unspeakable, the meta-narrative, or subtexts, of historical and political events that shaped the 1960s also enabled this music's striking disunity to occur, and it is with this rather academic but central concern that my study engages. Only Ingrid Monson, in her most recent book,

---

<sup>29</sup>For audio documentation of Charlie Parker's thoughts on Classical music, see [http://www.melmartin.com/html\\_pages/interviews.html](http://www.melmartin.com/html_pages/interviews.html) (accessed Mar. 7, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> See Friedrich August Kanne's 1824 review of Beethoven's Ninth symphony from David Levy, *Beethoven: The Ninth Symphony* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), pp.133-4.

*Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, has addressed the myriad implications of race as it concerns 1960s jazz, and her treatment is both comprehensive and illuminating; the chapter entitled “The Debate Within,” Monson is particularly thorough in her presentation of the many difficulties surrounding not only the “jazz” musicians but the club owners and critics as well, all attempting to come to terms with the rapid and widespread musical and sociopolitical developments in which Coltrane played an integral and patriarchal role.<sup>31</sup>

It became obvious, during the research process, that not all of the music’s implications could be explored in the scope afforded by a dissertation. I have chosen, in that light, to limit my analysis to the music itself. In dealing with this period of Coltrane, I am dealing, as has been stated above, with recorded sound. Simply and perhaps obviously put, the recordings are the primary documentation of Coltrane’s music of 1965-1967, as it is with most “free” jazz. I hope that it is equally obvious that I do not mean to imply any lack of compositional procedures. The conventional notion of free improvisation seems to involve “making it up as you go along,” but such a notion is severely limiting regarding the composers’ conception and execution of their respective compositions. It is only necessary to determine what those procedures might be, so far as is ever possible, by using means other than conventional score analysis. Equally important is the fact that in many instances of late Coltrane, where meter and pitch disappear, conventional notation simply cannot represent or replace the sound of the music itself.

The fact that improvised music is documented most completely in recorded media switches the interpretative angle from the static to the transient. In a written score, intention

---

<sup>31</sup>Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2007), see especially “The Debate Within,” p.238.

can be deduced from the page, a fixed form, and while the music is certainly malleable in performance, the parameters in play must be derived, in large part, from the score.<sup>32</sup> In Western art music from the Renaissance until the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century, improvisation, no matter how prevalent, remains in the service of the music as written symbol. Improvised music is just what the title implies, and therefore, execution is of primary importance. The fact that recordings exist paves the way for different interpretative concerns; for our purposes, style and phrasing are among the most important. The differentiations between players' so-called "sound" is not necessarily capturable in standard notation. If vibrato, thickness of tone and decay are converted to symbols, they are still only substitutes for the primary document, in this case the recording. Even a conventionally tuned solo instrument, such as a piano, is capable of achieving many simultaneous rhythmic layers and vastly differing attacks, and these are better conveyed to the student or scholar in original form, especially when the sound as a whole is the subject of discussion.

Because the music under discussion is documented in this way, I have elected to use sound examples where conventional notation is not appropriate and traditional transcription in those circumstances where it supports my hearing of the music. Coltrane's solos, for example, still rely mainly on material that exists in the domain of conventional pitch. Unlike Pharaoh Sanders, he does not resort to the hugely emotive but ultimately un-notatable moans and shrieks so prevalent in the 1960s "free jazz" saxophone repertoire. Given that Coltrane does not eschew pitch, notation is a fairly simple procedure, account only needing to be taken of the spaces between atomistic phrases so important to his soloistic language.

---

<sup>32</sup>I am, of course, leaving aside early Western musics for which the score, all that remains, was probably a road map to many improvised practices that are only now being reconstructed.

His use of the standard rhythm section, especially in the final two years of his career, is a different matter. While individual components can be notated, with varying degrees of success dependent on their complexity, the aggregate sound defies any conventional notation. Essentially, it is this sound that forms one level of my bipartite hearing of Coltrane's final works, and each component of that level's relationship to any other is open to debate from moment to moment. To illustrate these aggregates, or what Ekkehard Jost insightfully labels sound complexes, fragments of the recordings themselves seem the only truly satisfactory method of conveyance. With the advent of readily accessible digital recording and playback technologies on every computer, not to mention the recently adopted procedure of online dissertation submission, such a solution seems all the more viable. It allows the music to be heard in its primary form, not glimpsed in a serialized bare-bones and, most importantly, visual approximation, and it is to be hoped that my descriptive prose will elucidate the salient points in what is undoubtedly difficult but extremely important music that was meant, above all, to be heard.

To that end, I have divided my discussion of Coltrane's music along different lines than have previous analysts. The theoretical groundwork for my approach is laid in the first chapter, quotations from Kramer and Parker used to support my claims of disunity along the lines of temporal perception. The rest of Chapter 1 consists of quotations from Coltrane himself regarding time, rhythm, temporal expansion and the conjoined roles of magic and spirituality in his music. Chapters 2 and 3 address, separately, Coltrane's soloing and the novel way in which he deploys rhythm section respectively. In the second chapter, Coltrane's solos are analyzed for the atomistic tendencies that increased in his final period. Chapter 3 comprises an examination of the way in which conventionally "swung" rhythms,

or dotted eighth-note rhythms, gradually disappeared from Coltrane's compositional aesthetic to be replaced by structures that thrive on verticality, even approaching minimalism. In the final chapter, two different case studies are presented to demonstrate the ways in which two succeeding generations of musicians come to terms with Coltrane's compositional legacy, especially concerning the work from 1965-1967. These case studies encompass the intersections of "jazz" and "classical" music and blur the boundaries between these superficially distinct genres.



# **CHAPTER 1**

## **ANTECEDENTS**

### **Introduction**

Any analytical model employed to analyze Coltrane's final work must take into account the music's fundamental split from conventional jazz structure; it is the aim of this chapter to provide and detail such a model. Following a presentation of the model I have employed to elucidate these works, Coltrane's own words, few as they are and vague as they can be, will be examined as they relate to the path I have chosen through his final period.

Before such an examination can occur and my bipartite model be presented, a few general observations about the evolution of improvised music toward the freedom of the 1960s are in order. As stated in my introduction, the fundamental problem with scholarship concerning Coltrane's final works, and with scholarship concerning free jazz more generally, is that the music is analyzed along the formal lines of more traditional jazz. Regarding creative Black music up to the time of Ornette Coleman, the concepts of melody, harmony and rhythm governed the way a piece of music was constructed and the "feel" of the piece. A large component of that ambiguous but ever-present phenomenon we label "feel" is the way events are divided in time, whether it be the passage of rhythmic cycles or the melodic/harmonic form of the music. Up to 1962, admittedly an oversimplification but applicable, jazz improvisation relied on repeated rhythmic cycles, exemplified most

completely by the drummer's role as timekeeper in the service of various conceptions of melody and harmony. Even in the mainly undocumented early stages of bebop, when a pre-existing set of chord changes was stripped of its melody and given a new one, the structural language followed similar lines. However, rhythm, as manifest through the passage of time and the "freeing" of drummers from metronomic slavery, became as determinate a factor as melody in the structure of a tune. True, the swing aesthetic was still present in the swung rhythms heard in the drummer's ride cymbal patterns, but the syncopations were sublimated in favor of strong accents on beats two and four, creating more of a simple duple feel that supplanted the swung rhythmic complexity of much 1930s music. Such a feel still kept a continuous sense of the even passage of time firmly in the listener's grasp while elucidating certain moments of burgeoning temporal disunity. Increased tempo became the catalyst leading to the transformation, the process being laid bare in the jam sessions waxed privately during the recording ban of 1942-44.<sup>33</sup>

While each epoch in jazz history sports its retrogressions, the 1950s were, as Orrin Keepnews claims with understated insight, a period of transition.<sup>34</sup> Melodies continued to become more disjunct, also being divorced from whatever harmony was occurring while the melody was stated. The end of swing corresponded with the end of the decade, as mavericks like Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman began, at first in private, to examine more loosely defined rhythmic structures and, consequently, increased temporal freedom; these innovations will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3. Traditional western European art music became less and less overtly relevant as new forms and musical languages were

---

<sup>33</sup>A detailed discussion of the American Federation of Musicians' recording ban of 1942-44, and its precursors and implications, is available at [http://www.swingmusic.net/Big\\_Band\\_Era\\_Recording\\_Ban\\_Of\\_1942.html](http://www.swingmusic.net/Big_Band_Era_Recording_Ban_Of_1942.html) (Accessed March 21, 2008)

<sup>34</sup>Orrin Keepnews, phone interview conducted by Marc Medwin, May 25, 2007.

realized, Ornette Coleman finally stating that he had devised a music independent of European influence.<sup>35</sup> Whether or not his assessment was accurate, the impulse is extremely important in defining the music that would follow during the next six to seven years.

Western European classical music's practitioners had already been obsessed with such temporal concerns for years, the most ubiquitous examples involving Stockhausen's "moment form" and Boulez's temporally conflated cycles in *Le Marteau sans Maître*, both seeing advent in the middle 1950s. The improvised music of the 1960s brought about a similar seachange in the increasing number of approaches to time in music and its perception. After Taylor, Coleman and the early orchestral compositions of Bill Dixon, melody and harmony lost much of their revered meanings, new traditions usurping old as jazz faced the inexorability of its own history. The hybrid structures of 1940s innovators such as George Handy, still all but unrecognized in the written histories of creative music, bore rapid and plentiful fruit. I am not referring to what is called Third Stream in so many jazz courses and texts, that failed approach hopelessly indebted to Western European classical music. I am not even positing that Coleman, Taylor, Dixon and the other revolutionaries simply tapped into the classical repertoire for inspiration; their developments paralleled innovations in formal concert music, as will be shown in Chapter 3, but to paint their accomplishments solely in that light negates the aims and roots of the music that emerged. Their work is ultimately an innovative product born of race-based exclusion from the elite of American composition, musical education and organizations.<sup>36</sup> The path they forged is multifarious, requiring a new mode of analysis as well as new modes of sociopolitical discourse.

---

<sup>35</sup>See Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1998), p.217.

## **Evan Parker, Jonathan Kramer, Time and the Atomism/Laminarity Dichotomy**

We have already seen that by 1965, American free jazz had penetrated deeply into Europe's improvisational psyche, and that despite statements to the contrary, a reciprocal process was in play in the United States. Therefore, my analytical model involves two modes of musical perception, one drawn from the realm of Western-European classical music and one born of the tradition of 1960s improvised music. Both Evan Parker's intellectualization of atomism versus laminarity in improvised music and Jonathan Kramer's theories of temporal perception in classical music are based on phenomena associated with listening. More importantly, the former is equivalent to Kramer's elucidations of multiply-directed linear time and vertical time, the bird's nest of terminology to be untangled in due course. Parker's and Kramer's constructs are complementary in that they express trans-cultural opposites which, I will posit, blend in the final music of John Coltrane to create an innovative two-level narrative form. Such a construction will allow this admittedly difficult and certainly underdiscussed music to be heard in a way that does not chain it too tightly either to jazz or European classical analysis traditions. Yet, neither theoretician's construct accounts directly for Coltrane's final works, even though both articulate what I believe to be its core components and implications.

If John Coltrane has an equally famous European counterpart, it is British saxophonist Evan Parker. Very few European improvisers have had the continued world-

---

<sup>36</sup>Most of the African-American musicians of the 1960s to whom I have spoken have a story about denial—not being allowed at a certain school, not being auditioned for orchestras under the same terms as white colleagues, etc. Their bitterness is palpable forty years later. Art Davis, one of Coltrane's favored bassists, went to his grave embittered about the way the New York Philharmonic had treated him in 1968-69. A detailed discussion of his failed discrimination suit against the New York Philharmonic can be found in Ortiz Walton, *Music: Black, White and Blue, a Sociological Survey of the Use and Misuse of Afro-American Music* (William Morrow & Company, 1972), pp. 124-135.

wide success and received the acclaim afforded him; in the admittedly rarified culture surrounding improvised music of the late 1960s and beyond, he has achieved something vaguely akin to mainstream notoriety, remaining one of the most active participants on the current European improvised music scene. His longevity is due, in large part, to his willingness to verbalize, perhaps to intellectualize, matters of improvisation that have long been considered intuitive. The case might be made that such articulations embody a European trait, as in my experience, many, but not all, US improvisers are far less interested in what they view as unnecessary verbiage. Yet, even among the more conventionally articulate improvisers, Parker stands out for the lucidity and precision of his explications.

In a 1980 lecture, he described the polar opposites of 1960s British improvisation as follows:

The group of people that were working around the SME [Spontaneous Music Ensemble] at that time (1966-67) - John Stevens, Derek Bailey, Trevor Watts, Paul Rutherford - were working on a method that I could call 'atomistic' - breaking the music down into small component parts and piecing them together again in a collective way, so as to de-emphasize the soloistic nature of improvisation and replace it by a collective process. But at the same time AMM<sup>37</sup> (discussed below) had what I would call a 'laminar' way of working, where although the solo had been lost and the emphasis was on a collective sound, an orchestral sound if you like, it was not done by breaking the music into small components but by contributing layers which would fit together and make a new whole.<sup>38</sup>

The dualistic construct is brilliant in that it captures the opposing aesthetics of European improvised music, to be discussed presently. More than that, Parker's verbal rendering was the wellspring for the present study; more than any scholar associated with Coltrane, Parker separates and articulates exactly the two currents in Coltrane's last works. While the

---

<sup>37</sup> AMM is a British improvising group active since 1965. The meaning of its three lettered appellation is deliberately obscured by its members.

<sup>38</sup> Evan Parker informs me that the lecture was not recorded, only taken down in shorthand and then written in longhand. He is not sure that copies still exist. The fragments I use are available at <http://www.variant.randomstate.org/8texts/issue8.html> (Accessed March 21, 2006)

surviving fragments of his lecture do not address late Coltrane, the fact that Parker's construct is divorced from traditions associated with American improvised music renders it flexible enough to encompass the radical structures waxed in Coltrane's final two years.

Interestingly, the opposing aesthetics of atomism and laminarity were in formation very soon after Coltrane's classic quartet disintegrated, and this fact may account for British improvisers' public neglect of Coltrane's final pieces. The Spontaneous Music Ensemble was formed, after all, in 1966 around drummer and cornetist John Stevens. As much a teacher and lecturer as a performer, he was at the center of a group of musicians influenced by the "New Black Music"; yet, the group's earliest recordings demonstrate much more affinity with Ornette Coleman than with late John Coltrane. By 1967, the septet was shorn down to two members; their new sound forsook melody and harmony, but it also eschewed the high-volume freneticisms of the New York school of free jazz. Stevens' emerging vision is best captured by Evan Parker in a 1997 interview. He was asked if he found playing with SME inhibiting:

I didn't feel particularly restrained. I felt a lot of what John was talking about, or the kind of method, such as there was one, was based on several quite simple rules: (1) if you can't hear somebody else you are playing too loud, and (2) if what you are doing does not, at regular intervals, make reference to what you are hearing other people do, you might as well not be playing in the group. I mean I've put it in my own language, but those were maybe the two most important lessons that John wanted people to learn when they played with SME. And so there was what you can call a compositional aesthetic which required musicians to work with those two kinds of rules or ideals in mind.<sup>39</sup>

If the emergent SME sound had an American parallel, it occurred in Chicago, where similar studies in sound and silence were being undertaken, to very different ends, by the newly forming Art Ensemble of Chicago. The recordings on the recently released *Summer*

---

<sup>39</sup>See Martin Davidson, Spontaneous Music Ensemble, *Summer 1967* (EmanemDisc, EMANEM4005, 1995), p.5.

1967 are the only ones that survive by this version of the SME; as the 1967-1968 box set on Nessa Records did for the Art Ensemble, *Summer 1967* allows the change in SME aesthetic to be charted more easily.<sup>40</sup>

“Listening Together 3,” taken from the album *Summer 1967*, will demonstrate that phrases are often detached, almost disembodied, unrelated to what occurs around them in any traditional harmonic sense. I chose the example as it is one of the most transparent, comprising the soprano saxophone and percussion duo of Evan Parker and John Stephens, the core SME unit in the summer of 1967. It employs many different sorts of atoms, from long-held notes to the quickest “call and response” dialogue and much in between; however, it demonstrates the vast difference between Coltrane’s duo recordings as detailed in the following chapters. (Example 1.1, “Listening Together 3,” 0:00-1:10.)<sup>41</sup>

The first note, an extended E-flat, disappears into silence, and there can be no denying the almost Webernesque atomism of the gesture. It is a historically charged moment fraught with implications, carving, in a stroke, a place for the new music quite apart from many of its New York influences, including John Coltrane.

As the piece progresses, intense listening becomes more obvious given the players’ swift interactions. Parker’s dyadic atom at 0:23 is followed immediately by a similarly terse gesture from Stephens on cymbals. As Parker’s note, a D, decays, Stephens’ high-hat mirrors the gesture. At 0:58, with the energy increasing slightly, Parker plays a three-note descending figure whose rhythm is immediately echoed by Stephens two seconds later; it is

---

<sup>40</sup>See The Art Ensemble of Chicago, *The Art Ensemble: 1967-68* (Nessa Records, ncd-2500, 1993).

<sup>41</sup> Complete citations for the sound examples can be found in Appendix B.

the first time in the piece Stephens uses anything but cymbals, the tom-toms particularly poignant for that reason.

While the level of interplay is astonishing, equally important is the atomism in Stephens' playing. Critic Victor Schonfield describes it best in a 1967 review of the duo:

Stevens has a marvelous facility for coining successive contrasting figures, each with its clear and lively speed, shape, and melodic colour. Currently, however, he intersperses these with less-defined equally spaced or eddying rolls, which do not move to a new part of the kit with each stroke, so that his work has calm, as well as nervous activity.<sup>42</sup>

In hindsight, it is easy to see that the calm and nervousness that Schonfield cite are atomistic in their own right, two juxtaposed aesthetics that change from moment to moment. Stephens' drumming of this period forms a constantly morphing study of serialized timbre, Schonfield pointing out, quite correctly, his movement from one part of his kit to another as an essential part of the SME aesthetic. His dynamics never rise above mezzo forte, the above quotation having a practical application in Stephens' energetic but reserved approach to the drums.

It should be remembered that despite composed tendencies, this is still improvised music. When melodic relationships occur, they are fleeting—an inversion, a repetition, a transposition, and then the next idea is stated, seemingly without a backward glance. Of course, the motivic relationships are often more complex than I have stated, each motive contextualizing its neighbors in ways that stem from long emersion in the language of improvised music and of Stephens' vision in particular. In the following chapter, Coltrane's playing will be shown to have demonstrated atomism from his earliest documentation, a trait that would inform his work increasingly through his final recordings.

Laminarity, as practiced by the British improvising group AMM, is atomism's polar opposite.<sup>43</sup> Formed in 1965 out of several working jazz groups, the collective pursued what

---

<sup>42</sup>Victor Schonfield from *Summer 1967*, *op. cit.*, p.6.



was then a remarkably new musical aesthetic. Very simply stated, AMM (the name is a secret acronym) sought to emancipate the idea of music from all associated conventions and polarities. This goal sets them apart from the SME, as it does from any other improvising group. Their first album, *AMM Music*, released in 1967 on Electra UK, contained only aphorisms as liner notes; one of these pithy fragments goes a considerable distance toward elucidating the group's concerns:

An AMM performance has no beginning or ending. Sounds outside the performance are distinguished from it only by individual sensibility.<sup>44</sup>

On the surface, such a pronouncement resembles nothing so much as a John Cage utterance, but in the *AMM Music 1966* CD reissue liners, percussionist Edwin Prévost disputes such a claim:

Little of the aesthetic social or cultural significance of our experiments was examined or perpetuated. Our own experience in relation to influences, *e. g.* the Gagaku or John Cage's music, indicates how easily elements can be adapted without taking on board the cultural baggage of the original. In a sense it is all material to be exploited! Cage's 'chance' philosophy has no place in AMM's thinking, although superficially the sounds and effects may appear at times to be similar. By contrast AMM can create a much more powerful emotional response than Cage's work was ever able or designed to do.<sup>45</sup>

The following example, a fragment of "Later, During a Flaming Riviera Sunset," taken from AMM's debut album, will demonstrate what would become known as the AMM sound. (Example 1.2, "Later, During a Flaming Riviera Sunset," 0:00-1:00.)

---

<sup>43</sup>It should be noted that later in both groups' long careers, they can be said to have switched sides. SME began to engage in long-tone or held-tone experiments, while AMM's preoccupation with silence grew, necessitating the detachment of each phrase, or sonic object.

<sup>44</sup>Edwin Prévost from *AMM Music 1966* (Matchless Recordings/ ReR Megacorp., ReR AMMCD, 1989), p.4.

<sup>45</sup>*ibid.*, p.7.

The group, at that time, included composer Cornelius Cardew, Lou Gare on tenor saxophone and violin, percussionist Eddie Prévost, guitarist Keith Rowe and cellist Lawrence Sheaff. However, several of the members also employ transistor radios, as can be determined from the opening moments of the excerpt. There is something resembling an intermittent pulse, but its source is vague, possibly a prepared piano. The other instruments are also indistinct, and purposely so, but the overall effect is even more important. Creating a wash of sound and occasionally exhibiting transient peaks of near recognizability as with the cello at 0:19, AMM was obviously not as concerned with music as with the subversion of music by sound. What we hear is a unique take on the drone, but it is in no way engaged with typical Indian drone; rather, all registers are represented, the sound morphing slightly but never becoming absolutely recognizable.

A verticality is achieved in which only certain aspects of the overall sound are readily distinguishable, different sonic components emerging with each listen.

Such verticality renders time irrelevant, and the above quotation demonstrates how important temporal disjuncture was to AMM's aesthetic. Stories are told, by various members of the collective, of sounds being made during a concert, the nature of which were so powerfully disconcerting as to skew his perception of temporality completely.<sup>46</sup> The

---

<sup>46</sup> Saxophonist Lou Gare writes: "I arrive at the place, probably we have played there in previous weeks. Mostly we play once a week. The place is familiar then. Some or all of the other players are there. We chat a bit, set up equipment, tinker with things. Small sounds go on. The playing increases as we get involved in listening, searching, trying to perfect a sound, an action. The lights go out, or sometimes stay on but usually very low - almost dark. In the dark it is like having your eyes shut. All the sounds seems to go on inside. The sudden shocks of loud noise jolt one into alertness. The energy flows through the body. I think - a sound isn't good - it doesn't fit - we've heard it before - but all the time I am playing. And then something happens and I am listening very closely - it's beautiful and sharp and falls away, everyone is maintaining it, a slight change comes in, it alters, breaks down picks up again. It makes me laugh - I work hard - I can't go on - it's too difficult, why don't they stop - but I play all the same. Just for an instant, or slightly more I am right on the brink so to speak.

overall effect is one of dislocation, of timelessness or, as will be shown presently, of verticality as described by Jonathan Kramer. Coltrane's rhythm section, beginning as early as 1963, exhibited degrees of verticality, and the members of AMM listened fervently to Coltrane and his contemporaries.<sup>47</sup>

Evan Parker's atomism/laminarity dichotomy has its art music parallel in Jonathan Kramer's writings concerning the temporal perception of music. Kramer's 1988 book *The Time of Music*, in which he codified long-fostered theories of the way perceived time and clock time function when listening to music, provides the more conventionally academic component to my model for analyzing late Coltrane. Specifically, I am borrowing Kramer's concepts of multiply-directed linear time and vertical time and using them in combination, to complement Parker's Atomistic/Laminar descriptors. While both theoreticians meant their modes of analysis to be perceived separately, they form, when taken in tandem, a perfect

---

It is good just to listen. I don't know what to do.  
Keith is playing fantastically tonight.  
Why is Eddie laying on the floor?  
I can't hear Cor.  
Why doesn't Christopher turn that thing off whatever it is?  
I shall go deaf if this noise goes on much longer.  
Why doesn't someone turn the lights on - I hope they don't, don't stop.  
I can't bear it.  
One is tossed this way and that - and I don't move.  
It would be nice to play in this.  
It is very quiet.  
I must have been sitting here a long time, my ankle hurts.  
The silence goes on for what seems like a long time.  
The lights come on.  
Cor is still playing the cello.  
There are one or two or more people in the room as well.  
It seems as though I can't listen - it has come to me.  
We chat a bit, make arrangements, discuss business, say goodbye." <http://www.matchlessrecordings.com/amm-crypt/liner-notes> (Accessed Mar. 24, 2008)

<sup>47</sup>In a telling comment, AMM guitarist Keith Rowe, who always uses a radio and sometimes prerecorded tapes in his performances, labels such activities as his "sheets of sound."  
See <http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/rowe.html> (Accessed Mar. 21, 2008)

summation of the way in which Coltrane juxtaposed his soloing with the rhythm sections of his final period.

Kramer is quick to acknowledge the subjectivity of his own theories, based as they are on developed and sophisticated listening, which he opines is still very little understood.<sup>48</sup> He does observe, however, that from a very early age, Western listeners are inculcated into the various perceptual expectations at the heart of what he labels linear time, or the linearity of tonal music.<sup>49</sup> Kramer defines linear time, and contrasts it with non-linear time, as follows:

Let us identify linearity as the determination of some characteristic(s) of music in accordance with implications that arise from earlier events of the piece. Thus linearity is processive. Nonlinearity, on the other hand, is nonprocessive. It is the determination of some characteristics) of music in accordance with implications that arise from principles or tendencies governing an entire piece or section.<sup>50</sup>

Of the various linear time constructions outlined by Kramer, multiply-directed linear time seems the most appropriate when discussing Coltrane's soloing, especially between 1965 and 1967. Of multiply-directed linear time and its opposite, Kramer writes:

Multiply-directed time is not the same as nondirected linear time. In the former, the sense of goal-direction is acute, even if more than one goal is implied and/or more than one route to the goal(s) is suggested. In nondirected linear time there is no clearly implied goal, despite the directed continuity of motion.<sup>51</sup>

We see, then, that goals of some sort will be present in the Coltrane solos under discussion, mostly of a modal nature. It is worth noting here that, as with time, Coltrane's conception of tonality/modality becomes more and more fluid, beginning with the infamous and often derided 1961 Village Vanguard sessions. By the second half of 1965, Coltrane's harmonic conceptions were often so vague that standard modes of analysis do not define

---

<sup>48</sup>Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>49</sup>*ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup>*ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup>*ibid.*, p. 48.

their scope in full. Consequently, it becomes necessary to look for clues, as it were, in small details, or atoms. An atom might refer back to the mode established at the outset of a tune, even if the rhythm section is playing in some other mode at the moment the soloistic atom emerges. The result is a moment of temporal dissonance, or of recurrence; it should be clear, however, that these glances backward are not moments, as in “moment form.” Such structures circumvent the creation of goals, or points of departure and arrival, and Coltrane’s solos are clearly linear in that goals are established and met, even if more conventional expectations are thwarted in the process.

As for rhythm section deployment, the best model offered by Kramer is vertical time. His description of the experience of perceiving the temporality of a piece of music vertically is as poetic as it is apt:

Listening to a vertical musical composition can be like looking at a piece of sculpture. When we view the sculpture, we determine for ourselves the pacing of our experience: We are free to walk around the piece, view it from many angles, concentrate on some details, see other details in relationship to each other, step back and view the whole, contemplate the relationship between the piece and the space in which we see it, close our eyes and remember, leave the room when we wish, and return for further viewings. No one would claim that we have looked at less than all of the sculpture (though we may have missed some of its subtleties), despite individual selectivity in the viewing process. For each of us, the temporal sequence of viewing postures has been unique. The time spent with the sculpture is structured time, but the structure is placed there by us, as influenced by the piece, its environment, other spectators, and our own moods and tastes.<sup>52</sup>

Kramer also states that verticality gives the listener the illusion that the piece of music has neither beginning nor end, allowing for a glimpse into a process that mirrors eternity.<sup>53</sup> In Coltrane’s music, verticality is only achieved, as a unifying compositional

---

<sup>52</sup>*ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>53</sup>Kramer references eternity throughout his volume as an opposite to goal-directed temporal activity. See especially pp. 56-57.

factor, in the final period. It infuses certain moments in earlier works, as chapter 3 will demonstrate, even infiltrating several complete compositions and pointing to the contentious works of 1965-67. It is only with the addition of a second drummer, and, subsequently, with the departure of Elvin Jones and his trademark swing, that verticality comes into its own. Given the fact, stated above, that swing is replaced by a rhythmic conception that eschews tempo and meter, I will discuss the rhythm section's activities separately from my analysis of Coltrane's solos.

I do not claim, in any way, that Coltrane viewed his group along the hierarchy I intend to establish. While evidence of his ruminations concerning jazz, time and rhythmic freedom will be presented, nowhere does Coltrane discuss any kind of separation between soloist and rhythm section. I employ this hierarchy, most likely a legal fiction, as a way of facilitating easier listening. Coltrane's music has been judged, quite harshly, using standards to which it cannot possibly conform, as its structure bespeaks broader developments in jazz of the 1960s, to be outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.

Equally disturbing for any set analytical model is the fact that despite his radical employment of the soloist/rhythm section hierarchy, Coltrane's pieces still conform to the tripartite structure so long associated with jazz — head, solos, head. In the final works, the heads might exemplify a slightly different type of temporality, as some employ chord structures; some exhibit sectional changes via shifts in timbre, motive, density or relative speed, signaling hybrids approaching moment form. One in particular, "offering," could even be cast in what Kramer calls true "moment form," and this will be discussed in Chapter 2. However, these structures disappear as soon as the solos begin, and even this superficially useful demarcation can be difficult to judge, as my analysis of "Ogunde" in chapter 2 will

demonstrate. I maintain, therefore, that despite problematically non-conformist features where some of the heads are concerned, the multiply-directed/vertical hierarchy, or duality, that I propose is a governing principle of Coltrane's final period.

I am also fully aware that my analytical method does not take into account more recent methods of studying Coltrane's heritage, such as the ways in which his music parallels influential literary movements of the period under discussion. Similarly, it is possible that my efforts might be perceived as unwittingly racist attempts to place Coltrane in the European composer box.<sup>54</sup> I maintain, in response, that I am certainly not diminishing the importance of studies that focus on the music using these more current and more inclusive methods of analysis. As stated previously, in no way do I mean my model to be definitive, and there are many solutions to the formidable challenges posed by Coltrane's final works. I wish to encourage dialogue about a repertoire that has been unjustly neglected, if not maligned, for over forty years. I propose this study to be a beginning, a point from which other analytical models, strictly musical or otherwise, might be formed.

---

<sup>54</sup>During the process of writing this dissertation, I have encountered sometimes fierce resistance from several white scholars and African-American musicians; these individuals claim that in treating Coltrane as a composer, I am inflicting Western-European values on music that transcends such academic constructs. A thorough discussion of the negligible difference between improvisation and composition is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study, but it does seem absolutely appropriate to consider Coltrane a composer whose music, written as well as improvised, was shaped in part by Western European traditions. Therefore, my opinion remains that if critics, journalists and fans continue to bandy about the cliché that Jazz is America's classical music, it can be examined with the rigor to which we subject the European music on which it is at least partly modeled. Obviously, I do not posit that such modes of analysis are sufficient in themselves, nor do I subscribe to the overgeneralization that jazz is indeed America's classical music, but traditional modes of analysis should not be dismissed on the simple grounds that they are the product of another and supposedly foreign culture.

## **Coltrane's Conception of Unity through Diversity**

No analysis of Coltrane's music would be complete without an explication of his own words, from interviews and his few writings. He lacked the flair for pronouncement, or gift of gab, relished by so many of his contemporaries, which gives his every utterance special importance to those wishing to understand his work. While Coltrane was never reluctant to give interviews and always cordial, a certain circumspection nevertheless necessitates reading between the proverbial lines. This is especially true where his final works are concerned, and his comments become more vaguely yet obviously concerned with matters of spirituality and less with the actual process of making music. Yet, in almost every Coltrane interview, there are comments that set him and his views apart from the concerns of his contemporaries. As we will see momentarily, even his earliest interview, from 1958, was largely concerned with matters of philosophy and spirituality; these subjects informed his music so fundamentally that it is logical to seek some sort of verbal precedents for the continued interest.

We can trace, in Coltrane's verbal articulations, an increasing and all-encompassing interest in unity. This was no superficial "all men are brothers" creed, nor was Coltrane dogmatic in his approach to the idea of all being contained in one. Rather, unity was an all-embracing concept, informing his thinking on spirituality, philosophy, socio-politics and music. These seemingly disparate elements are continuously juxtaposed in the answers Coltrane provides. How superficially ironic then that his final works achieved, for the listener, the exact opposite result in temporal disunity. If these works are unified, it is manifest in their instrumental and musical inclusivity. Yet, there is no real irony here. Not



merely juxtaposing the various elements in play, Coltrane's interviews and writings demonstrate a vision in constant synthesis, confronting then assimilating various elements with no hint of pretense or posture. Coltrane's words parallel the increasingly adventurous forays he made into the avant-garde in that unity was approached in increments; ultimately, Coltrane's brand of unity fostered the temporally disunified structures of his final period.

Unity from diversity was a recurrent fascination with Coltrane. Whether or not it was in the vanguard of his thoughts from the 1940s is debatable, but it is a theme that bears examination as it is certainly repeated throughout the ten years that formed the major portion of his career.

In interviews and writings, Coltrane expresses the elastic idea of unity in several different ways. It is tempting to evoke the 1957 dream, as related to Cuthbert Ormond Simkins by his first wife Naima (also known as Juanita), where Coltrane's musical vision was apparently born. "Nit, I had a dream. ... It was this beautiful droning sound, it was so beautiful ..." <sup>55</sup> The sound was absolutely beyond his ability to describe, necessitating an immediate reproduction attempt at the piano; <sup>56</sup> yet, the vision is obviously of the utmost importance to him, given the disappearance of rhythm in his final works. We hear again, it is to be assumed, of Coltrane's prototypal dreams in a July 27, 1965 recorded interview with Michiel de Ruyter. The interviewer asks about a dream as portrayed in some vaguely referenced Albert Ayler liner notes. <sup>57</sup> "Who wrote that?" Coltrane asks with uncanny

---

<sup>55</sup>Cuthbert Ormond Simkins, *Coltrane: A Biography* (New York: Herndon House, 1975; reprinted by Black Classics Press, 1989), p. 58.

<sup>56</sup>*ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>57</sup>de Ruyter is probably referring to the notes accompanying *My Name is Albert Ayler*, recorded in 1963. This material, mainly comprising standards, has been issued numerous times, on European labels including Debut (Denmark) DEB140 and America (France) AM 6100. Most recently, it was available on a Black Lion CD (760211, 1996). It remains out of print.

vigor. “It’s kind of true,” Coltrane smiles, continuing on to explain that around 1957, he had a dream in which he was either playing in, or watching, a band similar to that of Albert Ayler. “I knew this was coming,” Coltrane says, obviously speaking of the New Black Music. We see, then, that unity applies, in some degree, to Coltrane’s conception of his musical surroundings in that history is moving toward some sort of completion.

In keeping with such a multivalent view of history, Coltrane demonstrates that unity need not be a strictly musical concept. As the interview with August Blume in June of 1958, Coltrane proves himself ready and willing to deal with matters of the spirit and the philosophies that he encountered on his search. When explaining the impact that the burgeoning African American interest in Islam had on him, he said that it “shook me. ... it took me to something I never thought about, another religion ...”

The implication, as the interview progresses, is that every new development in his spiritual thinking constitutes a minor journey that sends him reeling, as it were, and it becomes necessary for him to forget about such concerns for a while, presumably so that he can digest and assimilate what is useful to him. Blume, perhaps perceiving the root and cure of Coltrane’s spiritual crisis and picking up on his idea of “getting together,” suggests that a world or universal religion might be the answer, as all religions encapsulate similar core values. Coltrane responds with something close to unbridled enthusiasm to the neo-Blakeian concept of spiritual unity. “When philosophers speak of good and bad, they take those two words and go so far with them! It can be a complicated thing. But, it’s got to be simple, to really get some good out of it, to really realize something you got to make it simple.”<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup>Coltrane’s June 15, 1958 interview with August Blume is available online via the Slought foundation. I transcribed the quotations from the audio recording. See <http://www.slought.org/content/11161/> (Accessed March 21, 2008)

Here then, we have an integral component of Coltrane's conception of infinite simplicity. He is under no naive illusions concerning the true nature of simplicity, aware of the many complexities that need to be resolved. Later in the Blume interview, he speaks of playing over Monk's changes with bassist Wilbur Ware. "Neither one of us would be playing the changes of the tune until we reach a certain spot; if we get there together, we're lucky."<sup>59</sup>

Again, it is apparent that musically, Coltrane's idea of achieving simplicity, or unity, out of diversity is already forming, a concept similar to that of AMM and one that would go a long way toward determining the music of his final two years. In fact, music becomes a primary vehicle for Coltrane to express his ideas of unity. In 1960, interviewed in Stockholm by Carl-Erik Lindgren, he speaks of wanting to get to the "one essential" by discarding many harmonic devices that he hasn't assimilated successfully.<sup>60</sup> At several points during the interview, Coltrane addresses simplicity, which also plays a crucial part in Don DeMichael's "Coltrane on Coltrane" article from 1960, initially in *Downbeat*. He says of Lester Young's influence on his 1940s playing: "The reason I liked Lester so was that I could feel that line, that simplicity. My phrasing was very much in Lester's vein at this time."<sup>61</sup>

These comments resonate with Coltrane's well-documented and oft-quoted liner notes and poem accompanying *A Love Supreme*, where unity embodies his concept of God and his way of expressing it musically. The difference seems to lie in inclusiveness; rather than simply looking for the essential, or a simple line through everything, Coltrane has

---

<sup>59</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>60</sup>See the Coltrane interview with Carl-Erik Lindgren from *Miles Davis: In Stockholm 1960 Complete* (Dragon Records, DRCD 228, 1992).

<sup>61</sup>John Coltrane from *The John Coltrane Companion*, ed. Carl Woideck, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), p. 99.

become absolutely inclusive, so that both paths are taken simultaneously. In other words, unity and diversity function as a single but multifarious entity, as a simultaneously inward and outward journey, as infinite simplicity. Coltrane's poetic text makes the case unequivocally:

Words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts, fears and emotions - time –  
all related . . . all made from one ... all made in one. Blessed be His name.<sup>62</sup>

It should be reiterated here that such concerns are demonstrable in the music. The “A Love Supreme” theme is certainly recurrent, both in instrumental and vocal form, and the opening flourish returns at the end of the fourth movement, but the musical material of which the suite is constructed is a model of diversity. Meters shift as the suite progresses, for example, ultimately giving way to meterlessness in “Psalm,” essentially summing up the rhythmic developments in the suite and in Coltrane's music up to that point. The geographical concerns of the late 1950s are also present, most immediately apparent in the drone and in the Latin-tinged rhythms laid down by Elvin Jones in “Acknowledgement,” A *Love Supreme's* first movement.

Such complex unity is manifested in words even later; in the liner notes to *Live at the Village Vanguard Again* from 1966, Coltrane discusses the very practical idea of multidirectional rhythms, concerning Rashied Ali's drum work: “You see, he's laying down multi-directional rhythms all the time.”<sup>63</sup> While these liners, in the form of an interview with Nat Hentoff, continually reference the idea of going deeper, of getting down to the proverbial crux, they elucidate a more important component. Here, Coltrane comes as close as ever to expressing the concept of multiply-directed linear time so crucial to my discussion

---

<sup>62</sup>John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme* (Impulse! 314 589 945-2, 2002), p. 28.

<sup>63</sup>John Coltrane, *Live at the Village Vanguard Again!*, (Impulse! IMPD-213, 1997), p. 6.

of his solos in Chapter 2. Multi-directionality seems superficially to be a catch-all adjective, connoting style and idea in equal measure, but its implications go beyond questions of musicality into the realm of temporal perception. For Coltrane, time had now been articulated as something beyond the merely chronological; it had been transcended on a fundamental plain of listener perception, but more than this, such transcendence was desirable at the most basic rhythmic level. The temporal cycles of previous generations had been supplanted by a much more inclusive concept, the “thing happening all through” nameless and simultaneously of the utmost importance. Multi-directionality refers also to vertical time in that simultaneities, not serial events, go a long way toward determining structure. This quotation demonstrates effectively that, in one stroke, Coltrane has given a succinct précis of his most crucial stylistic development.

The transition from conventional time to multiple manifestations of time was not an easy one for Coltrane to embrace quickly. There were delays, to which he readily admitted. In this, he is unique; a certain bravado is required in the face of true innovation, whether as performer or, as saxophonist Anthony Braxton asserts, as friendly experiencer. Coltrane’s public persona lacked entirely such a front. In another De Ruyter interview, Coltrane is asked about a new rhythmic freedom in his music. “Yeah, I had to get it beat into my skull first,” Coltrane grins.<sup>64</sup> In an August 1965 interview for *Melody Maker*, Coltrane actually admits that he delayed certain developments in his music, as he was not sure that people would be ready for them.<sup>65</sup>

Then, in 1966, a seeming contradiction emerges in Coltrane’s rhetoric, expressed

---

<sup>64</sup>Notable is the fact that this comment was made immediately following the Village Vanguard concerts of November 1961. See John Coltrane, Interview with de Ruyter, November 19, 1961. ([http://www.mp33pm.co.uk/2006\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.mp33pm.co.uk/2006_06_01_archive.html))

<sup>65</sup>See Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

in his famous interview with Frank Kofsky, conducted in August of 1966. Discussing his music at that time, he says:

I was trying to do something. . . . There was a thing I wanted to do in music, see, and I figured I could do *two* things: I could have a band that played like the way we used to play, and a band that was going in the direction that the one I have now is going in — I could combine these two, with these two concepts going. And it could have been done.<sup>66</sup>

The notion of a group that could do two things, that could encompass past and present, seems a logical outgrowth of *A Love Supreme* and of Coltrane's interest in the traditions from which his music came. It also references, again, the complexity contained in true unity, the multivalence of even the simplest gesture and Coltrane's relentless search for expression of simplicity in complexity and its inverse.

It is from 1965 onward that Coltrane is most public concerning his overwhelming interest in multiple expansions, in the constant urge to strive, grow and become, but his fascination with these concepts predates his many song titles in that vein. As early as 1960, Coltrane wrote:

I want to be more flexible where rhythm is concerned. I feel I have to study rhythm some more. I haven't experimented too much with time; most of my experimenting has been in a harmonic form. I put time and rhythms to one side, in the past. But I've got to keep experimenting. I feel that I'm just beginning. I have part of what I'm looking for in my grasp but not all.<sup>67</sup>

We have already seen an allusion to multi-directional rhythms, but Coltrane also demonstrates increasing and abstract preoccupation with matters of a mystical nature, including the passage of time and the idea of magic as it relates to art. In his liner notes to the controversial 1966 album *Om*, he writes: "I want more of the sense of the expansion of

---

<sup>66</sup>See Coltrane's interview with Frank Kofsky in Woideck, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>67</sup>*ibid.*, p. 102.

time. I want the time to be more plastic.”<sup>68</sup> *Om* can be set apart from Coltrane’s other late works because of this conception. One long track, it embodies the explosive and expansive gestalt of its title, the thirty-minute work emanating from a series of generative complexes rather than from pitched themes in the manner of *Ascension* and *Meditations*.

Most enigmatic, however, and most difficult to rationalize intellectually is a comment from Coltrane that treats music as something purely magical.

I would like to bring to people something like happiness. I would like to discover a method so that if I want it to rain, it will start right away to rain. If one of my friends is ill, I’d like to play a certain song and he will be cured; when he’d be broke, I’d bring out a different song and immediately he’d receive all the money he needed. But what are these pieces and what is the road to travel to attain a knowledge of them, that I don’t know. The true powers of music are still unknown. To be able to control them must be, I believe, the goal of every musician. I’m passionate about understanding these forces. I would like to provoke reactions in the listeners to my music, to create a real atmosphere. It’s in that direction that I want to commit myself and to go as far as possible.<sup>69</sup>

Here, we find what might be the most compelling evidence for viewing Coltrane’s approach to music as including an element of the supernatural, or at least of the elemental. In this rarely expressed sentiment, Coltrane is obviously viewing the traditions associated with music beyond anything academic or sociopolitical; It is possible that his spiritual awakening of 1957 led him down the paths associated with such thinking, and he claims, in his 1958 interview with August Blume, that many musicians discuss similarly spiritual concerns. However, the quotation goes beyond even the merely spiritual into the realm of magic, discussed by only a few in the jazz world, including Sun Ra and Sonny Murray. Coltrane seems to be examining the fundamental power of music as it exists beyond reason or logic. This quotation, in tandem with Coltrane’s concerns about temporal expansion, doubleness

---

<sup>68</sup>John Coltrane, Liner Notes to *Impulse!* 9140, see Kofsky, *op. cit.* p. 376.

<sup>69</sup>John Coltrane, interview with Jean Clouzet and Michel Delorme, from Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

and spirituality in general, bolsters the case that multi-temporal organization may not have been an alien concept to Coltrane, especially in the last two years of his life, as many of his ideas were beginning to come to fruition. It becomes clear that for him, playing and innovation were never enough and that beyond the mythology that now surrounds him, he perceived a multileveled and increasingly multifarious unifying principle at work in his life.

Given the trajectory of these comments, it is little wonder that Coltrane took the path he did; exploration was second nature to him. Like Scriabin, and unlike Miles Davis, to cite a contrary example, musical innovation was only a means to an end, a method through which to encapsulate his burgeoning ideas of humanity and spirituality and their coexistence. Not an overly articulate man, Coltrane's comments about human existence and about his own music leave little doubt, contrary to comments from Nisenson and others, that the temporal disunity of his final period was the necessary and the most complete expression of his musical aesthetic and his view of the human condition. I prefer not to think of Coltrane's verbal reticence, and what can often seem vague or naïve, as a deficiency, but I would also leave it free of intimations of the beyond as far as any one dogma is concerned. He is concerned with the human being as a whole, with the expression of all dichotomies pervading every word as it does his compositional aesthetic. An excerpt from a letter to *Downbeat* editor Don DeMichael, written in 1962, expresses, with surprising eloquence, the free thought at the heart of Coltrane's vision:

You know, Don, I was reading a book on the life of Van Gogh today, and I had to pause and think of that wonderful and persistent force – the creative urge. The creative urge was in this man who found himself so much at odds with the world he lived in, and in spite of all the adversity, frustrations, rejections and so forth – beautiful and living art came forth abundantly...if only he could be here today. Truth is indestructible. It seems history shows (and it's the same way today) that the innovator is more often than not met with some degree of condemnation; usually according to the degree of departure from the prevailing modes of expression or what



have you. Change is always so hard to accept. We also see that these innovators always seek to revitalize, extend or reconstruct the status quo in their given fields, wherever it is needed. Quite often they are the rejects, outcasts, sub-citizens, etc. of the very societies to which they bring so much sustenance. Often they are people who endure great personal tragedy in their lives. Whatever the case, whether accepted or rejected, rich or poor, they are forever guided by that great and eternal constant the creative urge. Let us cherish it and give praise to God.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> See Simkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-161.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SOLOISTIC ATOMISM**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will chart increasingly prevalent atomism in John Coltrane's solos from the early 1950s through 1967. No matter how anecdotal Coltrane's interest in temporal procedures and concerns might be, his soloing brings a certain concreteness to his often elusively hesitant language. A comparison of early solos with those of his final period reveals an increasingly complex and long-range exploration of the relationship between soloist and rhythm section typified by inherent disaffiliation to overriding rhythmic structures in favor of temporally detached motivic exploration. All linearity is, however, not forsaken for pointillism, but reinvented and re-contextualized; small blocks of sound are stated, altered, sometimes reiterated and then developed in serial fashion, and while these involve many references to an established tonality/modality, the rhythmic freedom leads to eschewed cadences and jarring anticipations, rendering multiply-directed linear time appropriate as a defining model. Even longer melodic lines, when present, serve as points of stylistic or historical reference, what are commonly called signifiers. The dialectical development of atomistic linearity is in part, a chronological concern, pivotal points of contact between these two apparently polar opposites occurring in the early 1950s, on the Miles Davis tour of 1960 and, obviously, in the final period, anticipated in the Halfnote performances of March through May, 1965, and expanded by *Ascension* in June of the same

year. The present chapter will chart chronologically this growing disunity, mainly focusing on key solos but also including brief examinations of Coltrane's compositional methodology where relevant. Comparisons to other prominent saxophone stylings will also be made to demonstrate the uniqueness of Coltrane's atomistic vision and the external forces to which he was indebted.

### **Coltrane's Atomism**

An atom can be viewed as a musical motive, separated in some way from surrounding solo material. It can consist of as few as two notes, and it can be an entire line or long phrase. It must, however, be separated from its surroundings, namely the other elements at play in the solo. In Coltrane's soloing, the atoms usually hint at a tonal area, an integral component of the narrative structure to be explained presently. However, the appearance and context of any atom is fluid, and atoms can be defined using a number of parameters, including silence, register, note length and pitch content.

From the outset, it should be noted that Coltrane's brand of atomism has very little to do with the post-Webernian construct employed by improvisational groups such as the Spontaneous Music Ensemble, as outlined in the previous chapter. Coltrane was not exclusively a student of the "classical" or European tradition, although he fostered a life-long passion for chromatic exploration<sup>71</sup> and developed his own ideas concerning the nature of

---

<sup>71</sup>Coltrane's melodies, but especially their accompanying harmonies and his solos over these harmonies, became increasingly chromatic, the infamously complex changes to "Giant Steps" being a noteworthy example. Alice Coltrane suggests that in 1967, Coltrane was writing a series of pieces that employed all twelve chromatic

“classical” music later in life.<sup>72</sup> Rather, it might be posited that Coltrane’s atomism derived from the same impulses that lead to all formal extension in jazz. As Coltrane drummer Rashied Ali observes, it is the moments of formal expansion in the playing of post-bop drummers such as Philly Joe Jones that first caught his attention, leading him toward that aesthetic now known as “free” jazz.<sup>73</sup> For Coltrane, such freedom was a possibility to be explored in each moment of any given formal structure. On a very intuitive level, as jazz depends so much on chordal and chorus repetition, the desirable scenario for improvising musicians with a predilection for exploration is to expand the form, to elasticize it by creating solos that stretch the boundaries of a given structure, on both macro and microcosmic levels.

Whereas all players can be heard bending rhythmic and harmonic rules from time to time—this is an established mode of expression dating back to Louis Armstrong’s earliest recordings—Coltrane’s approach to these procedures is more difficult to classify in terms of style. Coltrane’s atomism began, obviously enough, on the microcosmic level, typified by substantial breaks from established rhythm and chord structures, exemplifying perfectly the dialectic described by Ekkehard Jost as encompassing swing and energy.<sup>74</sup> These disconnects are not seamless, as might have been the case with any player versed in bebop. Even in the very first recordings he made, dating from 1946,<sup>75</sup> there is a latent desire to

---

pitches, numbered to correspond with the signs of the zodiac, a plan that, as far as we know, was never to achieve fruition. See the liner notes to Alice Coltrane, *Transfiguration* (Warner Bros., LP 3218, 1978), p. 2.

<sup>72</sup>Interview from John Coltrane, *Live in Japan* (MCA Records, Inc., GRD-4-102), p. 8.

<sup>73</sup>Rashied Ali, Phone Interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, October 4, 2005. It is also worth remembering that during his 1938 Library of Congress interviews with Alan Lomax, Jelly Roll Morton stated that the break (now called stop-time) was the most important element in jazz. See *Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax* (Rounder CD 11661-1888-2, 2005).

<sup>74</sup>See especially Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz*, Graz (Austria: Universal Edition, 1974; reprinted by Da Capo Press, 1981), p.71.

experiment, to expand harmony and rhythm in the moment, and while this can be attributed to youth and inexperience, hindsight allows the trajectory to be seen clearly, even if it was not understood by audiences and critics of the 1950s, when Coltrane was continually charged with trying too many things at one time, or simply with sounding angry or aggressive. Coltrane himself explained the phenomenon in 1960, stating that he had several ideas that would allow him such freedom, even though he hadn't grasped the implications of each concept to his satisfaction.<sup>76</sup> Each idea, which I am labeling as an "atom," can be perceived as a point of articulation, as a harmonic deviance or as some type of rhythmic aberration. In fact, this trait is at the heart of his soloing, and it remained personal regardless of the genre or style in which he played.

The aesthetic results might best be described as a disconnect, a way of momentarily circumlocuting any harmonic, rhythmic and temporal boundaries—barriers for Coltrane—inherent in the bebop tradition out of which he emerged and in any compositional structure he chose to explore.<sup>77</sup> This type of disjunct exploration is slightly but superficially related to the honks and squeals associated with Albert Ayler's recordings for the ESP label, which predate Coltrane's "free" period by about a year. While Coltrane relies occasionally on extramusical utterances to make his point, these timbral twists and turns would be the property of Pharaoh Sanders more than they were of Coltrane, leaving the latter to play

---

<sup>75</sup>These recordings were made privately, while Coltrane was in the navy in Hawaii. See Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (University of Michigan Press, 1998), p.44.

<sup>76</sup>John Coltrane, interview with Karl-Erik Lindgren, March 22, 1960. See Miles Davis, *In Stockholm 1960 Complete* (Dragon, CD 228), disc 1, track 4.

<sup>77</sup>By referring repeatedly to standard bebop soloing throughout this chapter, I am invoking the melodic models established by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Bud Powell among others; in this style, dissonances are usually resolved chromatically, in a way fairly close to that of western classical music as the solos' implied harmonies also take their cues from this genre. Though there is certainly moment to moment disjuncture in bebop, the overriding rhythmic pattern is one of swung eighth notes, conforming in this way to the traditionally established harmonic models followed by the solos.

mostly pitched tones in his solos. Furthermore, despite the fact that Ayler used space to stunning rhetorical effect, there are precious few tonal references in his solos, those being reserved for Ayler's simple heads, seemingly derived from real or manufactured folk melodies. Above all, Coltrane's atomism is based on ideas relating to the modal structure of whatever composition is being played.

At its most successful, Coltrane's atomism can also be said to relate to the "sheets of sound" approach, to be discussed in more detail below. Briefly, it has been posited that Coltrane was attempting to play up to three arpeggiated chords on a single chord in the rhythm section, the other two being harmonically related.<sup>78</sup> It is plausible that atomism is, at least in part, an extension of the sheets approach, a synoptic form of the harmonic concerns expressed by Coltrane in the aforementioned 1960 interview. No matter how far "out" the soloing and accompaniment becomes, on a local or long-term level, Coltrane's solos always refer, even if intermittently, to an aspect of the melody.

### **Atomism in Coltrane's Apprenticeship**

An examination of Coltrane's early solos, especially those found in recordings from 1951-52, reveals a penchant for pushing the rhythmic and melodic envelopes in consistent ways that would ultimately come to define his final recordings.

Dizzy Gillespie's Dee Gee single, "We Love to Boogie" is nothing more than a G-Major jump blues in 12-bar form, and it would be common practice to emphasize scale

---

<sup>78</sup>See Ira Gitler's description of "Sheets of Sound" in "Trane on the Track" from *The John Coltrane Companion*, ed. Carl Woideck, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), pp.3-6

degrees 1, 3 and 5 using “bluenote” versions of these as befitted the idiom. Gillespie does so in his solo, a model of tastefully bebop-inflected but generic blues figuration.

**Example 2.1** Gillespie’s Solo from “We Love to Boogie,”<sup>79</sup> mm.1-4



Coltrane, whose solo begins mid-chorus, continually emphasizes notes that fall outside the IV<sub>7</sub> chord, and when conventional notes are employed, they are stretched and un-idiomatically resolved. The B flat/A figuration found near the outset of Coltrane’s solo is symptomatic of this practice, and the more conventional move back to G from B flat is delayed almost until the end of the bar. Furthermore, the A is emphasized by length, rendering it a force apart from and outside of standard blues rhetoric in terms of both pitch and rhythm. The collective result is a rather primitive temporal suspension for the listener, as what amounts to a prolonged cadence occurs.

**Example 2.2** Coltrane’s Solo from “We Love to Boogie,” mm.1-4



A similar treatment of an “outsider” scale degree, this time A Flat, occurs in a 1951 Birdland broadcast of “Night in Tunisia,” again with a small Gillespie organization.

Foregoing Charlie Parker’s classic and legendarily difficult solo alto break as recorded in 1946, Coltrane opts for an exotically scalar passage, leading into a series of patterns largely involving iterations and reiterations of A flat. Given A flat’s polarized nature with the E

---

<sup>79</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all transcriptions are by Marc Medwin.

dominant harmonies which open each melody statement, the effect is one of struggle between Coltrane and the rest of the group as Coltrane floats above “Tunisia”’s rhythmic and harmonic structure.<sup>80</sup> Eventually, Coltrane is forced to play in a more conventional style by piano and vibraphone, but these brief moments are portentous events; they illustrate a growing fascination with the disunity that would come to typify his approach to improvisation.

### **Atomism under Miles’ Tutelage**

What might have been perceived as manneristic apprentice foibles in Gillespie’s groups will be shown to be absolutely essential stylistic elements in the Miles Davis years (1955-1960), even though at the time they were treated with some contempt by several dedicated critics.<sup>81</sup> The single-note temporal rhythmic and melodic deviations heard in the Gillespie recordings are expanded, developed and used to replace the post-bop tropes in his playing. The master take of “Bye-Bye Blackbird,” recorded for Columbia in 1955, demonstrates both the transition to a more atomistic style and Coltrane’s growing ease and facility with this method of improvisation.

It can certainly be argued that Miles Davis’ solo on the master is atomistic, as are many of his solos from all periods of his career, beginning most notably with performances from the early 1950s. The opening of the “Blackbird” solo is a case in point, a single arpeggiated figure being repeated and then transposed to suit the melody’s implied harmonies.

---

<sup>80</sup> This might at first seem to be a result of amateurish playing, but the effect is often present in a more sublimated form, especially following Coltrane’s miraculous improvement after 1957.

<sup>81</sup> See Bill Coss’ review of “The New Miles Davis Quintet” in *John Coltrane Companion*, *op. cit.*, p. 226.



Davis' approach is contemplatively spacious, and each idea, while obviously related to its counterparts, is presented as a self-contained unit.

**Example 2.3** Miles Davis' Solo from "Blackbird," mm.1-8



However, the solo is quite obviously wedded to the track's overall rhythmic structure, an easily loping swing feel. Any momentary disunity between soloist and rhythm section or harmonic structure (e.g. the extended B in measure 6 of Davis' first chorus) is quickly settled as Davis continually returns to the eighth-note patterns usually associated with bebop-inflected swing. Any deviations from this typical pattern occur, sporadically, on offbeats, and they do not become integrated in Davis' musical rhetoric in any way that would create lasting rhythmic or tonal disjuncture.<sup>82</sup>

The first eight bars of Coltrane's solo offer a powerfully stark contrast, demonstrating a huge leap in the direction of multiply-directed linear time exploration from the previously discussed Gillespie solos (See example 2.4).

<sup>82</sup> The occasions on which Davis would begin or conclude the head in G hold more shock value for that very reason, as can be heard from several of the audience reactions to the now infamous March 20<sup>th</sup> 1960 Olympia concert by the Miles Davis Quintet.

**Example 2.4** Coltrane's solo from "Blackbird," mm.1-8 (Copyright © 1973 Andrew's Musical Enterprises, Inc., Transcribed by Andrew White, All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.)

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1 through 4. Measure 1 begins with a rest, followed by a melodic fragment (MF) in measures 2 and 3, and a scalar figure (SF) in measure 4. The second system covers measures 5 through 8. Measure 5 starts with a scalar figure (SF), followed by another scalar figure (SF) in measure 6. Measures 7 and 8 continue the scalar figure (SF). The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, with specific annotations for 'Melodic Fragment (MF)' and 'Scalar Figure (SF)'.

A fragment of the melody is played, consisting largely of the opening phrase, but from the rhythmically delayed first note at 3:25, Coltrane is pulling sharply at the rhythmic bounds imposed by Philly Joe Jones' percussion work and Paul Chambers' bass line. The solo then shifts gears radically, a rapidly ascending scalar figure from  $c'$  to the  $c''$  (3:28) completely breaking away from any eighth-note patterns, existing outside any pulse offered by the rhythm section. Another melodic fragment ensues, continuing the melody where the first one ended, seemingly rendering the scalar figure an interruption. However, it returns in mutated form after the melody reaches F in measure 4, becoming the principal improvisational tool over the next few bars. Each of the four succeeding scalar occurrences is a rhythmically modified version of the initial ascending figure, and here again, none fits comfortably with the rhythm section's rhetoric.

Harmonically, relations to the rhythm section are not much more conventional. True, the scalar motive is altered to fit the changes, but the temporal disunity established by Coltrane's rhythmic invention is complemented harmonically, especially at the ends of phrases. The fifth upward scalar motive (measure 8), for example, ends on F sharp, anticipating the eventual harmonic move to the II chord but doing so on the weakest possible beat.

One of the most striking things about this section of Coltrane's solo is the amount of space between each idea. There is no bebop linearity here, as might be heard in the best solos by Parker or Gillespie. There is also no apparent urge to flow seamlessly from one idea to the next, a conventionally desirable result of linear development. In fact, juxtaposition seems to be Coltrane's goal during the first eight bars, where melody and the scalar motive are put in contrast and exploited for a new breed of soloistic development. As the solo progresses, these elements return in somewhat more stereotypically "bebop" fashion, notably at 3:56, where an upward scale is stretched into something approaching more suitably conformist "bebop" eighth notes; however, even they are still immediately recognizable, even given differences in tempo and a decrease in the space between each idea statement.

A notable refinement of these techniques is evident on every recorded concert from the spring 1960 European tour with the Miles Davis quintet. Coltrane acknowledged the consistency of his playing on this tour, and the March 22 version of "All Blues," recorded in Stockholm, serves as a primer of the techniques that comprise Coltrane's multiply-directed soloistic narrative.<sup>83</sup> His solo opens at 5:07 with some very simply sustained pitches, as is usually the case with the solos from this tour. Coltrane chooses to emphasize E, C and D, despite the rhythm section's movement through the first chorus of a standard 12-bar blues

---

<sup>83</sup>The Stockholm "All Blues" solo can be found, in transcription by Andrew White, in Appendix A.

form. These three opening notes are played quite slowly, followed by repetitions at varying levels of speed, some vaguely proportional and some not.

**Example 2.5** Coltrane's solo from "All Blues," mm.1-12 (Copyright © 1994 Andrew's Musical Enterprises, Inc., Transcribed by Andrew White, All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.)



The next chorus, beginning at 5:34, finds Coltrane stating and then developing a scalar figure, first stated in arpeggiated thirds and then the other notes of the scale are incorporated to fill the gaps; the ambitus of this figure is often between A to the a' one octave higher and sometimes from A to d'' an octave and a half higher. The scalar statements, absolutely atomistic in terms of space and phrasing, give way to the oft-cited "sheets of sound". The atomisms do return, for example at 6:14-6:17, but there is a certain intensity now, a linear drive even though no conventional lines are occurring. When Coltrane wishes to play a solid bebop line, as he does at 6:51, it is really only a fragment, a point of historical reference for him as he builds his arsenal of technique and rhetoric (see example 2.6).

**Example 2.6** Coltrane's solo from "All Blues," mm.21-23 (Copyright © 1994 Andrew's Musical Enterprises, Inc., Transcribed by Andrew White, All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.)



The same can be said of the stock blues riff at 8:28 (see example 2.7); it exists on its own, amidst more avant-garde techniques and concerns, attaining atomism by virtue of its historical separation from surrounding elements and becoming “avant-garde” by virtue of this separation and the resulting temporal disjuncture.

**Example 2.7** “All Blues,” m.82 (Copyright © 1994 Andrew’s Musical Enterprises, Inc., Transcribed by Andrew White, All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.)



The solo develops along similar lines, comprising a long-term juxtaposition between more linear elements with blatantly and atomistically repetitive ones, until at 8:07 (see example 2.8). Coltrane begins the exploration of multiphonics that typifies many of the solos executed on this tour.<sup>84</sup> Not content with simply attempting to play two notes simultaneously, Coltrane begins to attempt verticality by alternating his “chordal” dyad with other notes in the mode, the procedure fully emergent at 8:40.

**Example 2.8** “All Blues,” mm. 85-91 (Copyright © 1994 Andrew’s Musical Enterprises, Inc. Transcribed by Andrew White, All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.)



<sup>84</sup>This is a practice of playing a note so that one of its overtones, often a third above or a sixth below the fundamental, also speaks. See Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), see esp., p. 122.

Obsessed with chordal playing for the next several choruses, Coltrane makes obvious attempts to state the tune's changes, sometimes using E and C on the IV, sometimes sticking with scale degrees 2 and 6 in a third-based formation. The return to a "sheets of sound" *modus operandi* by 10:03 may be seen to render the entire multiphonic section as a single atomistic exploration, in turn rendering Coltrane's playing atomistic on a micro and macrocosmic level.

A useful and illustrative comparison can be made with Sonny Stitt's soloistic vocabulary from the same period. It is not, by any means, that Sonny Stitt's playing is lacking in invention or taste as he solos on a version of "All Blues" recorded several nights later on the same tour. It may simply be that Stitt employs a technique of polished cliché, largely indebted to Parker's hugely influential work. He is therefore less able to develop atomistic ideas, when they manifest themselves in his solo, with the same fluency evidenced by Coltrane. His solo on "All Blues" begins with a perfectly timed but stereotypically-based triplet blues riff, emphasizing scale degrees 3 and 1 with a passing glance at 4, his sound brittle and pure, characteristics often associated with Parker's innovative middle 1940s playing. In fact, much of Stitt's solo is built on hard-bop and "soul" blues riffs, making Wynton Kelly's pianism here a perfect foil. However, whereas Coltrane's solo develops, beginning with simplicity and winding through a widening ambitus and a series of intertwined multi-temporal complexities until more than one note at a time is necessary for self-expression, Stitt's solo sports the concision, complexity and tightness often heard in much briefer tracks by Parker and Gillespie. The modality and length of "All Blues" seems to place Stitt outside his element. His solo does not so much develop as continue along a conventionally linear path. The descending B flat inflected arpeggiations that define Stitt's

approach to the IV chord in the first chorus is indicative of his approach. As befits a descendant and protégé of first generation bebop, any non-chord tones are immediately resolved to fit in with the changes, even if an upper structure or tension is invoked in the process. For Stitt, chromaticism, while prevalent, is subservient to the changes, whereas with Coltrane, rhythmic and chromatic invention serve as long-term disrupters, defying the form of the piece in favor of freer harmonic exploration.

### **Atomism in Coltrane's Compositions 1957-1965**

Simultaneously with atomistic developments in Coltrane's playing, his first recorded compositions began to emerge. As Scott Saul observes, these earliest compositions prefigure Coltrane's later works in that the minor third of the pentatonic scale is a major component of head construction, usually cast in the form of a minor blues.<sup>85</sup> These melodies complement Coltrane's atomistic approach to soloing in that their construction is simple and itself atomistic, largely eschewing long melodic phrases in favor of terse statements of three or four notes which are then developed as were the opening bars of Coltrane's solo on "Blackbird."<sup>86</sup> Early works such as "Blue Trane," "Cousin Mary" and the even sparser "India" demonstrate an increasingly deconstructionist view of 12-bar blues form, while "Impressions," atomistic at its root, follows suit in a modal framework.<sup>87</sup> It could even be

---

<sup>85</sup>Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Aint* (Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 256.

<sup>86</sup>Fascinating is that "Brazilia," a composition from this formative period, actually prefigures some of the atomistic procedures of *Ascension*, in that atomistic phrases are followed by long sustains, mostly of an arrhythmic nature. This blend of sustain and rhythmic freedom, only present in "Brazilia"'s head, would come to be a hallmark of Coltrane's later style.

argued that Coltrane was drawn to “My Favorite Things” precisely for its latent atomism, especially apparent at the verse’s beginning and in the coda.

The relationship between “Cousin Mary” and “Blue Trane” is especially striking. Both use the same minor third/major second components, with a perfect fourth ambitus, as primary figurations, and while each might be considered ornamented to flesh out the melody, these “extra” notes do not alter any fundamental similarities gained from accentuation and note length. Equally fascinating is the fact that bars 5 through 8 of “Blue Trane” share a very similar construction with much of “Cousin Mary”’s melodic underpinnings. This could certainly be due in part to the fact that both tunes are cast in traditional twelve-bar blues form, but it seems more likely that the similarities depict, at the very least, a growing fascination with repetition, space and atomism on the structural level.

**Example 2.9** “Blue Trane,” mm. 1-12



**Example 2.10** “Cousin Mary,” mm. 1-12

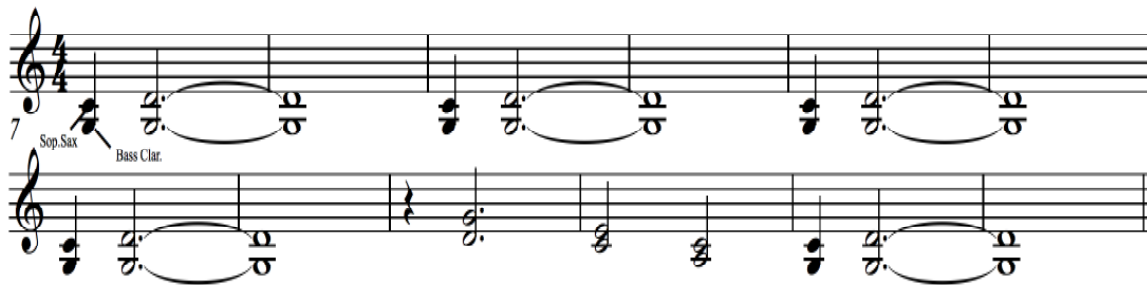


<sup>87</sup>This is a composition based on “So What” by Miles Davis. While the principle motive is always followed by a pendant melodic figure which is more linear, the whole structure is often subject to a quasi-serial change in performance, especially documented on the 1962 European tour recordings, some of which have not seen commercial release.



“India” would present a logical outgrowth of these concerns. Basically comprised of horizontal dyads and triads, both arpeggiated, the melody could not be more sparse, in keeping with other Coltrane heads of the time, such as “Dahomey Dance.” In “India,” space, in the form of silence, plays an equally crucial role in melodic construction, each elemental repetition being absolutely and purposefully apparent, especially when set in contrast to the complexities of the solos (See Example 2.11).

**Example 2.11** “India,” mm. 1-12



As “Cousin Mary” and “Blue Trane” exhibit a fundamental melodic relationship, “India” and “Impressions” coexist in modal territory. “Impressions” combines “India” ’s atomistic melody with some composed material, in the way that “India” ’s melody and solos work in contrast, to support and enhance the bimodal chord structure, while the form remains a very traditional ABA structure. India pushes the modal concept even further. If a twelve-bar blues bass line is inserted into “India,” it becomes a very convincing representative of the form; all the more striking, then, that this is not how it is cast by Coltrane. It is entirely based on G, which serves as a constantly repeated note in the bass line, freeing up the two-bass lineup for its own atomistic explorations.<sup>88</sup>

“My Favorite Things” seems, in retrospect, an obvious choice for Coltrane, far more so in fact than does “Greensleeves,” which was planned to be the follow-up hit single. While

<sup>88</sup>This freedom might be considered a nascent form of what would become an extremely important form of autonomy in rhythm section deployment for Coltrane beginning in 1965.

modal in Coltrane's various renderings, "Greensleeves" melody seems too conventionally linear for suitable repetitious and atomistic treatment, implying many more harmonic changes than the solos actually employ. The melody of "My Favorite Things," on the other hand, even contains some of the same fourth/second construction and pervasive repetition found in "Cousin Mary" and "Blue Trane," albeit with a fifth as ambitus.

While the heads of these pieces do not specifically conform to the multiply-directed linear time model as established by Kramer, they leave room for such procedures in the accompanying Coltrane solos.<sup>89</sup>

The atomistic strain inherent in these compositions culminates in two suites of 1964 and 1965 respectively—*A Love Supreme* and *Meditations*. The first movements of both works are studies in atomistic construction, "Acknowledgement" still in all likelihood being one of the most famous Coltrane compositions precisely for this reason<sup>90</sup> (See Example 2.12). The movement's oft-quoted and overanalyzed four-note motive is treated in a way that strongly prefigures "The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost" from *Meditations*, treated in similar atomistic mutation using what Lewis Porter has aptly dubbed "motivic cells"<sup>91</sup> (see Example 2.13.) Again, these are independent blocks of sound, or smaller monophonic

---

<sup>89</sup>In "Cousin Mary," for example, there are similar scalar flourishes as are heard in "Blackbird" and the second scale degree is emphasized strongly at the solo's opening, as in "We Love to Boogie." The rhythmic displacement of these temporal disrupters is obviously more subtle here, as Coltrane's improvisational voice has become more unified with his compositional approach, but they are undeniably present.

<sup>90</sup>The "Love Supreme" motive, as it is often called, is quoted by artists in jazz, rock and hip-hop, as is the opening piano figure of "My Favorite Things," itself perhaps only slightly less famous.

<sup>91</sup>See Porter's analytical discussion of *A Love Supreme* in *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), especially p. 233.

versions of what Ekkehard Jost labels sound complexes<sup>92</sup> which are then reordered, repeated and transposed.

**Example 2.12** “Acknowledgement,” 1<sup>st</sup> movement of *A Love Supreme*, mm.5-8



**Example 2.13** “The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost,” 1<sup>st</sup> movement of *Meditations*, mm.1-4



Not only similar in atomism but in scalar and motivic construction, “Blue Trane,” “Cousin Mary,” “India,” and “Acknowledgement” and the opening movement of *Meditations* form a unified compositional body that parallels and arguably facilitates Coltrane’s trajectory and development as a soloist, helping to set the stage for the 1966 and 1967 pieces, where many of the simple transpositional procedures discussed above occur on multiple levels and in temporal disunity.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup>Jost, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>93</sup>*Ascension* might be included in this atomistically constructed corpus for its opening figure, resembling *A Love Supreme* so closely, but due to the fact that the melody is treated collectively instead of developed in linear fashion, it seems to fit more comfortably with the 1966-67 compositions.

## 1965: Transition and Discontinuity

1965 was arguably a transitional year for Coltrane and for the Classic Quartet in many respects, and group dynamics and musical relations will be discussed more fully in chapter 3. It seems appropriate, at this point, to posit that a breakdown in intent, if not necessarily in communication, began to manifest itself within the quartet somewhere between May and July, the seminal Sunship sessions of August notwithstanding. A freedom of rhythmic exploration, similar to what had transpired on the Miles Davis 1960 tour, began to be apparent in Coltrane's solos, accompanied by even more atomistic activity. The newly released March recording of "One Down, One Up"<sup>94</sup> from the Halfnote demonstrates new harmonic vigor and invention in a more rhythmically restrained environment, partly reflected in some rhythmic rigidity in Coltrane's delivery, serving as an effective point of stylistic transition. Again, if bebop lines occur, they are detached and consequently divorced from conventional meaning and syntax. The form aids in this process; again, Miles Davis is referenced, as the form of "One down one up" is a simple ABA, like "So What," the difference here involving the choice of modes, perceptible as either a whole-tone scale or as stacked augmented chords. Atomism occurs almost from the outset of Coltrane's solo, especially at 2:14, where C sharp and B are reiterated and flanked by increasingly lengthy pauses. Occasionally, this atomism demonstrates strains of the freed rhythmic activity that would come to typify the solos from the next two years, notably from 2:33-38.

---

<sup>94</sup>This is a radio broadcast, cutting in during Garrison's bass solo, if the announcer is to be believed, some forty minutes into the performance. It has now been released as part of John Coltrane, *One Down, One Up: Live at the Halfnote* (Impulse! IMPDCD 000238002, 2005).

Another phenomenon begins to manifest itself, and this version of “One Down, One Up” exemplifies it perfectly. Despite formal structures being governed increasingly by a type of loosely atonal approach, Coltrane’s solos continue to emphasize a single pitch by repetition and by articulation. This version of “One down, One Up” is as “atonal”, or tonally free, as the classic quartet was ever allowed to become, and yet, Coltrane’s atomistic approach brings repetition of certain key notes that in themselves reference any loosely defined tonal center the tune originally had. The constant inter-registral reiteration of G at and around 7:25 is actually an example of this from a moment in which Coltrane is again “referencing” bebop, and as we have seen, this is also a type of atomism, the reference having no real bearing on the tonality or structure of the tune.<sup>95</sup> At 6:33, the approach is much more typically and unabashedly atomistic, B flat serving as a constant point of repetition over a tonally shifting but rhythmically stable accompaniment.

As the texture goes from a quartet, to trio and then to duo setting, with all dropping out except Elvin Jones and Coltrane, all semblance of the form disappears, leaving room for unhindered exploration. For Coltrane, this usually involves, but is certainly not limited to, explorations surrounding F and associated harmonies, or some iteration or reiteration of augmented chords. The privileging of F and the aforementioned reiterations of B flat harken back, obviously, to the head. It is tempting to see Coltrane’s solo here as a multiply-directed linear narrative whose beginning does not even occur in this performance. Rather, it is manifested in the two versions of the tune recorded earlier that year, one studio and one live. Here also might be the beginning of Coltrane’s vision of his final period as a unified whole.

---

<sup>95</sup>It should be noted that when Tyner does finally pick up on Coltrane’s temporary emphasis of G, Coltrane begins to trill in a manner not at all complicit with Tyner’s figurations. It is possible that instances such as this speak tacitly to the beginning of tensions within the group that was to dissolve by the end of the year. See 8:00-8:05.

Coltrane's soloing from this pivotal period demonstrates another new development in his atomistic approach. Especially from May and beyond, every solo begins to deviate so much from group rhythm that even when the solo is superficially linear, the lines are devoid of conventional meaning in traditional jazz rhetoric. An embryonic version of this approach can be heard at the very opening of "Acknowledgement," where a quartal arpeggio, based around B, is stated and reiterated, its internal properties restated multiple times in a rhythmically free fashion but without pause, creating a kind of linear atomism.

The version of "My Favorite Things" recorded in July of 1965 at the Newport Jazz Festival is a more developed case in point. Coltrane's solo is largely linear in surface construction, but it consists, for the most part, of trills on notes in the E-minor scale, especially prevalent from 8:23. If divorced of the trills and imbued with Coltrane's penchant for spaces between phrases, these notes would present atomistic structures similar to those found in earlier solos. It can also be argued that here, the trill itself becomes an atomistic device, being stated, altered, restated and disseminated over increasingly wide intervals. A bit further into the solo, beginning at 9:07, a trilled B is sustained, while other notes are invoked, again through use of the trill, and these events occur in similarly serial fashion. Again, the lack of space denotes linearity, but this linearity follows neither the song's inherent rhythm nor does it always conform to the changes, many unpitched sounds being interspersed with the E-minor/major related material.

It is worth considering the sources of Coltrane's radical approach to what I will call atomistic linearity in some detail. They are two-fold, as two musicians - Albert Ayler and Pharaoh Sanders - seem to have had the most readily perceivable influence on Coltrane in his final years.

## Saxophone Influences on Late Coltrane

Given Coltrane's originality of approach, especially but not exclusively in this period of his development, it is a temptation worth thwarting to place him in a stylistic vacuum. As we have already seen, this is far from the truth. In the previously cited 1960 Stockholm interview, when Coltrane is asked about some of his formative influences on tenor, the first name he mentions is Sonny Rollins, demonstrating a willingness to acknowledge current and historically important players equally. It is no surprise, then, to find Coltrane actively listening amidst the striking and long reverberating elements that have come to be known as New York's "New Thing." There is no denying Ornette Coleman's effect on jazz<sup>96</sup> but Coltrane is indebted even more strongly to those that pursued the implications of Coleman's diverse output even further. Of these, Albert Ayler deserves more recognition than he has so far received for a readily discernable influence on Coltrane's "late" sound. As has been stated above, it is not in reference to note choice that Ayler's influence is most notably manifested. It has more to do with the treatment of an individual note, or multiphonic tone, or sound, and in this, Ayler had a style all his own. Given the New Orleans march topoi and folk-derived melodies with which his music is replete,<sup>97</sup> it makes sense that vibrato would mirror that found in traditional dixieland of the 1920s, notably in King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band and in the Hot Fives and Hot Sevens, all of these projects including the young Louis Armstrong. Such seminal recordings are typified by wide and almost constant vibrato, so

---

<sup>96</sup>Coleman loosened, but did not eradicate, the notion of harmony and of harmonic development in jazz, and it seems reasonable to suggest that it is ultimately the dialectic engendered by this development, rather than a dogmatic adherence to any one stage or aspect of the emergent freedom it offered, that had the longest lasting effect on the music as a whole.

<sup>97</sup>"Truth is Marching In" will demonstrate these phenomena convincingly.

invasive that it often goes some way toward obscuring its fundamental pitch. Additionally, notes are often connected by slides and smears, these devices being given the terms “portamento” and “glissando” in classical performance practice. These mannerisms were not merely affectations associated with Albert’s playing, as they also are a hallmark of the trumpet work of his brother Donald, with whom he often collaborated.

Coltrane adopted these approaches in miniature. The second half of 1965 and the succeeding years saw a general widening and deepening in his vibrato, and while it never achieved the proportion and magnitude associated with Ayler, it is a concession to Ayler’s influence that cannot be overstated. When notes are accentuated in Coltrane’s later solos, they are even more readily identifiable given the warmer and richer tone that emerged as a result of more vibrato. It might also be argued that Coltrane’s use of trills from the period was a transmogrification of Ayler’s penchant for what might loosely be called ornamentation, but which really has no satisfactory term associated with it, especially when it becomes such a prominent aspect of the soloistic dialectic of linearity and atomism fostered in this period.

Equally important is the early work of Pharaoh Sanders, who had already cut his first solo record for ESP by the time he began to work with Coltrane in mid 1965. He proves that he is perfectly capable of playing over changes, but in the years he was employed by Coltrane, this was not a concern, and it was not for any such ability that he was brought into the quintet. Sanders’ aesthetic might be closely compared to human speech, a trait he had in common with reedsman and fellow Coltrane alumnus Eric Dolphy. In fact, Sanders may be seen to be a replacement for Dolphy, picking up where the latter left off upon his premature death in 1964. Both players are essentially linear players; while the lines produced by Dolphy are disjunct, their contour and the way in which repetition is employed are as much



influenced by bebop as by “free” jazz. While Sanders eschews bebop altogether, his playing consists largely of long moans, screams and stuttered lines where micro-pauses abound throughout; basically, his playing mirrors the length of his breaths, which are varied but contain a plethora of notes and microtones. The opening of Sanders’ solo on “The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost” is a prime example of his aesthetic of this period.<sup>98</sup> It is untranscribable in any conventional method, but there are occasionally discernable notes present. It begins with short squawks which might be considered atomistic only in the sense of a Miles Davis melody; with Sanders, no resolution takes place, as there is no tonal/atonal dialectic. Pure unadulterated human expression is the *modus operandi* of the solo, and the breath-phrases increase in length as the solo progresses. If notes occur, as they do in occasional twos and threes, they bear no resemblance to their surroundings.<sup>99</sup>

### **Atomism in Coltrane’s Late Solos**

Both of these markedly individual stylistic approaches exerted a profound influence on Coltrane, and they can be heard in tandem, usually in quick and repeated succession, throughout every solo of the period under discussion here. This newly and atomistically independent approach to linearity would be the defining element that would shape the solos of Coltrane’s final period. In essence, these solos are shaped by all that has come before—the often disjunct linearity of bebop coupled with the increased employment of atomistic

---

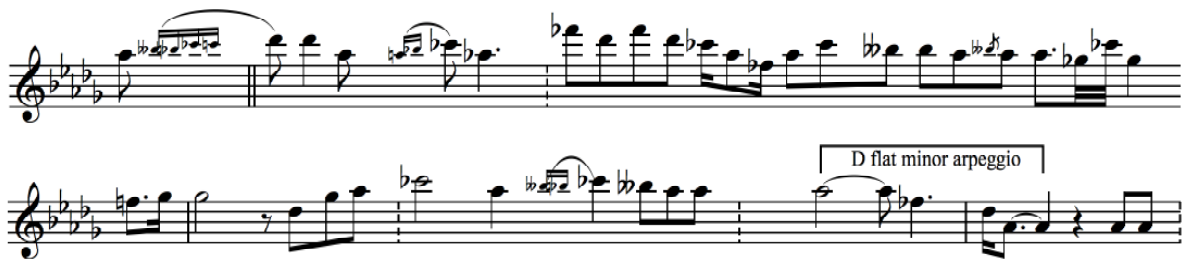
<sup>98</sup>Solo is not really the proper appellation here, as one “solo” fades into and out of the others, forming a kind of collective gestalt that would permeate the soloist/rhythm section boundaries in all of Coltrane’s last works.

<sup>99</sup>This is especially true on the more frenetic Sanders solos. When he is playing more reflectively, fragments of the head and related ideas are pursued, but the procedure is not consistent throughout the two years in consideration, as atomism is in Trane’s solos.

motivic development—but these solos are seamless constructions, blurring the edges of atomism and linearity to form a consistent approach that would complement the modal/atonal nature of his final compositions.

“Ogunde,” recorded in early 1967, presents in microcosm Coltrane’s newly reintegrated approach to soloing.<sup>100</sup> There are three statements of what might, at best, be termed a very loose but still identifiable melody, based as much on intervallic exploration as on a definitely discernable melodic line. Each head statement is followed by a solo break, the first much longer than the second. Self-consciously referential from the opening bars, the aesthetic from “Acknowledgement” is palpable in the piece’s initial quartal explorations.<sup>101</sup> The modal treatment of D flat minor provides a temporary but unmistakable center here, and as the music is not pulse-based—see the following chapter for a discussion of rhythmic concerns—there is ample room for temporal exploration via both pitch and rhythm. Indeed, the first 9 seconds of Coltrane’s very loose statement of the melody focus primarily on scale degree 5, giving the entire gesture a feeling of impending closure.

**Example 2.14** Coltrane’s Solo from “Ogunde,” (Copyright © 1977 Andrew’s Musical Enterprises, Inc., Transcribed by Andrew White, All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.)



<sup>100</sup>The solo from the studio version of “Ogunde” can be found, in transcription by Andrew White, in Appendix A.

<sup>101</sup>Other tracks on *Expression* evoke this earlier work even more directly, “Offering” being the most revelatory example but “To Be” also employing very similar quartal harmonic material in its opening moments.

The reiteration of A flat and the opening ascending flourish to D flat further enhance what might, in normal jazz rhetoric, signal an oncoming conclusion. The ending sounds almost complete at 1:51, where A flat is again stated and extended, followed by a descending D flat minor arpeggio, employing slightly decreased dynamics and an even slighter *ritardando*. However, the next several seconds bring a series of widening arcs of linear improvisation, all leading back to or almost reaching A flat. Again, while linearity is certainly prominent, accentuation and repetition often lead to atomistic perception, as exemplified by the whole tone fragment from 0:45 to 0:46. At 1:09, a four-note “atom” involving permutations of D flat, E flat, G flat and A is clearly and spaciously audible, but the procedure had certainly been prefigured with the two-note figurations at 1:06 and finally comes to a temporary resolution on D flat at 1:19.

None of the markers associated with generic jazz styles—song or blues form, for example—is employed to prepare the second head statement at 1:25; Coltrane’s previous activity ends on an inconclusive G, and the third melodic statement, at 2:34, simply grows out of the quartal explorations that precede it. This fairly cavalier approach to head placement is in exact opposition to more traditional jazz, where the head might be stated twice, solos ensue, and the out-chorus occurs. However, even more perplexing is Coltrane’s approach to rhythm. While not directly proportional, sudden juxtapositions of long and short notes complement the previously-discussed shifts in goal attainment and cadential thwarting. This aspect of Coltrane’s multiplied-directed linear approach to soloing is most evident in “Ogunde”’s opening measures, where F flat and D flat are noticeably faster than many of the notes surrounding them, pulling against any established sense of a single linear narrative. The solo on the studio version ends, in fact, inconclusively and quietly, Coltrane simply and

quite softly stopping the solo mid-phrase, as if the ending had already occurred at some previous point.

A live version of “Ogunde,” recorded the following April, presents these developments on a grand scale. Where the studio version is restrained, almost contemplative, this recording is long, bold, confrontational and blaringly intense.<sup>102</sup> Here however, after its first faithful statement, the melody functions more as a point of temporal reference, making brief and disjointed appearances throughout Coltrane’s long solo. What sounds as if it will be a second melodic statement occurs at 1:40, but it is truncated, and by 1:51, Coltrane is beginning another improvisation. The most obvious of the smaller fragmentations occurs at 16:40, when Coltrane begins his lengthiest solo. Here again, and this time even more obviously, miniscule fragments of the melody’s opening notes are played unceremoniously, almost in tempo, amidst the frenetic swarm of notes that characterize this particular version’s solos. At 17:40, for example, the opening fourth is played at an increased tempo, compared to its surroundings, but reversed; at 18:21, the opening fourth is played only once and very quickly, seamlessly integrated into the soloistic fabric. At 18:30, an A is sounded repeatedly, and these declamations are longer than the surrounding notes, giving the false impression that the melody is about to be stated a half step higher. Telling also is the fact that the highest recognizable note played by Coltrane is an A Flat (20:27). As with the opening fourth, A flat has also become a point of multiply-directed reference.

These deliberate insertions may be one of the most blatant examples of multiply-directed linear time in Coltrane’s late music in that they derail momentarily any developing sense of linearity while repeatedly drawing listener focus back to the opening of the piece. At first, toward the beginning of the solo, these are quite obviously intervallic explorations—

---

<sup>102</sup>This is due, to a degree, to the amateur recording, made by a friend of Coltrane but at times barely listenable.

sometimes doubled and halved—of the piece’s opening fourth. However, as the solo becomes more harmonically complex, these recognizable bursts act almost as another layer, providing an orchestral effect as far as possible with a monophonic instrument. These are not multiphonic assertions, as can be heard in the previously discussed documentation of Miles Davis’ 1960 tour; rather, they are actually linear in that there is no space between notes, which often occur at lightning speed. However, the approach is atomistic in that referential ideas are plainly insertions, often without development, and the ensuing motivic condensation demands rigorous listening for cues on the parts of audience and players. Indeed, the solo might be judged to be employing similar procedures, though exponentially refined and augmented, to that of the 1955 Davis version of “Blackbird”.

As the solo nears its conclusion, larger fragments of the head occur, the first at 25:25, but again, as in the studio version, providing a false sense of closure. Here, this happens twice, each partial melodic statement being followed by more soloistic exploration. As with the studio version, the melodic fragments merge seamlessly with the solo, even more convincingly in this version. Here again, the ending is inconclusive, not because Coltrane stops midstream but because there is never a full melodic statement, only larger and more defined references made to the melody and its structural components, it is as if the listener must be content with the fact that a fairly complete statement has already occurred long before, inverting “Ogunde”’s structure as was the case with the studio version.

Such inconclusive endings are common in this period. While the heads are constructed in a very loose ABA form, they are often not repeated as the tune draws to a close. “Mars” from *Interstellar Space* finds Coltrane simply stopping, leaving the rest of the

track to be completed by Rashied Ali.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Coltrane's final gestures are entirely unrelated to the head's tonal center, E-flat. In fact, he ends up skirting around E, but in the horn's lower register. A similar phenomenon occurs in the version of "My Favorite Things" recorded at the Olatunji center in April 1967. An extremely high-energy rendering, the melody is only referenced once, for about a bar, with enough vibrato to obscure the reference. The solos follow, and the melody never returns, not even in referential form. It is as if the established tonal center, itself only referenced occasionally and in passing, is supposed to be sufficient reminder, leaving the maximum amount of freedom for the soloist/rhythm section improvisatory dialectic.

Unity in the face of diversity can be perceived on yet another level in Coltrane's final works, one whose implications will be more fully explored in Chapter 4. Unity became increasingly and demonstrably important to Coltrane, as the *Love Supreme* liner notes and accompanying poem attest.<sup>104</sup> Beyond this, the liner notes for *Meditations* speak of the album as an extension of *A Love Supreme*.<sup>105</sup> While there may have been a commercial aspect to the statement, the truth is probably more ideological than pragmatic. We have already observed that certain pitches recur in Coltrane's solos, forming multiply-directed

---

<sup>103</sup> Ali told me, in the October 4<sup>th</sup> 2005 interview cited above, that Coltrane gave him no instructions whatsoever regarding the pieces on *Interstellar Space*. According to him, when Ali asked about tempo, form and length, Coltrane would simply say "Don't worry, follow me. I'll just start with some bells, and we'll go from there."

<sup>104</sup> In his accompanying poem, Coltrane portrays unity as follows:  
 "Words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts,  
 fears and emotions - time - all related . . .  
 all made from one ... all made in one. Blessed be His name." See John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme* (Impulse! 314 589 945-2 Deluxe Edition, 2002).

<sup>105</sup> Nat Hentoff writes: "I asked John Coltrane to what extent this album was an extension of his incantatory *A Love Supreme* (originally Impulse AS-77). Both albums obviously focus on Coltrane's religious concerns. I use the word "religious" not in any sectarian sense, but rather in the sense that Coltrane's persistent searching in music is simultaneously a searching for meaning in the world and for his place in the world." See John Coltrane, *Meditations* (Impulse! IMPD-199, 1966).

linear constructions out of the juxtaposition of atomistic fragments. In the final years of his creativity, motives took on another meaning for Coltrane, one that may have had long-term implications for his body of work had he lived to carry them to fruition. One might posit that Coltrane was creating a universe of connected musical ideas, bringing together all phases of his soloistic language in an increasingly structured framework.

We have already seen the relationship between Coltrane's early pentatonic constructions, like "Cousin Mary," or "Blue Trane" and the opening movement of "A Love Supreme." While similar constructions are also present in "Dahomey Dance" and "India," we cannot be sure that Coltrane was specifically referencing those earlier compositions, even though matters of geography and spirituality were certainly unifying factors. We have certainly noted the way in which geographical themes unified his composition titles, transitioning gradually to a more universal bent to the titles of his final two years, all of which suggests that unity is of increasing importance to Coltrane. However, in the last two years of his life, such references became even more prominent; it is as if Coltrane was gathering his compositional forces, aiming to produce, in musical terms, the unity to which the Love Supreme poem alludes with such conviction.

In "Offering," released on *Expression*, the final album Coltrane prepared for release, the very opening moments are absolutely reminiscent of "Acknowledgment"'s first bars. The first three seconds, now legendary, present stacked fourths in the key of B, played with only the slightest suggestion of a pulse, which soon disappears. The opening of "Offering" is basically identical, especially where the saxophone line is concerned. The stacked fourths, four notes totaling an octave, are played in exactly the same series of three quick notes and

one long held note, and the pitch content is the same.<sup>106</sup> If the following measures of each piece are analyzed, they also reveal striking similarities, although they are not identical. Yet, it seems obvious that a definite reference is being made, one that goes beyond structural speculation, as with the earlier material, into the realm of quotation.

The accompaniment is also strikingly similar. Lacking only the gong, which is replaced with Ali's crystalline cymbal work, the invocative piano chord resembles that which opens *A Love Supreme*. The major difference lies in a lower-register emphasis on D instead of B, as is present in the older work.

Relatedly, many compositions dating from late 1964 through late 1965 worked along similarly motivic lines. It is not simply that atoms were in play in the tunes themselves, as had been the case with earlier compositions, but that similarly derived motives informed compositions as seemingly diverse as "One Down, One Up," "Evolution," and the as-yet unreleased "Creation." The motives are not identical, but their structures and development implies an increasing awareness of unity that goes beyond mode, topos or geographical region. They use scalar or chordal ascents and descents, are usually five to seven notes in length, and do not conform to any specifically "Western" harmony. On one level, Coltrane had been playing with similarly simple melodic ideas since the "Blue Trane" period, but in this transitional style, the transpositions could be said to possess a serial quality.

"Evolution," discussed below, stands as a prime example of this fluidly transitional approach, one that was gradually beginning to unify Coltrane's compositions on a very fundamental level. Recorded in Seattle on September 30, 1965, it finds the classic quartet itself in a state of flux. Saxophonist Pharoah Sanders had been added to the lineup, and he would remain with Coltrane until the end of his life. For the Seattle concert and an ensuing

---

<sup>106</sup>It should also be noted that the rhythm section behaves very similarly to that on *A Love Supreme*.



West Coast tour, multi-instrumentalist and Association for the Advancement of Creative Music cofounder Donald Raphael Garrett was asked to join the group, lending his unique bass sound and orientalisms resulting from his homemade instruments.<sup>107</sup> The music grew louder, each piece more superficially indistinguishable from another, and the sound was no easier to take for several of the musicians involved.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, the musical motives were becoming smaller, less overtly linear, and the length of their statements much more variable.

“Evolution” embodies all the innovations of the period between *A Love Supreme* and *Meditations*. It extends “Acknowledgement”’s motivic innovations by eliminating the modal backing of the rhythm section and emancipating the motive. The main motive of “Evolution” is most concretely represented at 2:29. However, hints of the melody to come begin even before the first full statement. Toward the end of a quietly chamber-like texture comprising bass clarinet, two tenor saxophones and bass, fragments of what would become the main melodic motive can be heard at 2:15, presumably played by Sanders. It is then expressed in augmentation, prefiguring the fluidity of Coltrane’s treatment.

Equally fascinating, we hear something very similar to the shofar figures<sup>109</sup> that would open *Meditations*, recorded almost two months later in a similar sextet formation.<sup>110</sup> The melody is then presented, by Coltrane, in at least four full transpositions, the last occurring at 3:04; all end with the drop of a fifth, rendering them similar to both

---

<sup>107</sup>Interview with Kali Z. Fasteau, June 26, 2007.

<sup>108</sup>Elvin Jones’ displeasure with the musical direction Coltrane was then taking is well documented. See the prologue of Simon Weil, “Circling OM”: <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=14286> (Accessed 12-09-2007)

<sup>109</sup>The shofar is the ram’s horn blown in temple on the Jewish New Year, or Rosh Hashanah. The traditional formulae it produces, echoing the Cantor’s exhortations, usually involve production of fifths.

<sup>110</sup>This time, Rashied Ali was the sixth man, replacing Garrett, who retreated after the Seattle concerts. He stated that the experience exhausted him. (Kali Z. Fasteau interview, *op. cit.*)

“Acknowledgement” and to the opening of *Meditations*. The motives are irregular in length, prefiguring the rhythmic freedom that would come to pervade Coltrane’s final works. There is even an oblique reference to *A Love Supreme* at 3:11, consisting of the stacked fourths so commonly associated with that work, except that the first note is missing. At the track’s conclusion, some 35 minutes later, the motivic material returns, this time in rhythm to coexist as well as possible with Elvin Jones’ swing-influenced drumming.

I have presented the descending scalar figures as the main motivic ideas. However, there is also a series of improvisatory fourths, presented with rapid-fire precision, that occur just before the “melody” is stated. Interestingly enough, they recur at piece’s end, just as the opening fourth-based material concludes “Psalm” from *A Love Supreme*. Perhaps, this means that *A Love Supreme* is being referenced in terms of form as well as melodic content. It could also demonstrate a more elaborate plan for “Evolution” than has previously been elucidated, rendering it a loose binary rather than a simple series of motives transposed “on the fly.” However, the fourths have no real bearing to any tonal center established by the recurrent motivic material; in fact, the fourths effectively dispel any sense of a tonal center.

Thus, Coltrane is beginning to reference forward and backward simultaneously, bringing his music into a consciously unified corpus. Even more striking however, and more definitive in terms of a unified vision, is the way in which a portion of “The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost” is incorporated into “Leo.” “Father” originally from *Meditations*, which was recorded in 1965, employs what might be described as a folk-tune motive, consisting of an arpeggiated first-inversion triad with an added second. Basically emphasizing the first three notes of a major scale with the last repeated, the atomistic figure is immediately recognizable. In July of 1966, on the quintet’s only tour of Japan, Coltrane

begins a version of “Leo” with the familiar *Meditations* opening, much to the delight of the Japanese audience. It is worth noting that Pharoah Sanders actually plays the open fifths, as he does in the 1965 official recording for Impulse!, and the piano also takes a similar role to that in the 1965 version.

It is not clear when the two pieces merged in this way, but in November of the same year, in a radio broadcast from Temple University in Philadelphia, Coltrane also incorporates the line from *Meditations* into “Leo”, this time without the associated rhythm section activity. Also, the fragment shows up toward the end of “Leo,” whereas it is placed squarely at the beginning in Japan.<sup>111</sup> Apparently, though the idea of incorporating one composition into another had occurred to Coltrane by August of 1966, he had not quite worked out the particulars, at least where “Leo” is concerned. However, it does make clear that he began to see his compositions as fluid, able to be melded into one another, atomistic motives being the prime transformative vehicle. As titles merged, and as sociopolitical, geographical and spiritual concepts melded to form a unified vision, music was beginning to follow suit. The question can be raised: Did Coltrane eventually come to view his entire output as a manifestation of multiply-directed linear time?

Whatever vision Coltrane was fostering privately, there is no question that the sound achieved by the final quintet’s rhythm section is as important to the music as are Coltrane’s solos, and no complete understanding of these works can be gained without thorough study of the geographical and multi-rhythmic components of which that rhythm section and its aesthetic consisted.

---

<sup>111</sup>In fact, while the reference to *Meditations* is most prominent at the beginning of the Japan version of “Leo,” it does appear at the end as well, but in such a modified form as to be almost unrecognizable. Tempi and articulations disguise it but do not completely obscure it.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RHYTHM SECTION LAMINARITY**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 1 of the present study begins with a quotation from Coltrane to McCoy Tyner concerning keeping “a thing happening all through.” While referring specifically to “Dearly Beloved,” it seems a seminal moment, both insightfully explanatory and prophetically evocative. There, his own soloing remained unaddressed; rather, Coltrane was simultaneously establishing the mood of the piece and outlining the procedure by which the particular soundscape he imagined was to be executed. Hindsight reveals that an innovative mode of expression was nascent in the form of a radical deployment of the standard forces that comprise a jazz rhythm section; this new approach constitutes the other half of the “double-time” listener experience in Coltrane’s last works, which Kramer labels non-linear time, and the present chapter is devoted to the development, evolution and pursuance of that phenomenon. First, various geographical and cultural concerns, including some of the music and art with which Coltrane and his fellow musicians may have been familiar, will be analyzed for influence on Coltrane’s 1950s and early 1960s work. Second, the classic quartet’s rhythm section will be shown to provide a glimpse into the rhythmic freedom to come, and the year 1965, the year of transition, will be given special attention. Finally, several pieces recorded during Coltrane’s final two years will be analyzed to show the outcome of the experiment, a kind of pan-global minimalism represented by innovations in

pitch, rhythm and timbre whose symbiotic relationship will be shown to be essential to the rhythm section's aesthetic.

### External Musical Influences

While Coltrane always expressed an interest in world music, notably in the work of Ravi Shankar, his earliest studies in the music of other cultures are very difficult to date. He speaks of having all the Shankar records in early 1960s interviews, but multiple references to the music of Carlos Salzedo have also come to light.<sup>112</sup> We also know that in 1961, Coltrane performed along with a group led by Nigerian drummer Babatunde Olatunji, whose *Drums of Passion* album had been recorded for Columbia in 1959 and released the following year.<sup>113</sup> Simultaneously, he was recording compositions with titles such as “Africa” for Impulse! and “Ole” for Atlantic.<sup>114</sup>

Clearly then, Coltrane had been developing interests in geographically diverse music much earlier than they were overtly manifest in his recordings, no one musical system taking precedent over another. Rather, it is evident now that while Coltrane's interest in playing was clearly rooted in the jazz in which he immersed himself as a young adult, he was always looking beyond it, attempting a slow but certain expansion of the music until even the term

---

<sup>112</sup>A newly rediscovered interview from the Coltrane quintet's summer 1966 tour of Japan, date uncertain but probably in mid July, makes the Salzedo connection abundantly clear. There, Coltrane designates French harp virtuoso Carlos Salzedo (1885-1961) as one of his three favorite musicians. Coltrane's love of the harp has long been documented, and it seems reasonable to assume that he respected Salzedo's desire to liberate the harp from its subservient role in Western classical music.

<sup>113</sup>*Drums of Passion* has been re-released on numerous occasions, most recently in an expanded version (Legacy SKCD66011, 2002)

<sup>114</sup>For a concise summation of Coltrane's world music influences, see Porter, *op cit.*, pp. 209-214. Porter quotes Coltrane as having listened to various records of African music and incorporating “native” elements into his compositions, but very little has come to light concerning which records he actually heard.

gave him some discomfort.<sup>115</sup> Of prime importance is that none of the “world” music evoked in Coltrane’s performances and recordings is strictly relevant to any one culture, as his study of world music did not transcend the superficial. Rather, it is a gestalt, a rhetorical platform on which Coltrane would eventually build music that exists outside but tangentially connected to any one geographical or cultural tradition.

The music itself makes the case that, despite the geographical regions depicted in Coltrane’s titles, his real interest lay in what he imagined to be transcultural similarities and in how he could use these to expand his musical conceptions. It seems plausible, in retrospect, that the lynchpin for Coltrane’s earliest documented explorations of pan-global musical issues came from his stint with Miles Davis’ group. If Monk gave Coltrane essential experience in the fundamentals of composition, Davis certainly provided similar insight into musical freedom and expansion. We have already seen that during the 1960 European tour in support of *Kind of Blue*, Coltrane was allowed to experiment in whatever way he saw fit even if it meant public and critical disapproval.

The *Kind of Blue* sessions also proved pivotal regarding Coltrane’s general approach to rhythm section deployment. While Miles was not really given over to scholarly or spiritual pretension, Bill Evans, the pianist on most of the tracks, clearly studied what were then, in all probability, considered “exotic” art forms,<sup>116</sup> as he references Japanese art in the

---

<sup>115</sup> Again, the 1966 Japan interview clarifies Coltrane’s distaste for the term “jazz,” as he refers to his music as “classical” music. Further evidence can be found in the August 1966 interview with Frank Kofsky. See Kofsky, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

<sup>116</sup> I use the term “exotic” with all the tacit but undeniable stereotypes of the late 1950s; it is an attempt, on my part, to imagine how exploratory and intellectually adventurous Northeastern Blacks, or anyone familiar with foreign cultures through their art, attempted to view those cultures long before the instantaneous modes of transmission and reception so prevalent today.

liner notes.<sup>117</sup> While what emerged from those sessions was not necessarily Japanese on a conscious level, that country's art was certainly an acknowledged ingredient, and the modal approach employed a level of staticity that would prove prophetic, especially on the Evans/Davis-penned "Flamenco Sketches," where the harmony is obviously indebted to Evans' own "Peace Piece." This approach fit very well with the compositional concerns that Coltrane had been exploring since 1957, notably the sparse quasi-modal compositions like "Blue Trane" and "Cousin Mary" referenced in Chapter 2. It should be reiterated here that the 1960 tour, discussed earlier in the context of soloistic development, also demonstrates Coltrane's eagerness to push beyond the roles he inherited regarding how to proceed in relation to the rhythm section. As we have seen, his playing does not follow the swung eighth note patterns associated with bebop, this innovative trait honed in the earliest days of his Davis tenure and brought to a level of mastery on the 1960 tour. The Miles connection proves, therefore, to be important on several levels where Coltrane's late music is concerned, and the superficially passive but advantageously permissive mentoring role that Miles adopted towards Coltrane can not be overemphasized.

Similarly influenced by Coltrane's vision of Africa, and less explored in Coltrane scholarship, are the sessions cut for Savoy by trumpeter Wilbur Harden, notably that of June 24, 1958. A quick glance at the track titles put to tape that day, including "Gold Coast" and "Dial Africa" shows at least a cursory interest in all things pan-African, perhaps stemming from the independence revolutions then brewing or actualizing on the continent in question. A closer look at these tracks also demonstrates a burgeoning interest in rhythms, percussion

---

<sup>117</sup>Bill Evans, "Improvisation in Jazz," from the original LP liner notes to *Kind of Blue* as found in Miles Davis and John Coltrane, *The Complete Columbia Recordings 1955-1961* (Sony 65833, 2000).

timbres and chord clusters that seem, in retrospect, to be some of Coltrane's earliest forays into the pan-globalism that would be one constituent element of his later work.

"Dial Africa" is really nothing more than a twelve-bar blues. As Loren Schoenberg points out in his insightful notes, Africa is certainly being dialed from Manhattan via mid 1950s Miles Davis.<sup>118</sup> However, Arthur Taylor's drum work, especially in the tune's modal intro and repetitive head, eschews the normal trap-set patterns associated with jazz for soft rolled tom-tom and cymbal crescendos, most likely using mallets instead of sticks. (Example 3.1, "Dial Africa," 0:00-0:47.) The results are vaguely Eastern, the tom-toms evoking Africa in a way that obviously has very little to do with Africa.

"Gold Coast" takes the "exotic" imagery even further, beginning with a call and response figuration on a variant of the harmonic minor scale. After this figuration is played both solo and heterophonically, in octaves, the percussion enters in what the musicians imagined to be an African topos, employing what is probably meant to simulate stereotypically African percussion. (Example 3.2, "Gold Coast," 0:00-0:40.) The changes, presented in clusters, give Coltrane freedom to create one of the most complex and "free" solos of the period, replete with diminished implications and intense scalar runs.

Obviously, similar concerns were being addressed outside of jazz's sphere of influence. Early minimalism is even more directly related to the staticity and occasionally high-volume energy Coltrane's final rhythm section would employ; it is worth exploring, albeit briefly, the kind of minimalism that Coltrane might have been hearing when La Monte Young and Terry Riley migrated from California in the late 1950s. If a classical model need be established as a parallel to the sound achieved by the rhythm section of Coltrane's final

---

<sup>118</sup>See Loren Schoenberg, "Wilbur Harden and John Coltrane," from John Coltrane, *The Complete Savoy Sessions* (Savoy Jazz 92858-2, 1999), p.12.



years, the minimalism of early 1960s New York, notably of the Dream Syndicate, is a suitably illustrative example.<sup>119</sup> If Coltrane himself was not aware of the minimalists and their similarly expansionist and deconstructionist sociopolitical aspirations,<sup>120</sup> they were certainly aware of him. La Monte Young has cited Coltrane's modal period as a primary influence on his own playing, and some constructive comparisons can be made concerning the arhythmicity of Angus MacLise's percussion work with the Theater of Eternal Music and the style ultimately adopted by Rashied Ali.<sup>121</sup> We have already seen that Coltrane's November 1961 Village Vanguard sessions presented a logical extension of modal jazz as practiced by Miles Davis, and it should be noted that at the end of 1961, the Dream Syndicate was formulating its own collective aesthetic, the two events negating clear causality in favor

---

<sup>119</sup>In 1962, La Monte Young, Tony Conrad, John Cale, Angus MacLise and Marian Zazeela founded the Theater of Eternal Music, an amplified drone-based aggregate whose work also employed just intonation. The group was dubbed The Dream Syndicate by Cale. Young was a soprano saxophone player deeply influenced by Coltrane among others. See the liner notes to Tony Conrad, *Early Minimalism, Volume 1* (Table of the Elements, TOE 033CD, 1997).

<sup>120</sup>As Conrad has attested with frequency and vehemence, the music was meant to be a collective effort, part of the reason for an eventual split between Conrad and Young. He lists seven relevant points of contention in an interview conducted in 2000: "1. The "Theater of Eternal Music" ("TEM") of 1964 was collaboratively founded - and was so named to deny the Eurocentric historical/progressive teleology then represented by the designation, composer. 2. Young is suppressing the recordings of "TEM," which do not flatter him. He has specifically denied access by members of the collaboration (Tony Conrad, John Cale) to the collection of recordings for 25 years. Two members are already dead (MacLise, Jennings). 3. Young himself now ignorantly insists on the artistic demolition of this body of work by claiming that it is a series of "compositions" (by him). 4. The "TEM" introduced an influential preoccupation with just intonation. "TEM" was anti-rationalist and non-electronic, but did focus on perceptual and conceptual aspects of small intervals. Young himself misunderstands this development as neo-Pythagorean rationalism (after the scientific idealism of Helmholtz). 5. Each "TEM" member had an interest in carefully structured improvisation and long durations. Young's early Eurocentric compositional innovation - the use of long notes - appears in his *String Trio*. However, nowhere do his compositions show "TEM"'s crucial understanding that long durations are small intervals. 6. Young's neo-Futurist ("Fluxus") work aside, his Orientalism and romanticized personality-cult mark him among the most regressive of contemporary artists. His conservative gutting of "TEM" has paid off (for him) in a multimillion petro-dollar bonanza, which he uses to perpetuate his exploitative and artistically mindless enterprise. 7. Money paid to Young is valuable resources wasted on ignorance, false self-representation, service to Young's ego at others' expense, and a colonial image of American cultural expression. YOUNG - OUT OF BUFFALO NOW!", see <http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/conrad.html> (accessed Mar.22, 2008)

<sup>121</sup>We now have many recorded examples of MacLise's playing, even a low-quality recording of the Dream Syndicate in action. See *Inside the Dream Syndicate, Volume 1: Day of Niagara 1965* (Table of the Elements TOE 74CD, 2000). The polyrhythmicity inherent in his style seems very much akin to what Coltrane labeled "Multidirectionality" in Ali's work. .

of convergent paths of exploration based on even more diverse influences, some of which may have resulted simply from a confluence of like-minded artists on a particular geographic area.

For Coltrane, geographical location was paramount. New York had brought him into contact with musicians whose experience was as geographically broad as their penchant for innovation and grasp of tradition were formidable. According to trumpeter and veteran composer Bill Dixon, composer/improviser George Russell and early minimalist composer La Monte Young were very close in the late 1950s, sharing and discussing many musical finds as they were purchased in local record shops.<sup>122</sup> Dixon remembers having similar discussions with Coltrane, and he is fairly certain that Coltrane did in fact meet Young, at whose loft he might have heard Young on soprano saxophone with a young Tony Conrad on *tablas*.<sup>123</sup>

It is difficult to know exactly what the newly emergent music from that confluence of musicians sounded like, but it seems safe to say that it was Eastern in influence, given all of the participants' interest in all things related to India. If the later drumming of Angus MacLise is any indication of a performance tradition, tempo may not even have been a primary concern, as MacLise's was fairly far afield of regular.<sup>124</sup> It is possible, then, even if Coltrane did not hear it directly, that the "minimalist" or "eternal" music that was being played in one of its earliest incarnations combined elements of "pulsed" and non-pulsed

---

<sup>122</sup>Bill Dixon, phone interview conducted by Marc Medwin, March 9, 2007.

<sup>123</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>124</sup>This is documented on several releases on Quakebasket and Table of the Elements. Most notably, MacLise can be heard playing on the soundtrack to Ira Cohen's *Invasion of Thunderbolt Pagoda*, now available on DVD. See Ira Cohen, *Invasion of Thunderbolt Pagoda* (Arthur 001DVD, 2006).

minimalism to form something very close in spirit to Coltrane's own late works in that the TEM's rhythmic feel seems to have been multidirectional.

Regarding mode and melody, Tony Conrad's *Early Minimalism* reconstruction project from 1997, in collaboration with the release of a portion of "Day of Niagara," tells a convincingly corroborative story.<sup>125</sup> The switches and subtly shifting overtones that pervade *Early Minimalism*'s long-form drones are very carefully executed, constituting the only changes in what is otherwise a very stagnant form.

All of these possibilities have in common that they rely more on stasis than change, and this is the defining characteristic of Kramer's concept of vertical time. Multilayered repetition, no matter on how microcosmic a scale, is the driving force behind verticality, allowing for Kramer's analogy of a sculpture viewed from several angles, presented in Chapter 1. Rhythm, tempo and any other factors which can lead to change do so in such a way as never to disturb the verticality of the structure, never allowing a sense of progression to ensue. The pieces begin and end as if in medias res, a trait that can also be found in Coltrane's handling of the rhythm section during his final years. Dynamic changes are almost non-existent in the earliest extant documents of minimalism readily available, also a model for Coltrane's final experiments. It should also be remembered that these early pieces were put to tape long before minimalism became a formally codified art, and the instrumentation could be as radical as the concept, sometimes consisting of amplified

---

<sup>125</sup>This recording, taped on April 25, 1965, was released in 2000 by Table of the Elements, against the wishes of La Monte Young, who claims ownership of the composition; he states further that his master incorporates additional material and a superior sound mix, but as he will not let the tapes see the light of day, there is no way of knowing if these concerns change the sound in any significant way. It should also be noted here that, according to Young, MacLise's appearance with the 1965 Dream Syndicate was a rarity. This does not negate the fact that whatever Coltrane heard in the early 1960s may have included MacLise and contained a mixture of pulsed and non-pulsed material. For Young's take on the situation, as well as several of his jabs at would-be co-composer Tony Conrad, see <http://melafoundation.org/statemen.htm> (accessed March 18, 2008)

orchestral strings, sometimes of tape loops and/or keyboard instruments, sometimes engaging something as simple as a radio not quite tuned into a proper station. Again, if no direct influence on Coltrane can be claimed, this fluid instrumental schema certainly prefigures his final group's changing lineup and instrumentation — various doublings, added percussion, non-Western instruments and even vocals declaiming texts from other cultures all figuring into Coltrane's emerging aesthetic.

Simultaneous to the developments in early minimalism, jazz had been achieving a very different kind of autonomy. Ornette Coleman's experiments in what would come to be called "free jazz" are well documented, and his seminal 1959-1961 recordings for Atlantic demonstrated, definitively enough to warrant theoretical codification from George Russell in his *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*, that compositional structure need not be related to conventional chord structure.<sup>126</sup>

Coleman was, however, far from the only composer exploring this territory, and as innovative as his harmonic approach might have been, his rhythmic conceptions were, and remain, fairly conservative in that the "swung" eighths and ride cymbal patterns of bebop pervade his work to this day. Equally important, and in tandem, monumental innovations in rhythm and tempo were taking place, and these would have an even greater influence on Coltrane's final work. Recordings made by the 1962 Cecil Taylor Unit in Europe seem to be the first to document the new rhythmic approach, one that almost completely dispenses with the idea of "swing" or any kind of steady meter.<sup>127</sup> When one is present, as in "What's New," the only standard to be put to tape in these now-legendary sessions, it does not become clear until 1:43 into the tune; (Example 3.3, "What's New," 1:00-1:50) in the long

---

<sup>126</sup>See George Russell, *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* (Concept Publication, 1959).

<sup>127</sup>These recordings can be found on Cecil Taylor, *Nefertiti, The Beautiful One Has Come* (Revenant 202, 1997).

introduction, saxophonist Jimmy Lyons states wildly disconnected fragments of the melody, answered in flashes of counterpoint from Taylor in all registers of the piano. Sunny Murray, who seems to have been the first drummer to practice what was then a new style or technique, plays in starkly accentuated and widely dynamic gestures — rolls, short bursts and cymbal crashes being chief among these.

The bassless format of the trio prevents conventional grounding, and with metered rhythm gone, the sound was novel to say the least, rendering even well-worn standards new, almost unrecognizable. This in turn blurred the boundaries between the composition itself and whatever improvisational activity was in play. Other small groups were engaging in similar experiments, notably the Jimmy Giuffre Three, consisting, in 1961, of Giuffre on reeds, Paul Bley on piano and Steve Swallow on acoustic bass. While much of the material they played in concert was composed, their improvisations tended to eschew metered rhythm in favor of counterpoint, this trio's work being much more "Classical" in its rhetoric, sometimes evoking the linearity and pointillism of Schoenberg or Berio. The language was symptomatic, however, of the fact that such rhythmic and rhetorical experiments were beginning to be fostered outside of the group of African American musicians that spawned them.

### **The Classic Quartet**

The novelty of expanding the familiar, coupled with the afore-mentioned interest in non-Western music and art, proved an extremely fertile breeding ground for many manifestations of what was then being called "The New Thing." As far as Coltrane's last

works are concerned, his Classic Quartet, active from 1961-1965, proved to be an indispensable point of transition. It is likely that Coltrane would never have brought to fruition, in quite the same way, the highly complex activity of his final rhythm section had it not been for the increasingly non-linear and trans-geographic freedoms explored in the work of Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner and Jimmy Garrison. The rhythm section of the classic quartet approached non-linearity from two ultimately unified angles —multiculturalism and spirituality. Growing out of the period in which Coltrane was exploring all things “foreign” and cohering long enough to see his spiritual concerns come to the fore, the group was presented with many opportunities to stretch the boundaries of the purpose served by conventional rhythm sections. The results were similar, even if the reasons for achieving them morphed; internal repetition and arhythmicity became focal points rather than being relegated to the status of accompanying gestures. They exist in tandem with the soloist, creating two streams of music that exhibit increasing autonomy without ever being absolutely separate.

While Coltrane’s classic quartet was not necessarily at the vanguard of the “New Thing” experiments, they combined exploration with accessibility in a way that rendered the former less intimidating but equally energetic and engaging. In fact, the classic quartet had been approaching music from other cultures in ways innovative to jazz since its inception. With these explorations came shifts in rhythmic activity associated with jazz, never completely obscuring any allegiance to jazz but augmenting it, providing just enough accentual intrigue, for example, to render jazz “other” in a given piece’s conception. “Africa,” while not a quartet piece, involves three of the quartet’s musicians and shows all the hallmarks of this early period of discovery and assimilation, with its syncopated and

droning basslines courtesy of Reggie Workman and Arthur Davis, not to mention the brassy imitations of vocalization integral to Eric Dolphy's arrangement. (Example 3.4, "Africa" 0:22-1:06.) "India," recorded later the same year, might be viewed as a stripped down reading of "Africa" with a different melody. Elvin Jones' drumming swings, but it is the two-bass work of Jimmy Garrison and Reggie Workman that provide the greater sense of Coltrane's vision of non-Western percussion; the short-long, short-long rhythms they play almost go against the grain of the rhythmic feel established by Jones.<sup>128</sup> Additional notes in the bass pattern, provided to enhance "India"'s overall percussive quality, along with ghost notes on the piano to support the drone, emphasize a penchant for internal repetition, on a small scale, that can be seen as the first step toward the staticity of later rhythm sections.

As with "Africa," "India"'s introduction is sculpted of layered entrances. It is as if Coltrane wishes to demonstrate each instrument's innovative role in what was then a novel take on modal swing. Note the strict swing rhythms very consciously executed by Elvin Jones. Given the percussive bass work so similar to that on "Africa," this seems a very conscious attempt at timbral differentiation. The notes in the bass parts, G and D, are represented in the higher range of the instrument, a harsh almost overdriven staccato adding a layer of percussiveness. Most important are the syncopations, falling first between the first and second beats of the bar and then between the fourth beat and first of the following bar. (Example 3.5, "India" 0:00-0:44.) It is not merely that "India" has a pulse and a drone; the released master demonstrates a rhythm section approach that clearly incorporates trans-cultural concerns without unnecessary clutter. It exists in a "space" that is certainly not

---

<sup>128</sup>Coltrane had been employing two basses privately for some time, as future collaborator Donald Garrett explains, to simulate the sound of East Indian water drums. The lower bass provides the pulse, while the upper is free to improvise as the right hand would on the drum. See Porter, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

Indian music but not specifically jazz, rendering it prophetic of innovations to come in the next six years.

“India”’s implications are two-fold, encompassing drone and rhythm. Difficult to document empirically, but palpable to the listener, the droning of “India” still engenders a kind of meditative state, due to the small-scale repetitions discussed above. The effect is one on the spirit rather than on the brain, and we can trace the genesis of these drones back to Coltrane’s “spiritual awakening” dream of 1957, as discussed in Simkins and examined in Chapter 1. The drones are similar to the mind-altering qualities associated with early minimalism and later with AMM music; they are nevertheless integrated into the context of jazz, and this meditative gestalt would come to full arrhythmic flower on pieces such as “Alabama,” whose introduction lacks a tempo, and whose piano chords and droning rumbles from bass and drums providing the spare droning framework. The same phenomenon occurs in “After the Rain,” where, after an initial burst of metered activity, tempo disappears, and motion is led and determined strictly by the saxophone and supported by malleted cymbals. Similarly, “Psalm” from *A Love Supreme* dispenses almost altogether with tempo, save for a few tympani figurations between Coltrane’s saxophone exhortations.<sup>129</sup> These figurations may also be meant to engender an altered state, to enhance the experience of the whole by drawing particular attention to several important points of textural transition. It would seem that Coltrane’s burgeoning sociopolitical and spiritual concerns are brought directly to the fore through the incorporation of transcultural reference; in this way, any specific cultural

---

<sup>129</sup>The fact that Coltrane increasingly eschews geographically loaded titles is significant. By titling his November 1963 recording “Alabama,” he is obviously referring to circumstances at home. Precisely what those circumstances entailed remains a subject for debate, but the geographic shift is sudden, bespeaking awakening interest in the plight of the American south. “After the Rain” takes the process of universalization a step further, connoting the power of a natural phenomenon rather than referencing any culture or region.



elements are sublimated, demonstrating the first flowerings of the diverse unity, or universality, that would define Coltrane's approach to his last works.<sup>130</sup>

Meanwhile, as atomism pervaded Coltrane's compositions of the late 1950s, similar approaches to rhythm section repetition were also infusing his compositions, even if they did not necessarily invoke geographical regions or spiritual concerns on an overt level. The aesthetic can even be traced back to the repeating bassline of "Naima" from 1959, which achieves a very similar effect to that of "India"; even though it is cast as a slow ballad, microrepetitions almost impede listener perception of temporality and take the rhythm section one step closer to verticality. The semi-static structures of "Inchworm," "Tunji" and Coltrane's several recorded versions of "Greensleeves" behave similarly. Such repetitions would see fruition in the "Acknowledgement" movement of *A Love Supreme*.<sup>131</sup>

By the time of that 1964 masterpiece, the quartet had made considerably large changes in terms of tempo. As far back as late 1962 and early 1963, the Classic Quartet began, slowly, to abolish tempo altogether. The increasing number of temporal disruptors were due, in large part, to the highly syncopated assertions of Elvin Jones. He brought an element of multicultural exploration to the classic quartet's oeuvre, but more importantly, he also expanded the possibilities afforded the drummer regarding his role in the quartet hierarchy. His "free" introduction to "All or Nothing at All," recorded on November 13, 1962, parallels the approach that Sonny Murray was bringing to the instrument on Cecil Taylor's European recordings of a month before. (Example 3.6, "All or Nothing at All,"

---

<sup>130</sup>Lewis Porter states that Coltrane was leaning toward a universal religion. He quotes Coltrane as saying: "... the music is just part of the whole thing." (Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 233) The "whole thing" clearly relates to the unity described by Coltrane in his liner notes to *A Love Supreme*.

<sup>131</sup>Jimmy Garrison's legendary solo bass introduction to the 1961 studio recording of "Greensleeves" has even been used by hip-hop artists for similar purposes. It was used in the title track of Koop's debut album *Waltz for Koop* (Cookin' Records, JCR021-2, 2001).

0:00-0:37.) Jones never quite abolishes the idea of a steady tempo; sometimes it sounds as if he is playing in duple meter, as in the first three seconds of his introduction. At 11 seconds, he begins what sounds like two bars of a compound duple or triple meter, never quite brought to fruition due to the freedoms reintroduced by rolling tom-toms. In addition, Jones suggests a 3-2 clave rhythm which is then taken up in the tune proper by Tyner and Garrison who together with Jones create a composite version of the 3-2 clave.<sup>132</sup>

In other words, temporal elasticity and musical sources not typically associated with jazz were introduced to the classic quartet repertoire by degrees, long before such freedoms would determine the entire course of the music. Many of Coltrane's new compositions or reinterpretations brought a small but significant level of change, enabling the transformation to occur gradually, in line with his multicultural and pan-spiritual concerns.

### **1965: The Classic Quartet's Disillusion**

As has been discussed briefly in chapter 1, 1965 was a year of transition, but it was much more than that. As David Wilde wrote in his liner notes to the 2000 reissue of *Kulu Sé Mama*: "Of the twelve years John Coltrane spent centerstage, reshaping modern jazz, 1965 stands out, an Everest among mountains. The range and intensity of his output that year, the number of definitive performances, the sheer volume of recordings make it the highpoint of his too-brief career, the apogee of the trajectory."<sup>133</sup> The breakdown of the Classic Quartet,

---

<sup>132</sup>John Coltrane, *The Classic Quartet – Complete Impulse! Studio Recordings* (Impulse! IMPD8-280, 1998).

<sup>133</sup>See David Wilde's notes to John Coltrane, *Kulu Sé Mama*, (Impulse! 314 543 412-2), p.2.

looming on the horizon since June, seemed all but inevitable from late September onward, the disillusion finally occurring in 1966. Coltrane had certainly been inclusive before, allowing for lineup fluctuations in his groups as travel situations made fresh musical voices accessible to him.<sup>134</sup> According to Rashied Ali, who began to play with Coltrane during the spring of 1965, the addition of other musicians to the quartet lineup became much more frequent, Coltrane experiencing some resistance from both the “New Thing” players and those of a more traditional bent.<sup>135</sup> What some took for tolerance on Coltrane’s part, others took for a loss in direction or of focus, as we have seen. Even those loyal to Coltrane began to question his judgment in involving the players from what was then a controversial avant-garde. Bill Dixon has recently stated, “John Coltrane was the only one of the older generation who was kind to us, who understood what we were trying to do.”<sup>136</sup>

The music began to change as a result of the additions, or rather, one might say that the classic quartet sound imploded with *Ascension*. The piece is unique in the Coltrane catalog, chiefly due to the way in which repetition informs the collective material. The initial motive’s relationship to the “Love Supreme” motive is now well established<sup>137</sup>; what has not been discussed with nearly the same fervor is the innovative way in which loosely canonic interplay informs the work’s ensemble passages. The material in question comprises, in essence, a meeting of the two modes of temporal perception that form the main focus of this

---

<sup>134</sup>Notable among these early instances was the March 1961 engagement at the Sutherland Lounge in Chicago, in which a young Donald Raphael Garrett played bass and clarinet.

<sup>135</sup>Ali has said in many interviews that he did not want to play on the May 28<sup>th</sup> *Ascension* date because he found out that Elvin Jones was also going to be playing. (See Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 268, for a description of the strained relations between Ali and Elvin Jones. By late November, he had obviously changed his thinking about the two drummer lineup, the *Meditations* sextet resulting from the addition of Ali and Pharaoh Sanders.

<sup>136</sup>Bill Dixon, phone interview conducted by Marc Medwin, February 2, 2007.

<sup>137</sup>See Lewis Porter, liner notes to *John Coltrane, Ascension* (Impulse! 314-543 413-2 DG01, 2000), p.8.

study. While each of the eleven players engages in atomistic activity, alternately veering away from and referencing the mode/scale/chord at hand in multiply-directed linear time, the net effect is one of verticality, of non-linear time. While two takes of *Ascension* were committed to tape, the ensemble passages are similar enough in intent that either will suffice. Therefore, I will use the opening of Edition 1 to demonstrate the simultaneously multiply-directed and non-linear aspects of all the ensemble passages to follow. (Example 3.7, *Ascension*, Edition 1, 0:00-0:50.)

Edition 1 opens with Coltrane's solo statement of the five-note theme, establishing what seems to be a fairly brisk tempo; the dual trumpets, played by Dewey Johnson and Freddy Hubbard, pick up the five-note pentatonic motive, but they do so in something approaching cannon, a lax sort of simultaneity, exercising any sense of progression established in Coltrane's solo statement of the theme. More relevant to the purpose of formulating a dual temporal narrative, the two trumpets are foregrounded in the mix, rendering all else nearly inaudible, or at least indistinct. In the background, B-flat and E-flat are repeated, but the edges between sounds are blurred, the whole edifice resembling a wall of sound rather than any more traditional large ensemble.

As the opening ensemble passage progresses, chords well outside of the established pentatonic are arpeggiated by the alto saxophones of Marion Brown and John Tchicai. The motion is prefigured by a rather forceful dissonance, created by a glaring F and G-flat at 0:19. It proves to be a prophetic simultaneity, as the first arpeggiated triad (C-A-F descending) occurs at 0:22, articulated by one of the alto players. We can hear a similar interjection at 0:39, this time by one of the trumpets. These momentary digressions, or diversions from the mode, render the preceding and succeeding material components in a multilayered multiply-

directed linear narrative. It is not simply that the theme returns at 0:48, played again by the foregrounded trumpets; the narrative structure exists in the background as well, even components of the “wall of sound” outlined above referencing both the mode and the melody with which *Ascension* commences.

The ensemble passage outlined above makes many fluid returns, in different forms, a perfect rendering of Amiri Baraka’s “changing same” as outlined in 1963.<sup>138</sup> Whether or not Coltrane gave out chords, scales or some sort of melody line in the studio, and there is evidence to support all three conjectures, is irrelevant. Indeed, the fact that both levels of narrative structure are simultaneously apparent in the ensemble passages makes *Ascension* unique, in terms of Coltrane’s later music and in his entire output. In a recent online article, Simon Weil links the piece to the contemporary emergence of the Big Bang theory<sup>139</sup>; a very interesting hypothesis in its own right, his ideas could also be expanded to show that all elements of the piece’s narrative exist as a multiplicitous unity, a cliff-like granite structure of sound whose individual components shift in and out of sharp focus. Atoms appear only to be swallowed up again into the general melee, and as modes, or scales, or key centers change nebulously, the procedure remains the same in every ensemble passage. Even if there is a steady or swung rhythm in a solo passage and the conventional quartet hierarchy is reengaged, the ensembles serve as disrupters, themselves a manifestation of multiply-directed linear time in *Ascension*’s macrostructure. It is a formula that Coltrane would never repeat

---

<sup>138</sup>First outlined in Amiri Baraka’s seminal 1963 book *Blues People*, the “changing same” concept has been used in myriad musical and sociopolitical contexts throughout the past forty-five years. See Ingrid Monson, *op. cit.*, p. 10

<sup>139</sup>See Simon Weil, *Circling Om: An Exploration of John Coltrane’s Later Works*, 2004, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=14286> (accessed March 17, 2008)

again, and his music from that moment on would change as a result of the sound-world created at the Ascension sessions.

Almost as if it were a reaction to the excesses and unfamiliarities of *Ascension*, the Newport Jazz Festival version of “My Favorite Things,” recorded in July of 1965, is one of the few Classic Quartet tracks to demonstrate unplanned discontinuity between Coltrane and the rhythm section. All proceeds as usual through the head and through McCoy Tyner’s solo, just as had been the case since the quartet’s earliest documented performances of the piece in 1960. However, by 8:45, Jones, Tyner and Garrison have retreated dynamically, Coltrane still playing near the top of his range in a trilled solo discussed briefly in chapter one. Even as the solo dips in contour and rises again to the highest range of the soprano, the rhythm section remains subdued, almost hesitant. At 9:22, Jones hits a downbeat hard as if creating a signpost for the others. As Coltrane’s playing bristles with energy, replete with vibrato and microtonal investigation, Jones even lags momentarily, especially lax at 9:31 as he almost drops out of the texture completely. Garrison can be heard singing especially loudly but rhythmically, another seeming attempt at maintaining stability in the face of Coltrane’s decidedly arrhythmic solo. (Example 3.8, “My Favorite Things,” 8:40-9:45.)

Perhaps most telling of all, however, is the fact that Tyner demonstrates uncertainty about when the final head statement is to occur. In all performances of “My Favorite Things,” the group follows the minor/major dichotomy established in the original version, (i.e. predominantly minor for two verses, predominantly major for the following one verse). Almost invariably, Coltrane plays a triadic phrase, in second inversion, to cue in the head statement following the larger portion of his solo. Seemingly unsure if Coltrane is going to play the usual triadic figure that cues the melody, Tyner attempts a change from major to

minor mode, and he does so twice, once at 12:18 and again at 12:28. In both cases, he switches momentarily to E Minor before realizing that Coltrane has not finished with the E major portion of his solo. (Example 3.9, “My Favorite Things,” 12:00-12:40.)

While Coltrane does eventually provide the cue, and while there is certainly some very intense rhythmic activity from all players on this session, this version of “My Favorite Things,” more than any in the Classic Quartet catalog, demonstrates the group’s decay as Coltrane sought ideas that were ultimately beyond the sound they established. This is not to say that this July 1965 performance marked the group’s disillusion, and some of its best and most innovative material was to be recorded the following month. Perhaps the closest the classic quartet ever came to reaching Coltrane’s late style, in its entirety, was on “Dearly Beloved” from August of 1965, and the opening few minutes of that track will exemplify the procedures. (Example 3.10, “Dearly Beloved,” 0:00-1:00.) For one of the few examples in the Classic Quartet’s catalog, the rhythm section of Jones, Tyner and Garrison give the impression of constructing a solid wall of sound over which Coltrane orates. A layer by layer examination of the rhythm section’s activity shows what might be construed, on one level, as nearly complete referential and syntactic displacement.

McCoy Tyner’s figurations are extremely telling regarding a new aesthetic. He works here mainly with fourths and arpeggiations, the latter coming close to sounding like a harp.<sup>140</sup> His block chords reference tonal procedures, steering clear of clusters or

---

<sup>140</sup>It is too tempting to hear Alice’s influence in Tyner’s playing here. If not a direct influence from Alice, it seems plausible that John, in telling him to keep a “thing happening all through,” wished to invoke Alice’s harp rhetoric, though such speculation is fraught with more drama than fact. Nevertheless, it is precisely this piano style, replete with block chords amidst sweeping arpeggios, that Alice eventually brings to the group sound.

chromatics. In fact, the piece revolves around F-sharp minor, and while the structure is loose, that pitch is definitely at the center of the composition, and the fourths emphasize the pentatonic quality of the tune.

Garrison's bass work sticks close to the parent scale, but his rhythms are quite unorthodox, especially given the bass's usual role in quartet playing, as he provides support to neither Tyner nor Jones. There seems to be very little regularity, or even structure, to the rhythms in his playing.

Jones' timbres are probably the most interesting, consisting, as with Tyner, of mixed textures. Cymbal splashes, reminiscent of "After the Rain" are interwoven with rolls and with occasional rhythmically pounding passages, executed with mallets, creating an effect similar but not in tandem with Tyner's on piano. The best that can be said is that the two players parallel each other, while Garrison's part seems more disconnected, linked only by tonality.

The net effect is that individual parts swim in and out of focus, especially on first hearing. Coltrane's direction to "keep pressing" would seem to support this reading as a desired effect. Given the rhythmic/tonal experimentation in the Sunship sessions, such concerns should cause no surprise, and it would not be long before most of the propulsive swing that defined the classic quartet sound would disappear.

### **The Final Works**

What was left in its place is extremely difficult to describe and categorize, and this is probably why it has been neglected for forty years. To imply that the music is always



arrhythmic or atonal is false, but to assert or impose polyrhythmic structure or fixed tonality on this music would also be misleading. Kramer's non-linear model is extremely apt for describing what occurs in this group's rhythm section, whether performing live or in the studio. As we saw with "Ogunde," Coltrane usually begins each tune with what might be called a fourth or fifth-based exhortation. The rhythm section does not necessarily follow him; rather, they fade in, or join in, chordally if necessary, building a platform on which Coltrane can emote. He is never drowned out by the rhythm section, and a distinction should be made here between the powerful drumming of Elvin Jones and the more timbrally exploratory playing of Rashied Ali. Ali is not intent on volume, contrary to the reasons that Jones and Tyner gave for leaving the quartet.<sup>141</sup> Rather, his style is built on multiple rhythms and timbral exploration.

Ali's playing is one of the most radical elements of the new approach, and his first few gestures from "Mars" from *Interstellar Space*, where he plays accompanied only by bells, serve as an easily audible illustration of his approach and as a way in to the sound of this rhythm section. (Example 3.11, "Mars," 0:00-0:33.) After Coltrane begins the track with bells, as he does every piece on the album, a rapid series of snare taps are heard. The snare is actually fairly close to being steady, and it is clear that Ali is also hitting a tom-tom at the same time as the snare. The snare and the tom-tom gradually drift apart, conjuring images of Steve Reich's contemporaneous phase pieces. Another rhythmic layer is added as Ali sets up another tempo with the pedal of the high-hat, first closing it and then opening it in what sound like loosely metric reversed dactylic patterns. Simultaneously, the bass drum adds another rhythmic layer, vaguely complementing the tom patterns. It is the perfect

---

<sup>141</sup>Jones and Tyner stated that the reason they left the quartet had to do with not being able to hear what they were doing anymore. See Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

representation of what Coltrane calls “multidirectional rhythms”. Unfortunately, these rhythmic patterns do not maintain a steady tempo, fluctuating wildly almost as soon as they are established. All of this occurs before Coltrane’s bells have faded, at which point the patterns have become irregular. However, the snare and tom work comes back a few moments later, at 0:27 into the track, almost implying a kind of motivic development in rhythmic territory.

The rest of the track finds Ali in more typical soloist mode, even incorporating some conventional drum fills to acknowledge, improvisationally of course, the phrase structure that Coltrane employs. It is tempting to imagine that Ali has actually laid down the multidirectional head of the tune, Coltrane following suit when he enters.<sup>142</sup> This simple example should demonstrate, at least, that while the net effect of the rhythm section’s approach is a wall of sound, each component is as intricate as Coltrane’s own solos.

The opening of “Ogunde”’s studio version is a powerful and more complex example of Ali’s work in context, as the whole rhythm section is present. (Example 3.12, “Ogunde,” 0:00-0:50.) It is also fairly quiet, each layer being pronounced and set forward in the mix, Ali’s perhaps most prominent of all. His brush work is intricate, his use of cymbals subtle and restrained, but each stroke is definite and purposeful. His playing complements Alice Coltrane’s hazy piano work in that the two instruments merge, leaving no space for silence but plenty of room for accentuation.

Ali’s, Alice’s and Garrison’s playing on “Ogunde” will be presented separately for the purposes of elucidation and clarification regarding Kramer’s model of vertical time. It

---

<sup>142</sup>This is probably not the case though. Ali remembers that Coltrane told him almost nothing at the sessions for this recording, only that after some bells, he could do whatever he wanted. Ali wasn’t even told what the tempo of the tunes would be, although it has become clear, on the evidence of a track like “Venus” that exists in multiple versions, that Coltrane did in fact have structures in mind, albeit loosely defined ones.

will be demonstrated that, even in the head where some structure is apparent, multilayered rhythm sectional verticality demands that each part be examined separately, analogously to Kramer's multi-angled view of a sculpture.

Ali's work in the opening bars of "Ogunde" is the most dynamically varied of the group. His playing might be described as more of an atmospheric rustle, his brushwork barely on equal dynamic footing with the piano. Accents are most certainly present, but they are neither metric nor necessarily indicative of anything beyond themselves and the rhythmic complexity and displacement they afford. In fact, the substrata of his playing continually threatens to obscure them, bringing the dynamic levels in his playing into more equal focus.

Alice's piano work is even more regular. In this instance, there are loosely defined chord changes to follow, even if the length of each chord depends on John's improvisational whims of the moment. Alice's playing is soft, almost languid and extremely fluid, somewhere in-between arpeggio and tremolo. She follows John's cues, as the harmony moves from D-flat minor to G-flat minor and back again, but she and Ali never even come close to sharing the kind of rhythmic interplay commonly associated with standard jazz accompaniment, or comping. It is not as if she is detached from her surroundings; rather, it seems as if John gave her instructions on what and how to play.<sup>143</sup> Her pianism during the head is replete with trills, tremolo and arpeggiations, enhancing and supplementing the tune's chord structure as cued by Coltrane. However, her volume level never rises above mezzo-forte, even hovering around Piano during the head. The sustain pedal is employed liberally, almost obscuring the rising melodic figure she executes, in tremolo, beginning at 0:05.

Ascending from D-flat to G-flat, it anticipates the change to G-flat minor that occurs at 0:11;

---

<sup>143</sup>We do know that she was "blowin' wrong chords" at the beginning of her tenure with the group, and that John was patient with her. Beyond that, only assumptions can be made concerning any instructions she was given. See Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

however, as we have already seen, Coltrane's playing is atomistically linear at this point, denoting loose adherence to a scale rather than to the planned and timed execution of a series of vertical or chordal structures.<sup>144</sup> Even when Alice's playing becomes chordal, clusteral and quartal in post-Tyner fashion, as it does beginning at 0:30, there is no regularity to her phrasing and punctuation, any supposed patterns being offset by Ali and Garrison.

Jimmy Garrison's work on the opening of this track furthers the assumption of a scalar structure, some sort of hybrid scale in fact. I hear the scale as being a D-flat natural minor scale with substitutions of D-natural and A-natural.<sup>145</sup> Note that Garrison does not depart from this scale until the group improvisation enters freer harmonic territory at 0:33, and yet he also does not follow strictly the D-flat minor, G-flat minor, D-flat minor progression outlined by Alice. He does walk in what might be loosely described as a traditional manner, but there is no alignment between the harmonic motion set forth either by his playing or by what Alice plays. Apart from Coltrane's cues, which exist outside any definable tempo, the scale seems to govern the melodic motion he establishes. When the chord changes to G-flat at 0:11, Garrison actually plays a D; while this might subvert the harmony in any more traditional context, it seems perfectly natural here, as Alice has already introduced the pitch and because Coltrane has also introduced the A as a chromatic inflection. The fact that these tonal events happened out of synch with each other bespeaks "changes" that do not rely on harmonic progression.

---

<sup>144</sup>I make this distinction because adherence to scale rather than to chord implies and demands a different type of listening and playing, almost a heterophonic approach. It facilitates a type of interaction that often takes place on a more macrocosmic level rather than from moment to moment, a distinction of importance when discussing Coltrane's late work, especially the long improvised sections.

<sup>145</sup>It should be noted here that even if such a scale determines the modal/harmonic structure of "Ogunde," John plays a pronounced E-sharp at 0:10, just before Alice's switch to G-flat minor. In fact, Alice also plays one in the bass register at 0:09. So much for dogmatic adherence!

Equally important though is Garrison's rhythmic approach. His attack is percussive, and he exploits this to the full, creating another strongly defined rhythmic layer, as the opening moments demonstrate. His rhythmic attacks are loosely proportional, or at least repetitive at the pattern level. Up to the change to G-flat, Garrison plays a D-flat almost exclusively, introducing C-flat only briefly just before the harmonic change. As with Ali, his playing is heavily accented, but neither Ali nor Garrison seem to be attempting any kind of synchronization; in fact, Garrison is not even playing at the moments that Ali provides his strongest accents, as with the brush stroke at 0:05. Garrison has already played a note when Ali hits the snare, which displaces any sense of tempo established by Garrison.

Such rhythmic freedom is counteracted by Garrison's previously mentioned adherence to the scale. The net effect of this seeming contradiction in approach is that what might be called a rhythmic drone is established, the rhythmic complexities drawing attention away from the tonal center while note repetition is still clearly audible.

I have presented these factors serially, and a degree of fractured linearity certainly exists in each element when viewed separately, most readily apparent in Garrison's work. However, the fact that these purposely disparate events are combined in such a dense fashion, even at a fairly low volume, means that any one element is rendered subservient to the rest, except at certain moments; these instances, in which one member of the rhythm section emerges more prominently than the rest, are most likely subjective, dependant on whatever background the listener brings to the recording.

The very idea of background and foreground, as a creator and delineator of relativity, is paramount to the final rhythm section's sound, and timbre is as important as pitch construction where an understanding of the group dynamic is concerned. It is well known

that Coltrane had been augmenting the Classic Quartet with additional musicians, a particularly ubiquitous case being the aborted December 10, 1964 sextet sessions for *A Love Supreme*, which included bassist Art Davis and saxophonist Archie Shepp.<sup>146</sup> Other documented performances from mid to late 1965 show that the quartet was in constant flux.<sup>147</sup>

The July 1965 version of “My Favorite Things” has already been discussed in terms of what might be called rhythm-section uncertainty, but Coltrane’s saxophone timbre on the date is also significant. His use of vibrato is striking, deeper and wider than it had been previously. The result constitutes what Coltrane might have viewed as an Asian gestalt, complemented by the many trills and microtonal slurs Coltrane uses throughout his solo on this transitional track. By October of 1965, such pan-geographical concerns had infiltrated his group’s overall sound; in Seattle, Coltrane employed Donald Garrett, who brought a collection of non-Western wind and percussion instruments with him to supplement his saxophones and clarinets; he used these on even the most well-loved Coltrane compositions to disturbing effect, as will be discussed later. A few days later, in California, Coltrane recorded the menacing *Om*, where tonality was all but abandoned in favor of pure timbral experimentation, many of the non-Western instruments being chosen to match the Hindu text intoned by Pharaoh Sanders and Coltrane. The opening is unlike anything else in Coltrane’s catalog of works in that it bears no resemblance at all to “jazz” of any period. Awash in mbira, gongs, cymbals and various other percussion, it is similar to other late Coltrane works

---

<sup>146</sup>Some of these out-takes have surfaced, and more have recently been found and are scheduled to be released at a future date.

<sup>147</sup>These extra players brought conflict to the group. Impulse! Photographer Chuck Stuart tells a story concerning the recording of *Ascension*, where Elvin Jones threw his snare drum after the first take, because he couldn’t hear himself play. He was coaxed back by Coltrane for another take, but the damage to the group was irreparable.

only in that the rhythmic language is created by seemingly disjointed layering rather than any desire for pulsed connectivity. While rhythm is certainly striking here, timbre is the driving force of *Om*'s opening moments.

*Om*'s body proper is extremely high-energy, matching much of the Seattle material in intensity. On the opposite extreme, "Kulu Sé Mama" recorded at the same time as *Om*, softens the aesthetic, even bringing more traditional jazz into the mix again, but through a haze of pan-Eastern influence. While Juno Louis' text derives from an African language, the timbres of West and East are mixed in a fashion prototypical of the music to come in the following year and a half.

All previously discussed elements form the soundworld that makes Coltrane's final work unique in the "new thing" music. We have already seen these concerns addressed in a studio setting and in the confines afforded by the LP; however, timbral innovation and non-linear temporality merge equally vividly in concert reworkings of older Coltrane repertoire. "My Favorite Things" continued to be a staple, even appearing on the final recorded concert of Coltrane's career. The most complete and best recorded version from the period was recorded for broadcast on Coltrane's summer 1966 tour of Japan. Apart from the expected rhythmic displacements, which will be addressed presently, the most striking feature of the performance is a uniformity in volume that aids in creating the wash of non-conventional timbre and rhythm that typifies this group's approach to improvisation.

After a bass solo by Jimmy Garrison that lasts almost fifteen minutes and ends, surprisingly, almost in tempo, Ali enters softly, followed almost immediately by the expected e-minor chords from Alice. (Example 3.13, "My Favorite Things," 14:44-15:54.) The music's volume swells and then stays at a fairly high level throughout, despite any intricacies

that might provide slight transient peaks. Ali continues to play in tempo, but a shaker, presumably courtesy of Pharaoh Sanders, provides muddying accents as soon as the tempo and meter are established.<sup>148</sup> Garrison begins to walk in the way he would do throughout the period, emitting bursts of rhythmically driven activity; these phrases certainly have melodic contour, but again, they exemplify a scalar approach to the music rather than a simple adherence to chord changes or their implied structure, and the dynamic level is surprisingly constant. Alice continues in chordal gestures, but they do not adhere to any meter or tempo established by Ali, and neither ever plays above a mezzo forte. Within the first fifteen seconds of the full band performance, the ordered elements diverge in favor of the quintet's usual "wall of noise" approach, Ali's "multidirectional" rhythms contributing most significantly to the overall effect. At 16:38, another percussion instrument emerges gradually from the mix, again most likely played by Sanders and at the same fairly low volume as the shaker had been. (Example 3.14, "My Favorite Things," 16:35-17:10.) This time, the new instrument, probably a cowbell, brings a sort of pan-African feel to the proceedings, furthering the trans-cultural flavor of the music; given the elasticity of form and time passage resultant from the multiple rhythmic layers, the cowbell is even more front and center, in terms of listener focus, than it might have been in a more conventionally rhythmic setting, despite the constant flurry of activity.

All of this activity takes place before the melody is stated, which occurs at 18:24, it does so at what sounds like the end of a breath, Coltrane breathing before beginning the second heavily vibrato-laden phrase of the melody; Alice follows with an almost imperceptible shift into something approaching meter. Garrison and Ali's playing remains

---

<sup>148</sup>Interestingly, the meter sounds like some division of four, as begun by Garrison at 14:44.



meterless and timbrally complex, Ali's roll at 18:38 being the only signal that he is listening to every melodic detail. (Example 3.15, "My Favorite Things," 18:10-19:00.)

In this performance, Coltrane adds a layer of timbral intrigue beyond his normal strident and vibrated tone. Beginning at 19:33 and coming out of a long passage of what might best be described as "new thing squall", he begins to play and reiterate a low D, exploiting every overtone of which the alto saxophone is capable. Amidst the frenetically atonal playing that follows, the D keeps returning, notably at 19:50 and 19:57. (Example 3.16, "My Favorite Things," 19:20-20:20.) This is certainly a feature of the atomism discussed in Chapter 2, but here, an obvious advancement has been made in Coltrane's use of multiphonics. The playing is more subtle, more studied and even more technically proficient, allowing such gradations in microtone to be achieved. His playing had become, therefore, equally concerned with timbral and linear deconstruction, the two concerns unified in the way that the rhythm section's approach to improvisation is timbrally and rhythmically unified when viewed in cross section.

It seems fair to posit, even given the strength of Coltrane's innovations, that the quintet rhythm section would not sound as it does without the pianism of his then-new wife, Alice McLeoud, who replaced McCoy Tyner in 1966. As Rashied Ali provides the multidirectional rhythmic foundation for Coltrane's final quintet, and as Jimmy Garrison's rhythmic approach mirrors Coltrane's own in terms of atomistic multiply-directed linear time, Alice Coltrane's pianism comes closest to capturing the group sound as a whole, especially in her soloing. Her playing is a study in the temporal disunity that constitutes the quintet's sound, fluctuating moment to moment between swirling vertically temporal harp-like arpeggios and staccato melodic fragments. As there is no steady pulse in the music, these

devices follow no traditional placement patterns, forcing the listener to engage the music on several levels with few conventional musical signposts. The ones that are present are made ambiguous by the multi-temporal structure, which also informs mode, rhythm and meter. Pulse may arise, but it vanishes just as quickly, leaving the listener with a keen sense of disorientation that seems purposeful if temporal disunity is considered to be in play.

Such devices also figure, in embryonic fashion, into her work preceding her tenure with John. Even in her work with the Terry Gibbs group, with whom she toured from 1962-1963,<sup>149</sup> Alice's harmonic language was unique, drawing more on Monk's work than on that of bebop rhetoric. Her playing on "Bei Mir Bist Du Schon," for example, is clusteral rather than linear; the chords reinforce the track's rhythm and modality, occurring largely during passages in D-Minor rather than fostering any traditional dialogue between herself and Gibbs' vibraphone. Her eschewing of bebop would continue in her work with the Coltrane quintet of 1965-67, and it may be for this reason that Coltrane employed her to replace McCoy Tyner. Even when her chordal work expands to include arpeggios and harp-like glissandi, nowhere does her pianism resemble that of bebop icons such as Bud Powell, even though she had studied with him.<sup>150</sup>

Often, especially in the period under discussion, Alice would use two modes in alternation, the opening moments of "The Son," now available on the reissue of her first solo album, *A Monastic Trio*, providing a clear example of the method with no accompaniment. While the tune is definitely cast in an E-minor modality, there is no way to determine this from Alice's initial gestures. Here opening chord consists of C and F, superimposed on D

---

<sup>149</sup>For a brief history of Alice's career before joining John Coltrane, see her interview with Pauline Rivelli in the liner notes to *A Monastic Trio* (Impluse! IMPD-267, 1998), p.2.

<sup>150</sup>Porter, *op. cit.*, p.271.

and E, vertically prefiguring the polymodality to come. The scale she employs involves F-minor with E and B acting as passing tones throughout, and it is not until 0:47 that E-minor is definitively established, beginning with a sharply resonant E in the piano's low register. The F-minor modality returns after every chorus, rendering it easier to hear than in corresponding passages in late Coltrane.

Her approach to the group aesthetic is especially clear on the version of "Afro-blue" recorded in Japan in August of 1966. Throughout the rendition, as the others solo, Alice "chords" in and around F, as "Afro-blue"'s original modality centers around that pitch. She is not limited by any sense of mode, and her rhetoric is as often clusteral and chromatic, but she always returns to quartal voicings around F. At 12:51, to cite only one of many examples, her left-hand voicings sound very much like McCoy Tyner's, as she alternates F, B-flat and E-flat with E-flat, A-flat and D-flat, the whole gesture following a series of more chromatic playing. As with the others in the group, she plays without ceasing, each gesture passing with unremitting speed.

Simultaneously, mirroring John's approach, she might emphasize a note in the F-minor scale, by lengthening or accenting it. At 12:55 and for the ensuing five seconds, A-flat is quite prominently featured in the right hand, a point made even starker by the high C at 12:57, which brings modality squarely back into focus. Her left hand sometimes augments the right with rhythmic complexities, but block chords are used almost exclusively, in direct contrast to Ali's polyrhythmic approach to the drums.

At the outset of her own solo, from 13:15 to 21:36, Alice continues with the chordal figures she had been employing through Pharaoh Sanders' solo. A few passing tones, beginning at 13:25 and all within the F-minor mode, prefigure the arpeggiations in which she

will engage. These interchord tones might be considered as atoms, as they certainly do not conform in any sense to the rhetoric of bebop linearity. When the arpeggios begin, from 13:31 and beyond, they cover two main modal areas — F-minor and E-minor. As all sense of pulse has vanished, these modal areas do not conform to the original tune in any way, considering especially that the other chords in the original are E-flat major and D-flat major. Rather, her “tonal” approach is as fluid as her rhythmic language, which is enhanced by the fleet arpeggios she inserts between left-hand block chords and low-register octaves. Further clouding modality, her block chords sometimes range into D-minor inflection, even at this early point in her solo.

It is not until 14:03 that the E-minor implications begin in earnest, becoming an increasingly large part of this solo’s dual nature. The E-minor intrusion at 14:44 is of particular interest, as it might be misconstrued on first hearing as a return to any loose “tonic” the piece exhibits, due to the largely chromatic clusters that precede it. It is only with the three reiterated F’s at 14:51, the highest on the piano, that the “true” modality is restored.

A solo piano piece, recorded at the same 1967 sessions that birthed *Expression*, has been rediscovered and released in 1998.<sup>151</sup> It provides a chance to hear her pianism in an extended time frame, similar to that of Jimmy Garrison’s concert solos, without the dense layers of instrumental accompaniment. Now called “Altruvista,” it demonstrates her atomistic, modal and multiply-directed linear conception with clarity and concision. The piece is a complex web of chords, arpeggios interlaced with single and double-note atoms; again loosely based around E-minor, Alice’s first chord bears a striking resemblance to B-minor, given the prominence of F-sharp, B and D in the right hand. However, E is regularly reiterated in the piano’s middle register, giving it a seniority separate from dynamic or

---

<sup>151</sup>This piece was made available on the reissue of Alice Coltrane, *A Monastic Trio* (Impulse! IMPD-267, 1998).

registral concerns. At 0:17, an F is quietly introduced in the bass, anticipating a similar introduction in the upper register a second later. Meanwhile, the texture is atomistic, each gesture related to the surrounding material while maintaining autonomy and allowing for a degree of separation. The repeated fifths in octaved layers at 0:54 confirm the modality, but they are separated slightly from their surroundings by register and a softer dynamic. Even the arc-like arpeggio at 0:28, incorporating B-flat into the mode and overlaying an F-sharp in the bass, functions as an atom, as it proves parenthetical, emerging from near silence and leading back to silence. (Example 3.17, “Altruvista,” 0:00-2:00.)

The piece functions along the lines drawn in these opening moments. The atoms return, and each gesture throughout the meterless piece is similarly treated. The multileveled arpeggiated complexes at 1:33, as vast and multivalently resonant as they are, exist amidst moments of silence. While arpeggios pervade the right hand, four-note chords march in serial fashion in the left, long spaces between them.

Equally prevalent is the continual harkening back to E-minor modality. These returns are no more predictable than they would be in John’s solos, but they occur with similar frequency. At 1:52, E-minor returns softly, after long stretches of near atonality. The return can be judged most convincingly by the fact that all chromatic tones disappear, leaving only the E-minor mode outlined at the piece’s commencement. While this is a conspicuous return, many more such subtle procedures are in play throughout. At 1:59, a brief instance of pulse occurs as F and B-flat are introduced to cloud the E-minor modality, C and E-flat coming into play a moment later. These figurations are alternated, in the right hand, with E-minor figurations, shifting focus in a steady but momentary crescendo. By 2:16, the E-minor modality returns with a series of multi-octave fifths in the piano’s lower registers, almost

identical to the textural event at 0:54. The piece becomes a series of unpredictable returns juxtaposed with voyages into related but distant modal territory. She follows John's lead but transforms his vision, the piece a blueprint for the material of her first four solo albums.

Alice's work may be seen as the lynchpin of the group aesthetic. Her approach to tonality, or modality, is as multiply-directedly linear as her sense of rhythm is free but pointed. She blurs all structural and musical boundaries in a way that, one would imagine, captures perfectly John's conception of the "one essential." Since her death in 2007, discussion boards and Email lists have blazed with controversy concerning her role in Coltrane's final group, her musicianship, and the value of her vision as an instrumentalist. It may never now be clear just what she was taught by Coltrane and just what she brought to the group from previous experience. What is certain is that her approach to the keyboard was her own, only resembling others' work in passing, and it was definitive for the execution of Coltrane's vision. Attention has been drawn, by Kofsky and others, to the fact that John retained a pianist in a group whose deployment and aesthetic were quite revolutionary in other aspects. It must therefore be a testament to the clarity of Alice's vision that she became such a vital part of John's final working group, exemplifying in microcosm the structural unity and harmonic/rhythmic diversity that would come to typify its sound.

In a very fundamental way, unity and diversity are misnomers where this music is concerned, the African-American experience rendering such Western concepts inadequate to describe the poignantly artistic reflections of oppression and diaspora. Rather, the aesthetic on which the later Coltrane music is based has roots in what scholars are now calling irony. Of course, the double consciousness of the Black experience and its attendant irony, as outlined by Paul Gilroy and, more completely, by Ronald Radano is at the heart of the

conception. It is evident even in Coltrane's brief comments about his music. "Keep a thing happening all through," he says to Tyner during the Sunship sessions in 1965, but in Japan the following year, he describes his music as "music of the individual." He also states, in the same interview, that all men know the truth, but that the personification of that truth is going to differ among individuals. It is ironic that such doubleness, linearly constructed in plain words, involves so many musical implications.

Coltrane's interest in pan-geographical concerns is apparent but never overt, and his titles suggest unifying factors, universals, while the music suggests layers or substrata, disunified at best, disjointed at worst. As this study has demonstrated, an aesthetic of individual freedom was made to coexist, sometimes more conventionally than others, with a series of loosely defined but definite structures, and the dialectic between these polar opposites is what I have discovered to be the most interesting component of this music.

### **Immediate Influence**

Despite Coltrane's radical innovations, the path forged by his late works was seldom followed during his life time. True, Coltrane's legacy is vast and multifarious, and he has become a cultural icon akin to Beethoven. His hero status may very well have been established by members of the equally multifarious but far reaching Black Arts movement, a multiregional collective whose diversity James Smedthurst's recent book demonstrates with skill and authority.<sup>152</sup> Amongst "jazz" musicians, Coltrane was especially important, and

---

<sup>152</sup>James Smedthurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

many performers latched onto methods and sounds that he had already discarded when the often-subconscious homages took place. However, his later music spawned very few imitations, a notable exception being New Orleans-born saxophonist Noah Howard's "Homage to Coltrane," which appears on his first album for ESP, *Live at Judson Hall*.<sup>153</sup> Noteworthy is the fact that the tribute was recorded in late 1966, well before Coltrane's death and while his last works were still in formation.

As with pivotal works by Albert Ayler, *Ascension* alumnus saxophonist Marion Brown and Sun Ra, Howard's first disc was waxed for Bernard Stollmann's pioneering ESP label. A small New York company, it documented the new music at an absolutely critical phase, and the albums have become highly desirable classics.<sup>154</sup> Howard's Coltrane tribute reveals that, as with Coltrane's own early assimilations of Charlie Parker's innovations, there was indeed a musically informed listenership that was hearing and reproducing the sound of Coltrane's final quintet's collective improvisation as it emerged. A sonic reference to Coltrane's last work appears, suddenly, at 10:30, after some more vaguely Eastern sounds, resulting from the Indian-inflected dialogue of Sirone (bass) and Catherine Norris (cello), pervade the piece's first half.

The contrast is marked, to say the least. While the opening is redolent of *A Love Supreme*, even employing two sets of low strings as on the aborted December 10<sup>th</sup> date, all sense of tempo vanishes for the second half. This is due, in large part, to drummer Robert Kapp's sudden stylistic switch, transitioning from tight high-hat and repeated rhythms to

---

<sup>153</sup>Noah Howard, *Live at Judson Hall*, ESP 1064, 1967.

<sup>154</sup>Stollman relaunched the label in 2005, after many years of musical inactivity. His story, and that of the label, can be found in Stollman's May 2005 interview with reviewer Clifford Allen. See <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=19661> (Accessed March 17, 2008)



open and sustaining cymbals accompanied by meterless playing in the manner of Rashied Ali.<sup>155</sup> Simultaneously, pianist Dave Burrell switches from high-register block chords to middle-register drones fashioned of repeated figurations employing liberal pedal. The overall energy of the track had been increasing steadily, but at the point of transformation, it is fair to say that the playing shifts into ecstatic overdrive, the only link with the first ten minutes being the sustained B that pervades the piece. (Example 3.18, “Homage to Coltrane,” 10:00-11:00.)

Meanwhile, Howard’s playing also demonstrates a fluent knowledge of Coltrane’s work of the period by employing Coltrane’s brand of atomism. The repeated B, A and F-sharp, from 10:40-42, certainly demonstrates an atomistic approach, and while B has been the unequivocal tonal center of the work, Howard’s playing has traveled the proverbial spaceways; his constant return to B just before these atoms even casts a glance in the direction of multiply-directed linear time. The tune’s moment of transition is as shocking as it is complete, a rapidly morphing encapsulation of Coltrane’s 1960-1967 compositional development.

Beyond this, allusions to Coltrane’s 1965-67 work are scarce amongst his immediate associates. Even the exuberant *One for John*, recorded by Frank Wright for BYG/Aktuel in 1969, does not really have the same narrative disparity as can be found in Coltrane’s last works, Albert Ayler’s seminal output being much more apparent an influence. Even Alice Coltrane’s early 1970s albums for Impulse! sound very little like the work of her husband; rather, they elucidate her own vision, replete with studio effects, electronic instruments and

---

<sup>155</sup>Fascinating, and a bit eerily predictive, is Dave Burrell’s use of bells throughout the track’s first half. It would prefigure Coltrane’s use of the same instrument on his 1967 duos with Rashied Ali.

an increasingly but homogeneously Eastern flavor. We must look outside of more conventional “jazz” circles to find the legacy and influence of Coltrane’s final period.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **COLTRANE'S LEGACY**

#### **Introduction**

The two layers of Coltrane's late music function to create a listening experience that is multitemporal, assimilating elements that were both grounded in improvised music traditions and in the radically new and innovative free jazz of the 1960s. The present chapter will present the legacy of Coltrane's 1965-1967 work as it is manifest across the permeable boundaries of jazz and contemporary classical music. The two artists under discussion, saxophonist Anthony Braxton and saxophonist Paul Dunmall, both espouse Coltrane as an influence; yet, the way in which Coltrane's final music informs each artist/group's output is strikingly different, and those differences speak to the breadth and scope of Coltrane's vision.

I present the artists in chronological order to demonstrate the ways in which two successive generations of improvising musicians came to terms with Coltrane's final works. In the case of Anthony Braxton, Coltrane's death was still a recent event, and he needed immediately to assert his own voice as he formed his multivalent sonic and compositional aesthetic. Paul Dunmall began playing fully improvised music in the late 1980s, by which time some distance from Coltrane's innovations allowed for a more direct form of homage. In other words, temporal proximity to Coltrane's work goes some way toward governing the way in which each artist relates to his music and determines the way in which Coltrane's innovations are integrated into their respective styles of improvisation and composition.

It needn't be said that these are far from the only artists acknowledging Coltrane's influence; He became a cultural hero on the level of Louis Armstrong, or Jimi Hendrix, and his influence is claimed in the broadest circles. Often, virtuosity is the lynch-pin, and multiple generations of jazz musicians have claimed Coltrane as a father of sorts, organist Larry Young and guitarist John McLaughlin being two often cited examples. Both of these men pushed their music beyond expected boundaries for what would have been standard fare for a major label, experimenting with distortion, drone and various types of ethnic music in the context of extreme virtuosity with its roots in jazz. Their soloistic language is indebted equally to postbop and to the innovations of the 1960s, the era in which they both came to prominence. Both started in the tradition, as it were, and went some way "outside" to make their most definitive statements.

Just as often though, spiritual or sociopolitical matters are at the heart of whatever Coltrane influence is being claimed. Many musical stylists, from the late 1960s on, whose work has very little to do with Coltrane's musical language nevertheless drew on it for inspiration. The German group Faust, for example, cite him as a major influence;<sup>156</sup> their music is diverse enough to include passing references to free jazz, most notably on the LP *The Faust Tapes*. However, original Faust member Jean-Herve Peron states that the members of Faust were not "musicians" in the strictest sense, and that influence cannot be ascribed too assiduously.<sup>157</sup> It would seem, then, that Coltrane was a symbol of freedom from tradition in a time when such constraints were in upheaval all over the world.

---

<sup>156</sup>Not really German, Faust is known as a Krautrock group more or less by default. French and Russian descent played just as important a role in the group's membership. For acknowledgement of Coltrane influence, see the audio interview with Hans-Joachim Irmeler from Faust, *Abzu* (private release, 2003).

<sup>157</sup>Jean-Herve Peron, phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin (September 12, 2005).

Then, there are the most interesting cases of influence, those musicians who exalt Coltrane as a major influence, but whose music bears relatively small surface resemblance to anything Coltrane either composed or played. Anthony Braxton is one such composer/performer, his written music bearing the hallmarks of the Schoenberg/Cage/Stockhausen axis to which he has referred on numerous occasions.<sup>158</sup> His improvisations draw, in large part, on post-Charlie Parker linear constructions, also employing many of the “extended” techniques often associated with the New Thing and its European aftermath.<sup>159</sup> However, a deeper study of the culture from which he emerged, his playing, methods of composing and evolving a musical system, demonstrates a deep and multileveled allegiance to Coltrane; his work might be seen as really beginning just after Coltrane’s death, continuing the trajectories mapped out in Coltrane’s final works.

### **Anthony Braxton**

Multi-instrumentalist teacher and composer Anthony Braxton makes no secret of his allegiance to Coltrane. In interviews with Graham Locke, Ronald Radano and Mike Heffley, Braxton acknowledges both his initial aversion to Coltrane’s more experimental material and

---

<sup>158</sup>For typical comments from Braxton concerning his debt to Schonberg and Stockhausen, see Graham Locke, *Forces in Motion: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton* (Da Capo Press, 1989), p. 44.

<sup>159</sup>Braxton’s music straddles all manner of cultural lines and blurs many boundaries; he has often stated that his music is too Eurocentric for African-American comfort, yet too deeply rooted in jazz, a term he dislikes intensely, to be taken seriously by a narrow musical establishment. His disdain for the word “jazz” comes from his roots in the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians), who insist on calling the music “creative music,” or “great Black music.” For a detailed examination of the African American/European issue, See Locke, *Ibid.* pp. 72-73.

his ensuing acceptance of it.<sup>160</sup> In this, he is similar to Paul Dunmall, whose work will be examined later in this chapter. Unlike Dunmall however, he is clear that, after Coltrane's death, it became necessary to do something else, not to insult Coltrane by aping his innovations. What was achieved paid homage to Coltrane on a musical, temporal and spiritual level, all ultimately being unified in Braxton's Ghost Trance Music of 1995-2006. Even though he denied spiritual concerns in 1971, favoring a scientific and systematic approach to his music,<sup>161</sup> Radano points to the church as a major influence on Braxton's youth on the south side of Chicago.<sup>162</sup> His eventual stint in the burgeoning Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, begun upon his return from Korea in 1966, would also have a profound impact on him.<sup>163</sup> While the AACM music of the time was not spiritual in any singularly dogmatic sense, the Art Ensemble of Chicago's use of "ethnic" instruments and African garb represented a more general search for long-denied African-American identity. Not for nothing was the AACM motto coined: "Great Black music."<sup>164</sup> Only with the Processional music of the early 1980s, and with the Ghost Trance Musics of 1995-2006, would Braxton realize the AACM ideals in spiritual, pan-geographical and compositional domains.

---

<sup>160</sup>An online interview given at Mills College in 1985, makes Braxton's continuing allegiance to Coltrane readily apparent. See <http://www.archive.org/details/BraxtonSOM> (Accessed March 15, 2008)

<sup>161</sup>See Anthony Braxton, interview with Roland Young, Sandy Silver and Glen Howell, before his concert at the Palace of Legion of Honor, Paris, 1971, <http://www.archive.org/details/BraxtonAM1140> (accessed Mar.19, 2008)

<sup>162</sup>Ronald Radano, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique* (Da Capo Press, 1992), pp. 34-35.

<sup>163</sup>See Locke, *op cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup>The phrase is still a pivotal component of AACM rhetoric, as can be seen on its website: <http://aacmchicago.org/about-us> (accessed March 15, 2008) The Art Ensemble of Chicago, the AACM's flagship ensemble for over two decades, expanded the motto to read "Great Black Music, Ancient to the Future," introducing a critical element of temporality into the equation. See Locke, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

Braxton's compositional aesthetic is broad indeed, and as we will see, his relationship to the multifarious traditions to which he lays claim is complex. He has amassed a vast catalogue of numbered works, well in excess of 300 having been performed. These are for many different groupings and forces, from the solo piano of *Composition 1* to the four orchestras of *Composition 82*. His students attest that he is constantly absorbing the latest musical trends, avidly following "underground" music magazines such as *Wire* and listening to everything from contemporary classical to experimental hip-hop.<sup>165</sup> Braxton himself is always forthright about his influences, and these are multiple, the most recent being Native American music in relation to the Ghost Trance Music.

Braxton would embark on a thirty-year musical odyssey to arrive at Ghost Trance, but Coltrane's influence was present in his work, to a large extent, from the beginning of his involvement in music. Despite major differences in approach, Braxton's soloing is informed by Coltrane's solos from 1965-67. On a very fundamental level, both soloists share a penchant for skewing listeners' temporal perception. For Braxton, the realization of time's relativity came quite early in his career, as he gave his first solo recital. He tells the story of becoming aware that he was repeating himself within the first several minutes, and then his dilemma involved filling the next fifty minutes with something meaningful.<sup>166</sup> From that point, it became absolutely necessary for Braxton to develop a language that would guide his improvisations, a series of performative techniques that defined them, such practices becoming evident in compositions such as *26B*. Much later, these techniques would be manifest visually, both on score paper and in the guise of locations in his *Trillium* opera

---

<sup>165</sup>I have conducted informal interviews with Braxton students, but they wish to remain anonymous.

<sup>166</sup>Jonathan Piper, "Like a Giant Choo-Choo Train," from *Anthony Braxton: 9 Compositions (Iridium) 2006* (Firehouse 12 Records, FH12-04-03-001, 2007), p.6.

cycle. In the late 1960s however, they form the embryo of a system that would allow Braxton to fill time with the same concision with which a writer seeks to fill a page.

Coltrane's constant searching for the "one essential" resides at the heart of these early Braxton endeavors, but his soloing throughout his career also bears more superficial witness to Coltrane's legacy. In chapter 2, the proportional nature of Coltrane's solos was examined in the context of multiply-directed linear temporal narrative, and a similar phenomenon occurs in the way Braxton approaches his own soloistic constructions.

Like Coltrane, Braxton might form soloistic atoms by suddenly slowing down a line, without changing dynamics or intensity. In *Composition 131*, recorded for Black Saint in 1986, his solo improvisation demonstrates this approach; at 1:20, he plays a six-note figure that is separated from previous activity by a sharp reduction in speed. These notes also sit against the prevailing swing texture in hemiola, further individuating them from the rest of the solo. (Example 4.1, "Comp. 131," 1:00-2:00.) The first two notes of the figure, D and E, are also anticipated a second earlier (1:19) by D and F-sharp played at a similar speed amidst a flurry of solo activity. In essence then, and despite a different playing style, Braxton is presenting a multiply-directed linear solo in the manner of late Coltrane.

A similar construction can be heard, on a grander scale, in the version of Braxton's *Composition 26B*, recorded at Moers Jazz Festival on June 1, 1974.<sup>167</sup> This is one of Braxton's imprecisely notated pieces that relies on differentiation of line and attack as compositional rhetoric. The following recorded example, taken from the composition's opening material, demonstrates only one of the complex relationships in the piece. (Example 4.2, Comp. 26B," 0:00-0:50.) The first motives, heard through 0:35, form stuttered and fairly

---

<sup>167</sup> Anthony Braxton, *Solo Live at Moers Festival* (Moers Music 01002, 1976). This album has never been reissued on CD.



detached or atomistic phrases. The opening note, a sole E followed by a pause, is followed immediately by F-sharp and D as a pair, these two notes surrounding the E as if it represented a tonal center. Indeed, E functions as D-flat did in Coltrane's "Ogunde" in that it is implicated via multiply-directed linear time; a particularly poignant example occurs at 0:31, where Braxton plays two descending sixths, the second being G-sharp and B and the two-fold gesture resembling a plagal cadence.

Despite these resemblances to Coltrane's final work, we also see the aforementioned development of Braxton's language of compositional strategy, especially at 0:35, when the texture switches suddenly to more traditionally played lines. The tonal center also changes, the key of E-flat initially and briefly becoming the focus to compliment the change in timbre. E-flat triads recur at 0:35 and 0:38, serving as atomistic constructions and further manifestations of multiply-directed linear time. An arpeggiated A-flat major chord at 0:39 only re-enforces the tonal center, albeit briefly.

The piece is replete with dynamically and rhythmically opposing compositional devices reliant on different note lengths, repetitions and tonguings. In some very fundamental aspects, the aesthetic that forms this guided improvisation can be traced back to Coltrane's solos from the last works.<sup>168</sup>

Coltrane is by no means the only influence on Braxton's playing, and bebop's rhetoric, or what can be called "freebop" in the inter-registral manner associated with Eric Dolphy's most innovative work, is equally apparent. Yet, even amidst these backward glances at tradition, Coltrane is present, most notably in Braxton's expansive approach to time, both in the way he skews the music's history and in the more straight-forward negation

---

<sup>168</sup>I would not posit that these elements are present in Braxton's soloing to the degree that they are in Coltrane's, and certainly, they do not occur as often. Braxton is clearly influenced by Coltrane, but he is not a disciple, and the varying nature of his solos, and of his compositions, prove multiple allegiances.

of pulse. Braxton's many recordings of standards, beginning with the *In the Tradition* series recorded for Steeple Chase in 1974, demonstrate an astonishing array of stylistic principles; while the heads are often, but certainly not always, played faithfully, the solos then veer into avant-garde territory while maintaining strong allegiances to bebop and its aftermath. *The Charlie Parker Project* of 1993 presents many elucidations of his constant urge to preserve and battle tradition.<sup>169</sup> Braxton's soloing on "A Night in Tunisia" is executed on soprano saxophone and contrabass clarinet, the former most notably during what has been called the famous Parker alto break.<sup>170</sup> (Example 4.3, "A Night in Tunisia," 1:35-2:35.) Braxton unleashes a torrent of notes at 1:41 that invokes, unquestionably, Coltrane's late 1950s "sheets of sound," but it eschews the steady eighth notes of bebop in favor of a dislocating burst of "new thing" freedom. His subsequent clarinet work proves to be extremely reminiscent of Eric Dolphy's soloistic approach, most notably from 3:49 on. (Example 4.4, "Night in Tunisia, 3:40-4:40.) While there is a fair amount of atomism in this solo, especially concerning the reiterated notes D-Flat, D and A-Flat, there are also Dolphyesque inter-registral leaps, as at 4:21-4:25. At 4:28, Braxton reaches for the A-flat below middle C, then promptly plunges again into lower registers, where he engages in a few moments of multiphonics, an homage to the art of which both Dolphy and Coltrane were practitioners.

A more elaborate nod to tradition informs Braxton's solo on "Dewey Square," and again, Dolphy seems to be the primary influence with Coltrane standing close by. (Example 4.5, "Dewey Square," 1:20-2:00.) The octave G leaps at 1:29, to cite one example, bespeak a large number of accented registral shifts throughout the solo; in fact, Braxton covers a huge

---

<sup>169</sup> Anthony Braxton, *The Charlie Parker Project 1993* (Hat Hut Records, Hatology2-612, 1995).

<sup>170</sup> See the discography accompanying *Charlie Parker: The Complete Savoy and Dial Studio Recordings 1944-1948* (Savoy Entertainment Group, Inc., 92911-2, 2000), p.5.

pitch range throughout the 5.5 minutes of his solo, encompassing both extremes of which the alto saxophone is capable and often jumping unceremoniously between registers. Again though, “sheets of sound” and the aesthetic of Coltrane’s final works are also present, the latter particularly prevalent as the structure of the tune unravels, from 4:14, and meter gradually disappears. (Example 4.6, “Dewey Square,” 4:05-4:55.)

On a deeper compositional level, both of these examples find the listener’s sense of time constantly being called into question. Both “A Night in Tunisia” and “Dewey Square” are typical bebop constructions in that they employ verse-bridge-verse form, or 32-bar song form, as the basis of their structures. As with many of his interpretations of standards, Braxton’s group begins in tempo, following the form as prescribed. Inevitably though, any sense of overarching pulse is gradually lost, giving way to less readily identifiable explorations, sometimes related to the tune in question, sometimes not.

Resemblances to the parent tune might come in the form of rhythmic references or reminiscent fragments bubbling to the surface of a solo. Such procedures are most easily demonstrated in Braxton’s solo interpretation of standards. Throughout his career, Braxton has performed numerous solo recitals, in which standards have played a vital part. A brief examination of his solo treatment of “I’ll be Seeing You,” recorded in 2005, will demonstrate that his treatment of the composition bears a strong resemblance to the Multiply-directed linearity of Coltrane’s solos.

The tune begins and ends in E-Flat, and the entire rendition lasts a mere four minutes and fifty-five seconds. Despite brevity, considerable distance is placed between Braxton and the composition, accented notes being the only points of reference, guiding the listener back to the head. (Example 4.7, “I’ll be Seeing You,” 1:00-2:11.) Obviously, as there is no

rhythm section, Braxton takes rhythmic liberties from the outset, but the tune is readily identifiable until 1:22, at which point one chorus has been played.<sup>171</sup> Subsequently, Braxton engages in what might be called a free-fantasy approach to the tune, elongating and excising phrases at will. The G at 1:22, both elongated and accented, places the listener at the opening of the tune, as it is the opening note. It is worth remembering that just prior to this event, G an octave lower was heard but much more quietly, anticipating a brief pause. Both gestures signal the completion of a chorus and the commencement of another, even though any traditional counting of bars is impossible. Corroborating this reading, at 1:28, A-Flat is played, followed by a brief pause just before G and F are heard. It is only on repeated listening, due to registral concerns, that the accented C at 1:22 and the A leading to B-Flat at 1:24 register with clarity, adding additional layers of multiply-directed linearity in the proportional manner of Coltrane's later solos.

The paradigm holds throughout the treatment; even when seemingly disjunct lines are present, such as the Dolphyesque leaps down from D, to D-Flat and then to G at 1:53, a certain kind of resolution occurs at 2:02, where the opening gesture is again plainly heard. The D-Flat can then be viewed as a substitution relating to the dominant chord that ends the bridge.

Equally faithful and yet exploratory is his rendition of Coltrane's "Giant Steps," recorded at another solo recital in 1982. Taken at a fast pace, as are most renditions of the tune, it would, in most circumstances, be a vehicle for the soloist to demonstrate publicly the practice and skill inherent in mastering such a formidable set of chord changes. "Giant Steps" is, after all, the ultimate manifestation of Coltrane as a harmonic composer, the chords changing at least once every bar and rendering even a virtuoso like Tommy Flanagan close

---

<sup>171</sup>The example begins toward the end of the final eight bars of the melody.

to mute at such a clip.<sup>172</sup> However, Braxton circumvents such problems by elongating the rhythms; there is certainly a tempo, established from the beginning, but as soon as the first three choruses have been played, adhering to the melody, and the solo proper begins, tempo and form become quite relative.

At 0:27, we hear a pause, after which G-major and E-flat major are arpeggiated, conforming somewhat to the third relations that govern the tune. After these somewhat tenuous relations, long-breathed phrases employing bebop rhetoric alternate with long pauses, and only a few discernibly arpeggiated chords signal the form, as does the E-flat vii at 0:42. At 0:53, the notes D, B-Flat and C serve a similar function, C and D both tensions in the key of E-flat and delineating another chorus.

More frequently as the tune progresses, the notes of the melody become points of departure for more radical explorations. At 0:59, the tune's opening F-sharp and D are heard, but the A that follows leads the way to a similar arpeggiation on a G-major chord in second inversion, then ultimately to a scalar passage that fleshes out a B-flat major vii chord at 1:01. (Example 4.8, "Giant Steps" 0:00-1:05.)

As the solo becomes more charged, the streams of notes become thicker, until it is only longer and accented notes that signal the passage of choruses. At 1:41, we hear proportionally elongated rhythms on G, D, A, F-sharp and D, in the same rhythmic manner as is found at the opening of the head. Amidst the steady stream of smaller note values, this sort of proportionality skews the listener's temporal perception while also, somewhat paradoxically, providing a point of return.

---

<sup>172</sup>On the issued take of "Giant Steps" pianist Tommy Flannagan moves from increasingly faltering linear soloing to chordal gestures, ostensibly because he had not seen the tune before the session and, due to its complexity, misjudged it to be a ballad. See Lewis Porter, liner notes from *Heavy Weight Champion: The Complete Atlantic Recordings* (Rhino Records, R2 71984, 1995), p.13.

At one of the later choruses, beginning at 2:06, Braxton further confuses matters by incorporating many notes unrelated to the head. These signal the furthest points of exploration in this brief rendering of an already difficult tune. At that point, a pointilistic texture has been adopted, and even the ends of phrases have been altered rhythmically, making “Giant Steps” sound more and more like a Braxton composition. (Example 4.9, “Giant Steps,” 1:40-2:40.)

We see that even standards are subject to Braxton’s treatment as a composer in that the freedoms that inform his compositions are employed in the service of the traditions that spawned them. Somewhat ironically then, it is Braxton’s changing but increasingly unified compositional rhetoric that owes the greatest debt to Coltrane’s later music, as it bridges the gaps in traditions in a way that mirror Coltrane’s approach to his own compositions. From the outset, as we have already seen, Braxton’s compositions do not conform to any exclusively “jazz” or “classical” trope; they are fluid, reflecting an increasing disillusion with what Braxton deems the false boundaries placed, courtesy of race relations, on the points at which these musics intersect. This ambiguity of categorization brings to mind Coltrane’s comments, previously cited, about his final group’s output being perceived as classical music.

Where Coltrane is verbally reticent, Braxton takes the opposite approach; he gives lengthy and copious interviews, making sure that his positions are defined and disseminated in precisely the way he desires.<sup>173</sup> He has been very forthright about his compositional process, which might be seen to grow from the seeds planted in later Coltrane.

Briefly, and put in the simplest terms, Braxton has sought musical unity as his compositional language has evolved. Early in his career, possibly soon after his debut solo

---

<sup>173</sup>See, for one extreme example, the Third Millennial Interview, conducted by Mike Heffley, over more than 100 pages. <http://mheffley.web.wesleyan.edu/almatexts/absnt.htm> (accessed Mar.19, 2008)

saxophone recital, Braxton began to attempt demarcation of strategies that would allow him to structure his improvisations.<sup>174</sup> It was a logical step to incorporate said strategies into a compositional framework, one of the most obvious examples being *Composition 26B*, for solo alto saxophone, discussed above. His other early compositions ranged from the precisely notated scores of works such as *Composition 6K* to the long-form aleatory of *Composition 25*. Science governed his burgeoning compositional rhetoric, titles cast in the form of diagrams of varying degrees of complexity and given subsequent opus numbers for ease of cataloging.

From the outset, Braxton has been a composer enthralled by systems. Restructuralists, his term for composers that have redefined systems of thought and practice, have been his principle interest and influences, and it is these that he teaches in his graduate classes at Wesleyan University. For Braxton, Coltrane was among the restructuralists, “Giant Steps” serving as an early example of harmonic restructuralism.<sup>175</sup> While Braxton has not made specific reference to the later music of Coltrane, it is in this period that Coltrane’s restructuralist tendencies are most apparent; one such manifestation is in the motivic unity Coltrane was bringing to his final work, discussed in Chapter 2. Another such concern lay in Coltrane’s interest, semi-latently expressed, in time and temporal manipulation, as discussed in Chapter 1. Braxton made these concerns integral to his developing compositional rhetoric, and they have determined the course of his work to the present.

The concept of unity in Braxton’s music springs from practical concerns. By the middle 1980s, he had amassed a series of compositions that had only been performed once,

---

<sup>174</sup>See Anthony Braxton, interview with Charles Amirkhanian, “Speaking of Music at the Exploratorium in 1985,” <http://www.archive.org/details/BraxtonSOM> (accessed Mar.20, 2008)

<sup>175</sup>The 1985 interview with Charles Amirkhanian addresses these concerns in detail.

and he was certain that they would never be performed again. His quartet of the time, consisting of pianist Marilyn Crispell, bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Jerry Hemmingway, were given this back catalog to incorporate into the framework of newer compositions. In other words, and very simply, the quartet would begin to play one composition, and during the non-notated sections, each member could incorporate any number of melodic figures from previous compositions. In essence, twenty years of compositions were then becoming unified, and their multiple trajectories would inform a single performance. Braxton eventually labeled this system “Pulse Track” music, as each player presented a single line, or track, along which a series of compositional ideas would move.<sup>176</sup>

Far from content with that, Braxton disbanded the quartet in the middle 1990s, and his Ghost Trance Music was first performed in 1995. A direct expansion of the Pulse Track Music, and yet also related to earlier compositions involving variable instrumentation, GTM is Braxton’s most simultaneously unified and diverse compositional system to date. Drawn from various world music traditions, such as Native American music, Gamelan and Puppet Theater, GTM is pulse-based and consists, in basic form, of even eighth notes, gaining rhythmic complexities as it was modified from 1995 through 2006. At its core, though, was the idea that the temporal continuum must exist in cross-section in every performance. As Braxton scholar Francesco Martinelli observes, “Every performance must contain past, present and future; ... On the strictly musical plain, this means nesting of old compositions into new (past), presenting new compositions (present) and let the summation logics of these

---

<sup>176</sup>For a detailed description of pulse track structures and how they function, see Locke, *op. cit.*, p. 60



strategies forecast new developments (future).”<sup>177</sup> In light of this temporal simultaneity, it makes sense that, as Art Lange states, the Ghost Trance Music is to appear continuous, conventional beginning and ending becoming meaningless, even non-existent.<sup>178</sup>

We have seen the assimilation of previously composed material before, but given the time/space logics that Braxton wishes to address with GTM, the idea of temporality, or extended temporality, comes to the fore more prominently than in pulse track music. In this way, seminal aspects of late Coltrane, proportionality of soloing and a burgeoning interest in unity, are manifest into a compositional aesthetic that is both unified and diverse; rather, it encourages diversity under the banner of unity. Beyond this, the realm of magic beloved of Coltrane is now manifest in Braxton’s music through the idea of trance; as with late period Coltrane, compositional structures defy simple temporal logic, beginning midstream and incorporating earlier compositions into the already discontinuous multi-temporal mixture, bringing the perception of multiply-directed linear time to a new level.

The GTM music was concluded in March 2006, with a four-night series at New York’s Iridium club, nine compositions (350-358) being premiered. They represented GTM in its most advanced stage, the system having mutated from the steady staccato eighth-note patterns of *Composition 184*, for example, to a high degree of temporal instability. *Composition 184* is one of the first GTM pieces to have been written and performed, and it is a perfect example of the system’s early manifestation. In the following example, a steady stream of eighth notes forms the entire compositional makeup, written in Braxton’s diamond

---

<sup>177</sup>Francesco Martinelli, from *Anthony Braxton: Sextet (Istanbul) 1996* (Braxton House, BH-001, 1996), p.4.

<sup>178</sup>Art Lange, from *Anthony Braxton: Ensemble (New York) 1995* (Braxton House, BH-007), 1997, pp.3-4.

clef.<sup>179</sup> Yet, the recording, released on the Braxton House label, obviously departs from the score considerably, Kevin Norton's drum part often playing syncopated patterns, such as at 0:23, against the composition's rigidity. Even Braxton's playing strays, whether accidentally or by design, from the regular pulse of the music. (Example 4.10, "Composition 184," 0:00-0:40.)

By March of 2006, GTM had been transformed almost beyond recognition. The pieces were kept to as close to an hour as possible, by means of an hourglass.<sup>180</sup> Only the homophonic simultaneities that signify GTM's primary material were immediately apparent, this time in the context of a thirteen-piece ensemble. The following fragment of *Composition 354* will show the many interruptions in the formerly solid line of eighths, not to mention the long-held notes and rapid flourishes that also continually disrupt the pulse patterns associated with earlier GTM. (Example 4.11, "Composition 354," 0:00-0:40.)

The "heads," or primary compositional material of laterday GTM reflects late period Coltrane on two deeper levels. First, if we view the entire trajectory of GTM as a metaphoric representation of innovative Black Music, or restructural black music, from Charlie Parker onward, the metaphor begins to take shape. The steady eighth notes might be representative of 1940s jazz, or bebop, in its reliance on even eighth notes instead of the swung eighths of previous generations. As the music progresses through the complexities associated with GTM's development, post-bop is invoked, and by the time of the Iridium compositions, the music is only dimly related to its former manifestations, in the way "free" jazz reflects the

---

<sup>179</sup>Diamond clef enables any instrumentalist to perform GTM in any register, leading to a sound that is timbrally heterogeneous and homophonic. See Bill Shoemaker from *Anthony Braxton: Four Compositions* (Washington, D.C.) (Braxton House, BH-009, 1998), p.5.

<sup>180</sup>The liner notes to the resulting ten-disc *9 Compositions (Iridium)* (FH12-04-03-001), by various authors, describe the proceedings.

traditions from which it emerged. The proportional aspects of GTM, the sudden fluctuations of tempo void of rubato, mirror many aspects of Coltrane's solos from his final period; as a result, Coltrane's last works are placed in a historical context with music as the vehicle of historical transmission.

More intriguing, and engaging with Coltrane's work on a compositional level, is the notion that the trajectory of GTM reflects the development of a archetypal Coltrane solo, from simplicity to complexity. We have already observed that many Coltrane solos, from 1955 onward, follow the pattern of beginning with a few notes, usually in longer durations and stating fairly simple motivic material. They provide the genesis for increasingly complex developments as the solos build toward multiple climaxes, themselves arguably being renderings of the music's entire history. Braxton engages Coltrane's compositional philosophy over an extended chronological period, producing a musical system that might be viewed as a long-term homage to Coltrane that nevertheless remains outside of the realm of mere mimicry. In this way, Coltrane's legacy becomes an integral part of one of Anthony Braxton's most important compositional phases.<sup>181</sup>

An exemplary and illustrative moment from *Nine Compositions (Iridium 2006)* will demonstrate the multiple levels on which Coltrane's influence is palpable. The entire run of four evenings, represented on nine CDs, forms a plethora of simultaneities that will ensure Braxton scholarship for years to come; this is due, as Jonathan Piper demonstrates in his expert introduction to the set, in large part to the fact that each musician was allowed to incorporate any part of any Braxton piece into the compositional fabric.<sup>182</sup> In *Composition*

---

<sup>181</sup>The Ghost Trance Music has yet to be fully explored, and such an analysis is beyond the scope of the present study. Mike Heffley's superb treatise on Braxton's music was finished just as GTM was in the formative stages.

<sup>182</sup>See Piper, *op. cit.*, p.10.

354, at approximately forty-eight minutes, saxophonist James Fei and drummer Aaron Seigel begin a rendition of Braxton's *Composition 40E*, a piece redolent of the Sousa marches so beloved by Braxton.<sup>183</sup> (Example 4.12, "Composition 354," track 4, 0:00-1:00.)

As can plainly be heard, the *40E* fragment is not the only melody in play; a much slower melody, most likely taken from the score of 354 itself, can be heard in the background as the march dominates the foreground. Two quiet trills also become apparent underneath the march, until what sounds like a first-specie GTM melody enters, in a completely different tempo and played by tuba and French horn.

On a purely motivic level, Coltrane's emergent penchant for combining fragments and motives from his own compositions, as discussed in chapter 2, forms a precedent for the simultaneities on display in this brief excerpt of 354. Even more pervasive, there is no single sense of tempo, as is the case with Coltrane's final music. While there is certainly more dynamic contrast here than in Coltrane's work, a certain verticality is omnipresent in the palimpsest nature of this fragment and of the more advanced GTM pieces. The overall effect is a skewing of time, or a loss of ordinary temporal perception, which, it should be reiterated, was one of the original aims of GTM music as conceived in 1995.

The fact that Braxton allows his musicians, in this case a group of twelve, to determine the compositional structure of each piece takes Coltrane's embryonic aesthetic a step further, one that he might have embraced had he lived to see his vision to fruition. Certainly, this is one of the most complete absorptions and transmogrifications of Coltrane's final work to emerge in what the AACM calls Great Black Music, as Coltrane's legacy is apparent at every phase of its construction and execution. Compositional unity and temporal

---

<sup>183</sup>See Piper, *ibid.*, p.13.

disunity form the fascinating dialectic at the music's core and the axis on which each composition revolves and evolves. While no Ghost Trance piece is dedicated to Coltrane — seemingly a glaring omission in a body of work brimming with diverse dedicatees — no such homage is really necessary, so complete is Braxton's absorption and assimilation of Coltrane's legacy. A final clue can be found in the liner notes to the first Ghost Trance music release, on Braxton's own Braxton House label in 1995. In the interview by Braxton scholar Francesco Martinelli, Braxton states of the ghost's role in Ghost Trance Music:

“I believe that one of the problems with this time period is that we don't understand the old ghost, the old masters. We have been given a viewpoint of the masters that takes away the aura of the ghosts. All of it looks like artifacts, and more and more, children are not able to gain some sense of the real culture.”<sup>184</sup>

If Braxton's GTM is meant to bring new light to the past, Coltrane is both Braxton's spiritual father and the ghost to which he refers; Coltrane's final compositions summarize and transcend the music that he was no longer content to call jazz; Braxton's Ghost Trance Music is both in the Coltrane lineage and beyond it, both men creating self-consciously multifarious musical universes that are nevertheless rigorously unified in execution and intent.

### **Paul Dunmall**

Unlike Anthony Braxton, who has dealt with Coltrane's vast legacy by incorporating it into a series of extremely systematic performance and compositional frameworks superficially far removed from the source, British multi-instrumentalist Paul Dunmall demonstrates no need for any such evasion. He also feels no need to systematize his prolific

---

<sup>184</sup>Martinelli, *op. cit.*, p.5.

improvisations and compositions. He has great respect for Braxton's music, but his approach to Coltrane's legacy is, as will be demonstrated, much more intuitive but no less thorough.<sup>185</sup>

Of those younger artists who acknowledge freely a huge debt to Coltrane, very few are as criminally underrepresented in the literature as is this long-term member of the British improvising community. Primarily a tenor saxophonist associated with the second generation of British improvisers, he has assimilated and updated, with free and repeated acknowledgement, the solo and combinative instrumental language associated with Coltrane, and especially the late works.<sup>186</sup> Many of his album titles, instrumental groupings and compositional structures of the 1990s and beyond reflect a passionate and continuing allegiance to Coltrane's work of 1965-67, while his soloing can be heard, in one sense, as a composite reference to Coltrane's entire recorded legacy. His work is unabashedly indebted to Coltrane while informed by the broader history of American jazz and British improvised music. His biography, exposure to various and wide-ranging music and an examination of his playing and composing in different contexts renders the relationship clear. Additionally, his written and oral comments regarding Coltrane's work as a guiding force for his own development further support the notion of overt influence.

Dunmall's voyage to the United States in the early 1970s, where he played in an Ashram-associated band with Alice Coltrane,<sup>187</sup> might be construed as the beginning of a first-generation once-removed association with Coltrane, whose latter 1960s work Dunmall

---

<sup>185</sup>Paul Dunmall, Phone Interview, conducted by Marc Medwin (March 3, 2005).

<sup>186</sup>Paul Dunmall, Phone interview, Conducted by Marc Medwin (October 4, 2005).

<sup>187</sup>An Ashram is an intentional community meant to provide a safe haven for spiritual study and uplift. Traditionally associated with Hindu practices, it has now taken on a broader series of pan-Indian and multi-spiritual associations. <http://www.shantimandir.com/glossary/glossary.htm> (Accessed, Mar. 22, 2008)

had only recently come to appreciate after a brief period of non-comprehending rejection.<sup>188</sup> Having played subsequently with artists as musically diverse as legendary bluesman Johnny “Guitar” Watson, British folk artists Robin Williamson and Polly Bolton and the more traditionally oriented jazz group Spirit Level, which Dunmall co-founded in 1979, he did not completely embrace improvised music until 1988, after which it has become his primary musical concern. From this pivotal moment in his music making, much of his output has been completely improvised, and when compositional frameworks are present, they are often of a fairly skeletal nature, in the manner of Coltrane’s *Ascension*. It is not simply that Dunmall’s sonic aesthetic encompasses cross-cultural musical references such as drones, multicultural percussion and the slides and rapid-fire microtonal ornaments often associated with non-Western musics; his melodic and harmonic constructs exhibit the same blend of atonality, tonal repetition and romantic harmony that typifies a later Coltrane solo or compositional structure.<sup>189</sup> Yet, as with Coltrane, Dunmall’s musical aesthetic is firmly rooted in jazz, a fact which sets his work apart from much of what has come to be recognized as British improvisation. He does not engage, generally, in either of the two overarching aesthetics associated with first-generation British improvised music, namely the long-held tones of AMM and the post-Webernian pointillism of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble (see Chapter 1.) Perhaps it is more accurate to posit that while both constructs make appearances in his work, he is not limited by either aesthetic. Dunmall’s work might, in fact, be seen as trans-geographic in a very practical sense, and his biography shares many important elements with Coltrane’s. Beyond simply being influenced by recordings of American improvised

---

<sup>188</sup>Paul Dunmall, phone interview conducted by Marc Medwin (October 4, 2005).

<sup>189</sup>Dunmall has stated that he sometimes thinks of his soloing as following non-existent chord changes. See Dunmall, Phone Interview, conducted by Marc Medwin (May 25, 2005).

music, he lived the experience with a bonified and indispensable apprenticeship. His first love was not jazz, but 1960s rock and rhythm and blues, King Curtis and Junior Walker being primary influences. He speaks of Jimi Hendrix as embodying the spirit and raw energy of the 1960s in a similar way to Albert Ayler and John Coltrane.<sup>190</sup> His first contact with more traditional jazz came through working in a prominent London music store, where he had the opportunity to witness such iconic figures as Ben Webster and Stan Getz as they tried out saxophones.<sup>191</sup> “I watched everything they did really carefully,” he observes. “I didn’t really know what was going on theoretically at that time, but I knew I was in the presence of something really important.”<sup>192</sup>

As with Coltrane, Dunmall experienced what he has described only as a moment of expanded consciousness, or a spiritual awakening, and it seems to have been the experience that has determined both the aftercourse of his life and of his music. His discovery of the Divine Light Mission in London led him to the United States, where he worked and recorded with Alice Coltrane in an Ashram-associated group. Though the results were never released, his stay in the US, from 1973-1976, allowed him the opportunity to tour and record with Johnny Guitar Watson during his last year in this country. As with Coltrane, Dunmall was steeping himself in African-American popular music, very closely related to that which he had enjoyed in his youth, a rigorous challenge that forced him to perfect a more traditional technique and understanding of theoretical concepts. Yet, Dunmall’s first professional experience had been with a British progressive rock band called Marsupilami, during which

---

<sup>190</sup>Paul Dunmall, Phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin (July 9, 2006).

<sup>191</sup>This interview, on the Mind Your Own Music website, is undated, but it is conducted by guitarist Philip Gibbs. See <http://www.mindyourownmusic.co.uk/paul-dunmall-interview.htm> (Accessed March 15, 2008)

<sup>192</sup>Paul Dunmall, phone interview conducted by Marc Medwin (December 11, 2007).



he was introduced to the high-energy “free” playing of Coltrane, Frank Wright and Albert Ayler.<sup>193</sup> The simultaneous exposure to “structured” and “free” music has left a lasting impression on Dunmall; it has also been instrumental in forming his musical aesthetic. Never an advocate of total freedom without a basis in structure, Dunmall has repeatedly championed intense practice and exemplary technique. When asked about guiding principles that inform his current work, Dunmall often cites Coltrane first and foremost, whose penchant for ceaseless spiritual exploration and grasp of structure and technique renders him, in Dunmall’s perception, a complete musician. In a recent correspondence, Dunmall writes: “I consider him [Coltrane] to be my musical teacher, even though I never saw him play or met him. I can’t think of any other musician that transmits this powerful energy with such skill and humility.”<sup>194</sup>

Beyond this, however, he acknowledges a wide and occasionally surprising variety of music that has shaped the way he approaches his work. His immersion in many musical traditions is as far ranging as we believe Coltrane’s to have been, and, as Dunmall observes, access to recorded documents from around the world has never been easier to obtain. “You can hear anything you want, from anywhere in the world, and if something captures your fancy, more is only a mouse-click away.”<sup>195</sup> He maintains an interest in many types of traditional and experimental compositions; on a regular basis, he absorbs everything from North Indian classical music to American and British rock and Rhythm and Blues. His collection also includes a wide selection of more recently composed works, notably from

---

<sup>193</sup>Paul Dunmall, interview with Philip Gibbs, *op. cit.*

<sup>194</sup>Paul Dunmall, correspondence with Marc Medwin (December 19, 2007).

<sup>195</sup>Paul Dunmall, Phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin (December 11, 2007).

China. “Sometimes I just check if a piece is composed after 1950 or not, and if it is, I buy it.”<sup>196</sup>

It is this diversity, resulting from the inculcation in multiple playing environments and broad listening, that informs Dunmall’s prodigious output, most directly where his playing is concerned. As Coltrane’s playing references but exceeds all that preceded him, Dunmall’s work, while bearing unique stylistic traits, is also steeped in jazz history, most notably in the legacy of bop and postbop; as we will hear in “Mandala,” a typical Dunmall solo builds in intensity and complexity, arising from a few held tones in a similar fashion to Coltrane’s soloing with the 1960 Miles Davis group. However, Dunmall’s is a much more superficially traditional approach to soloing, expanding on Coltrane’s dualistic conception of linearity and atomism and reintroducing the stereotypically fluid lines of bebop into his improvisational language. He has stated that he is actually hearing harmonies in his inner ear as he plays, building webs of complex linearity over them, an important fact when attempting any sort of analysis of his work. Rather than employing the extramusical and speech-like rhetoric of Albert Ayler, Pharaoh Sanders or David Murray, Dunmall’s playing might be seen to exhibit many of the hallmarks associated with 1960s freebop saxophonist Sam Rivers. Dunmall and Rivers both seem to build solos on models that invoke pre-New Thing aesthetics, such as those established by Charlie Parker, but both players frequently incorporate now-established New Thing vocabulary. Dunmall is increasingly wary of using honks, squeaks and other such rawly expressive sounds, as he feels too much reliance on these techniques can substitute for proficiency and a solid technical grasp of the instrument. He does use the aforementioned rhetorical devices, especially in his earlier work, but

---

<sup>196</sup>*ibid.*

sparingly, trying to make each such gesture as meaningful as possible and avoid overstatement.

Of the many and varied references to Coltrane throughout Dunmall's vast discography, none is clearer than *Spiritual Empathy*, a duo disc recorded in 1994 with fellow British improvising drummer Tony Levin. It is only one of many duo projects in which Dunmall has engaged, but its debt to the *Interstellar Space* sessions, taped by Coltrane and Rashied Ali in February of 1967, cannot be ignored. The duo forces of drums and saxophone, especially deployed in this way, clearly descend from those seminal 1967 sessions, recordings that have become a model for many subsequent duo projects. The album title also references Coltrane, specifically regarding the subject matter that informed his latter-day projects. We have already seen that multicultural or pan-geographical concerns predominated the titles of his earlier compositions, certainly a kind of global empathy; it makes sense, given developments in Coltrane's thinking, that the titles of his later works concerned a spiritual empathy of sorts, both within and beyond African-American developments of the 1960s.

The music on *Spiritual Empathy* is also heavily indebted to *Interstellar Space*. The opening track, "Mandala," even shares contour and development with the Coltrane/Ali duets. As the Coltrane/Ali collaborations begin with bells and largely meterless drumming, "Mandala" opens with spare cymbals, barely stroked. Levin slowly adds layers of tom-toms, bass drum and snare in a manner reminiscent of Rashied Ali, building up a maximally minimalist wall of sound that conjures visions of "New Thing" freedom and volume. As with Ali, there are moments of near tempo; the cymbals at the opening begin to outline a fairly quick if erratic pulse, repetitions and reiterations fostering the illusion. However, the

various timbral articulations also fall prey to hairpin changes in speed, making any logical sense of tempo, or temporality, difficult to gauge. By the first bass drum stroke at 0:19, any sense of meter has been obliterated. Single strokes multiply exponentially, rapidly supplanting the cymbals and filling out the texture. It is as if any sparse reference to British improvisation has also been supplanted by American tradition and reference. (Example 4.13, “Mandala,” 0:00-1:00.)

Dunmall’s playing is even more immediately redolent of Coltrane’s final period. His first four notes, the fourth elongated, bespeak Coltrane’s atomistic soloing, as do the next three notes, which are clearly a development of the opening phrase. The first few phrases exhibit Coltrane’s penchant for beginning simply, each group of notes separated from the other by long-breathed silences. The tenor tone is strident, somewhat more dynamically varied than Coltrane’s in a duo context but certainly similarly declamatory. Vibrato is pronounced and extremely flexible, as in Coltrane’s final works, assuredly also a timbral nod to Albert Ayler’s influence; vibrato forms a large part of “Mandala”’s timbral interest, notably at the ends of phrases, as with the A-flat at 0:49. Dunmall cites vibrato, a strident or hard tone, high-register tenor playing and forceful low-register blowing in his work as having been absorbed directly from listening to Coltrane, and all are readily apparent throughout “Mandala.”<sup>197</sup>

Yet, it is motivic development that links “Mandala” most convincingly with latter period Coltrane. From the beginning of the track until 1:19, Dunmall’s phrases become longer and more complex while each maintains its autonomy, as we have seen in Coltrane’s solo from “All Blues,” discussed in Chapter 2. After 1:19, there is a marked decrease in phrase length, and a motivic idea similar to that in *Meditations*’ first movement appears. At

---

<sup>197</sup>Paul Dunmall, correspondence with Marc Medwin (December 17, 2007).

1:23, the six-note figure is stated, then transformed at 1:24, reduced to four notes and transposed from 1:25-1:27 before being subsumed into larger phrases.

Note repetition also formed an integral component of Dunmall's improvisational language in 1994. From 1:32-1:40, A becomes the point around which each phrase evolves, first in two octaves and then only in the upper octave. While this is certainly not a tonal center—no such judgment can convincingly be made in such a “free” context—the practice is similar to that heard when a tonal center is present in Coltrane's final works, conjuring reminiscences of Coltrane's soloistic atomism and to Multiply-Directed linear time. (Example 4.14, “Mandala,” 1:10-2:10.) Such repetitions and phrase reiterations overlap due to Dunmall's fluid style, and the rapidity with which Dunmall delivers his torrents of notes sometimes makes easy distinction impossible, and yet the influence of Coltrane's final work is undeniable.

Even at this earlier stage however, Dunmall is by no means a Coltrane clone. Throughout the sixteen-minute improvisation, he arpeggiates triadically in a way that Coltrane does not, and as will be demonstrated later, such an approach becomes a hallmark of his more current style of playing. Also, in 1994, Dunmall was still employing many of what might be called extended techniques, yet another homage to 1967 Coltrane and, even more, to his associates. As the piece builds in intensity, Dunmall and Levin engage in more intense dialogue, until at 3:11, Dunmall forsakes discernable pitches in favor of emotive shrieks. They abate momentarily as Dunmall resumes in a lower register, but upon their return half a minute later, they even inform lower-register playing as Dunmall growls in post-Ayler homage. (Example 4.15, “Mandala,” 3:10-4:10.)

Much has changed in the thirteen years following *Spiritual Empathy*. A pre-concert rehearsal fragment from his 2005 disc for solo soprano saxophone will demonstrate his more recent approach. (Example 4.16, “Part Two,” rehearsal fragment, complete.) While this fragment is completely improvised, it certainly exhibits a structure that blurs the boundaries between conventional notions of composition and improvisation, a manifestation of Coltrane’s legacy. The pitch A is repeatedly implied from the outset, the first long note being C-sharp; the key area is explored at length later in the piece, the whole fragment ending on C, the minor third above A. Melodic motives are also stated and expanded in a way that conjures shades of later Coltrane, most evident from 2:18 and beyond, where notes are added serially to destabilize the predominantly major harmonies.

In this fragment, reference also comes to the fore as a major component of Dunmall’s compositional language. While the reiterated arpeggios beginning at 2:24, rooted rather tenuously in A with the E occasionally altered, speak to an obsessively atomistic construct, the surrounding material presents lines that almost reference Diaghilev-period Stravinsky while still being rooted in the vocabulary of jazz.<sup>198</sup> The B-flat/F multiphonic at 0:15, the fifth being the most prominent overtone, resolves suddenly to an E, invoking similar tritone use in certain passages of *The Firebird* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Yet, the overarching rhythm of the passage is free in the manner of New Thing developments. This is not to imply that reference to improvised vocabularies does not play as significant a role in Dunmall’s work as it does in Coltrane’s; there are even definite reminiscences of Coltrane’s “Sheets of sound” approach, most notably at 1:08 and beginning at 3:30. The references

---

<sup>198</sup>It seems reasonable to assert that any marked resemblance to the opening of *Le Sacre du Printemps* is accidental; the E, B and A sequence at 1:12 is probably not meant to be a direct quotation. However, Dunmall’s timbre switches at that pivotal moment, almost darkening to that associated with a bassoon. In a recorded interview of December 11, 2007, Dunmall states unequivocally his enthusiasm for Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*, claiming the composer as one of his primary influences in the classical arena.

simply emerge as one layer of a more intricate, or tightly woven, soloistic fabric. The bent F at 0:25 may be heard as a subtle blues reference, but it is not the primary focus of the passage.

Perhaps a more immediately recognizable homage to late Coltrane comes in the form of tastefully introduced extended techniques and non-traditional ornaments that often invoke a broadly informed musical aesthetic similar to that in Coltrane's playing. The track opens with a flourish followed by multiphonics on three successive pitches. Similarly striking is the way in which the tempo of Dunmall's vibrato incorporates an immediately perceptible fluidity of speed and intensity, reminiscent of the Gamakas in Karnatic music or the vibrato found on important notes in Persian singing. As with 1965-67 Coltrane and as with Albert Ayler before him, Dunmall does not simply use vibrato as a decoration. It takes on aspects of non-Western approaches to the bending of notes, as Ayler's invoked the decadence, optimism and fervor associated with early New Orleans; this gestalt is enhanced by the many microtonal pitch-shifts throughout the fragment, often resolving rapidly up or down by third, as with the C-sharps movement to A beginning at 0:38. Quartertones also abound from 0:50-0:55, where more conventional if slow vibrato is supplemented by rapid and clipped note shifts that exist outside of more established Western technique. Taken together, these non-traditional multi-cultural references speak both to Coltrane's influence and to Dunmall's fresh adaptation of any accompanying spiritual and associated musical concerns.

While Dunmall's music engages multiple histories and geographical locations, the titles of his pieces also bespeak similarly "universal" and spiritual interests, some bordering on the sociopolitical. Album titles such as *Spiritual Empathy* and *Love, Warmth and Compassion* certainly invoke the all-encompassing humanity of Coltrane's titles, while

*I Wish you Peace*, to be discussed in more detail presently, enters into mildly political territory in a much more directly confrontational way than Coltrane ever dared to employ, save, perhaps, with “Alabama” or in “Peace on Earth.”

This, in essence, is the nature of Dunmall’s advance. He is clearly working from a standpoint of homage, but Coltrane’s arsenal of musical and social rhetorical devices have been assimilated into a framework that is consistently Dunmall’s own. It seems plausible to speculate that his approach has evolved a few steps away from the frenetic outpourings of late Coltrane, with which he is still most often identified, to a more introspective assimilation of Coltrane’s complete artistry. His group work also demonstrates the strides he has taken away from Coltrane. The first documented performances of Mujician, an improvising quartet including Dunmall, pianist Keith Tippett, bassist Paul Rogers and drummer Tony Levin, demonstrate that in 1988, volume, density and energy were among the groups primary concerns. However, unlike late Coltrane, no two Mujician concerts present the same material, each performance being entirely improvised. While many of Dunmall’s projects followed the path blazed by Mujician, Dunmall’s own interest in spirituality, present from the early 1970s, began to inform his music even more completely, bringing with it a certain non-stereotypical exoticism. By 2000, he had formed his own label, Duns Limited Edition, on which he was able to try many musical experiments unhindered by constraints from the marketplace and from other labels. *Manjah* is one of the most interesting of the Duns releases in that, by using M. Balachandar, an accomplished mridangum player, Dunmall employed the actual performer associated with Indian constructs in his music. His playing and compositional voice had become unified in a way similar to what Coltrane achieved in his final years, but Coltrane did not employ virtuoso instrumentalists from the countries he



referenced. More and more, Dunmall does not aspire to sound or compose like Coltrane; rather his entire musical outlook seems to be influenced by Coltrane at an extremely fundamental level. In other words, Coltrane's philosophy, approach to group deployment and playing style are adopted principles for Dunmall rather than blueprints to be followed strictly.

"I Wish You Peace" from 2003, Dunmall's first big-band project, is a particularly poignant case in point. He considers it one of his most important works, evidenced by the 16 musicians he picked for the performance.<sup>199</sup> Most have worked with Dunmall extensively in the past, in various combinations; the decision to use them in one aggregate is especially interesting given the historically unified nature of his approach to the saxophone, as discussed above. It seems clear, given the deployment of his musicians, that he wanted the instrumentation to mirror the various concerns that have informed his playing since his first solo disc in 1986, both indebted to Coltrane and superseding his innovations. The name he ascribes to his ensemble, the Moksha Big Band, is significant in that Moksha, very loosely translated, is a Sanskrit word denoting the final liberation of the soul.<sup>200</sup> The concept is redolent of late Coltrane in that it mirrors the concerns expressed in such titles as "Attaining," "Sun Ship" and "Offering." It also connotes a clear sequel to other Dunmall works, such as "Desire and Liberation." Again, the title bespeaks spiritual concerns stemming from his studies in the United States, which are inextricably linked with his experiences of Coltrane's final works.

---

<sup>199</sup>Paul Dunmall, Phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin (October 4, 2004).

<sup>200</sup>For the various states of liberation as expressed in Hinduist thought, see: Shah, C.S., "Moksha or Liberation" <http://www.geocities.com/neovedanta/aci.html> (Accessed Jan. 9, 2007)

The piece's construction and "orchestral" execution follow suit, assimilating and advancing Coltrane's later work in the context of Dunmall's own musical biography. Like *A Love Supreme*, it is a multi-part album-length suite, employing some composed passages amidst epic and varied improvisational episodes. As with *A Love Supreme*, the work's first movement is based loosely in F, while its final movement begins in C. As with *Ascension*, melodic lines are continually contrasted with controlled chaos, volume and energy in a state of constant flux within a series of connected vignettes. However, as we have seen with much of his more recent work, Dunmall extends Coltrane's implications. Where Coltrane's later work implies or suggests world music associations, particularly of African origin, Dunmall's piece actually employs a tambura in its first movement.<sup>201</sup>

However, Dunmall alters Coltrane's "Ascension" formula. Instead of layered motivic entrances forming a tightly wound but loosely constructed aggregate, Dunmall incorporates similarly dense but softer layers of sound into the accompanimental drone. (Example 4.17, "I Wish you Peace, Part 1," 0:00-2:00.) Harps, piano and winds achieve an urgent result while also leaving room for the composition to develop. The atmosphere of the opening might best be described as languidly anticipatory, the constant autoharp arpeggiations, courtesy of Philip Gibbs, set in contrast to the droning tambura. The harp glisses a scale that invokes F-minor and D-flat dominant vii simultaneously, as reminiscent of Alice Coltrane's piano accompaniments as of John's mode-based compositions, as we have seen in her handling of "Afro-blue"; the association makes sense, given Dunmall's 1970s work with Alice. The tambura, however, plays the traditional role of droning the root and fifth, firmly emphasizing

---

<sup>201</sup> This might be as much influenced by Alice's work as by John's, but a similar interest in what might stereotypically be called "exotica" is undeniable. Dunmall would never use such a term, preferring to focus on musical fusion and on the spiritual nature of the music and its making.

F and C. Adding color, prepared piano tones are sprinkled tastefully throughout the thick but transparent orchestration. There is no real meter to be found, even though the harp and piano provide the occasional but illusory sensation of slow pulse.

Out of the miasma, Dunmall's tenor saxophone rises on several sustained notes, hints of vibrato adding to the Indian feel. More interesting however is that while the band invokes late Coltrane, Dunmall's playing exhibits features of Coltrane's work with the 1960 touring version of Miles Davis' group. His playing is sparse, long luminous notes swelling sympathetically with the constantly morphing complexities of the orchestral drone. The first four notes, occurring at 1:30, invoke the quartal opening moments of "A Love Supreme" and "Offering," and while this associative act was neither planned nor deliberate, it bespeaks late Coltrane allegiance more convincingly than does any verbiage. Even the multiplied-directed linear model of narrative is maintained, but F, the obvious tonal center of the movement, is implicated rather than emphasized; the E that begins Dunmall's solo is a constant recurrent, returning at 1:32 to be held until 1:40, heard again at 1:42 and from 1:55 until 2:00. B and F-sharp are similarly held and accented, and it seems as if F is being avoided deliberately, except for momentary occurrences as at 1:46. Here, F is repeated, but it is in constant juxtaposition with F-sharp which continually offsets it. From the outset, Dunmall's playing exists, therefore, on two levels of reference; in terms of temporal layout and developing intensity, an earlier period of Coltrane's soloing is referenced, but at a deeper structural level, 1965-67 is clearly the model.

When the melody proper does in fact enter at 5:38, it does so only in a series of unisons, almost as if in contrast with the huge timbral development apparent throughout the score's introduction. Here, another layer of quasi-conscious reference is added, as the

melodic line bears romantic resemblance to *Ascension*'s construction.<sup>202</sup> Only at 7:27 do chords, more accurately described as clusters, appear as the movement's density and dynamics swell to saturation point, only to ebb again. As with Coltrane's *Meditations* suite, an area is left open for a two-drummer ensemble to improvise, all composed material ending at 10:24. However, the five minutes of composition invoke *Ascension*, alternating simple but fluid melodic lines with dense passages of long-held clusters. In this way, the orchestration and composition are as multi-referential as is the soloing. (Example 4.18, "I Wish you Peace, Part 1" 5:35-7:35.)

If the first movement contains melodic and harmonic elements associated with *Ascension*, the succeeding movement mirrors that work's construction even more closely. After a three-trombone dialogue between Hillary Geoffrey, Paul Rutherford and Chris Bridges, conductor Brian Irvine introduces, via slow fade, a quartet, tenor saxophonist Simon Picard replacing Dunmall in a sub grouping whose cameo is redolent of Mujician's work. The transformation, occurring at 2:55 into the movement, is the first of several such sub group introductions that completely change the character of the piece. (Example 4.19, "I Wish you Peace, Part 2," 2:45-3:25.) At 13:53, the trio of drummer Mark Sanders, guitarist John Adams and Dunmall engage in some freer improvisation, Sanders' approach to the drums far more timbrally diverse than that of Tony Levin, whose roots lie in more traditional jazz. (Example 4.20, "I Wish you Peace, Part 2," 13:50-14:30.) Juxtaposition is the key to this movement's structure, the soloist's prerogative subsumed into the compositional framework on a fundamental level.

---

<sup>202</sup>Dunmall is adamant that *Ascension* was not a direct influence on the piece, but he does concede, in an Email of May 25 2005, that the forces and harmonic structure can certainly be associated with the 1965 Coltrane work.

In this way, *Ascension*'s disunified vignette structure is evoked, but the references to Coltrane's late works transcend such superficial similarities, inhabiting a more philosophical realm. We have seen that Coltrane established a unity, the "one essential," by beginning the practice of self-quotation near the end of his brief career. The various sub groupings on Dunmall's *I Wish you Peace* speak to a similar career-long perception. Throughout the second movement of *I Wish you Peace*, Dunmall's chosen musicians are grouped and featured as they have been historically. The Adams/Sanders/Dunmall trio recorded the album *Totally Fried Up* in 1998, and the Mujician quartet has been a working group since 1988. In essence then, the three-part suite, while paying homage to Coltrane in terms of aesthetic and soloistic approach, is a multiply-directed linear look at Dunmall's career, conventional temporality and chronology having been eschewed in favor of a series of tableaux. These are connected without sharing thematic material, and in fact, the sectional differences are purposefully exploited, even celebrated. More importantly, they are surrounded by the constantly morphing but unified multi-voiced exhortations of a contemporary large group.

The third movement sums up the proceedings cyclically. As each of Coltrane's late works presents temporal disunity in a form that is nevertheless coherent, sometimes even traditionally begun and concluded, Dunmall begins and ends his suite with similarly constructed and contextualized ensemble passages, yet another link with *A Love Supreme*.<sup>203</sup> The movement begins, as did "Part 1," with tambura-inflected drone; the final ensemble passage. Furthermore, while the second to last note of the unison passage is a C, the final

---

<sup>203</sup>In fact, Dunmall employs the World War II song "We'll Meet Again," but it is easy to miss it on first hearing, given the amount of activity surrounding it. The reference begins at 17:20 of the final movement, an even more overtly political gesture than the title.

gesture of the piece never quite resolves to the F that opened the suite. (Example 4.21, “I Wish you Peace, Part 3,” 17:05-19:05.)

As Coltrane embodies and transcends all that came before in his playing and compositions, Anthony Braxton’s and Paul Dunmall’s compositional framework allows for all manner of improvisational practice, providing a condensed history of jazz-based and European improvisation. What might be considered Dunmall’s magnum opus to date is both a tribute to late-period Coltrane, musically and spiritually, and a summation of his own work. While he does not theorize or systematize in Braxton fashion, the multiple and multilayered references are there. Braxton and Dunmall form a trans-generational dialectic, demonstrating two approaches by which late Coltrane was necessarily assimilated and transcended by those who, despite initial rejection, could not avoid his powerful legacy.

## CONCLUSION

Early in the process of writing this dissertation, I was confronted by a fellow music journalist and improvised music fan. “You’re writing about Trane? Why? What is there left to say? Hasn’t it all been written before?”

I hope that my work has gone some way toward answering his question, but I hope also to have done more. In essence, I have attempted a demystification of John Coltrane’s music of 1965-1967, and in doing so, it is my wish for this study to be a link in the rapidly lengthening chain of improvised music scholarship, adding a degree of nuance to the multifarious discussion that has centered around this difficult and still controvertial music. By elucidating structural unity in this controversial period of Coltrane’s development, I have demonstrated these pieces to comprise an integral component of his output and not the aberration depicted by those who would dismiss them. I have employed modes of discourse representing both improvisers and classical theoreticians, along with Coltrane’s own words, to demonstrate that a fundamental temporal disunity pervades his final pieces; additionally, I have elucidated what I hear as the unifying structure of these difficult works, a group aesthetic that functions along two levels of temporal perception. Coltrane’s soloing is marked by increasing atomism, but his rhythm section is deployed in a vertically laminar fashion. The structural unity of these works demonstrates a compositional aesthetic that sets Coltrane’s final music apart from that of his contemporaries; this fact in turn brings one more layer of subtlety to the discussion of improvised music of the 1960s.

It is certainly true that much has been written of John Coltrane's music in the forty-one years since his death, but very little of it has dealt with Coltrane's final period. Perhaps more than any other improvising musician, his work has touched the imaginations of an extremely diverse array of musicians, artists and poets adhering to a vast variety of sociopolitical and spiritual philosophies. Scholarship concerning Coltrane's formidable recorded output is still a relatively recent phenomenon, and there is much left to discover for those who choose to study his life and music beyond the superficiality of popular biography.

As I have already stated, I consider my efforts to constitute one of many paths through the myriad complexities of Coltrane's final works. I have relied heavily on my hearing of the music, my understanding and appreciation of its intricacies growing over the years of my deep involvement. The privilege of conversing with many of those in Coltrane's immediate orbit has also provided an invaluable understanding of the times and circles in which he traveled. The journey past simple fandom has been rewarding, and as with so many that study Coltrane's work, a certain sense of awe in the face of his accomplishments increases with each audition. Yet, my increased respect for him is due neither to his technical abilities nor to his works simply surpassing those of other composers along qualitative lines. There are certainly better players and equally gifted composers; rather, I have come to perceive that his voice is unique in a music rife with stylistic imitators. I have attempted to demonstrate that he absorbed but eschewed the developments in jazz embraced by many of his contemporaries, choosing not to pursue the burgeoning freedoms of the 1960s until he was secure in his vision of soloistic atomism and rhythmic verticality.

In describing what I believe to be Coltrane's final compositional aesthetic, I have attempted, as far as possible, to keep my discussion centered on the nuts and bolts of the



music from which I have drawn inspiration. Despite its undoubted emotional and spiritual impact, a subject taken up by many Coltrane specialists, the innovative group deployment seemed the more interesting aspect of Coltrane's final period; yet, strains of rapidly disintegrating jazz traditions, and of Coltrane's earlier accomplishments, were still evident and in need of fresh contextualization. Inspired by Coltrane's oft-quoted admission of desiring two simultaneous modes of expression from his 1965-67 quintet, I strove to articulate what I hear as temporal doubleness, or disunity, in Coltrane's last works. This doubleness defines the pieces' common structure and the quintet's consistent group sound.

However, as with any study whose scope is narrowly defined, many fascinating aspects of this music were not explored, or only mentioned briefly. The melodies that Coltrane waxed at his final recording sessions demonstrate a remarkably chromatic approach to Western harmony. These are not the ii-V-I progressions of "Giant Steps," rather, they often meander through lush plains of third and fifth-related harmonies, but their patterns are obscure. The timbrally induced moment form of a track such as "Offering" signals fascinating new developments in the way that Coltrane was handling compositional form. Also, the study of motivic unity in Coltrane's final works, briefly discussed in Chapter 2, would yield fascinating analytical results. These would be extremely fruitful avenues of discovery, providing another layer of intrigue to the construct of Coltrane as composer. Such concerns would, in turn, highlight further the connections between the supposedly disparate worlds of improvised and classical music, a barrier that I have attempted to dismantle with my bipartite analytical model and that was addressed by Coltrane himself.

An examination of such connectivity would allow for modes of analysis that would render more systematic exploration of improvised music possible. With very few exceptions,

the music made in Coltrane's multigenerational orbit has been no better served by jazz scholarship than has Coltrane's final work. Coltrane nurtured the young lions of the 1960s Black avant-garde in New York, and these musicians would proceed to influence many others across the country and around the world. These musicians owe him an enormous debt, but their own accomplishments are only now beginning to be assessed. Their approaches to the general innovations of the 1960s—orchestrational, melodic, harmonic, etc.-- are as varied as were the more widely discussed outcroppings of 1930s swing. Each of the Art Ensemble of Chicago's early albums, to cite only one example, should be analyzed from multiple perspectives, demonstrating both the seminal group's extraordinary grasp of tradition and its continual pushing of timbral and formal envelopes, both here and abroad. However, the Art Ensemble is but one case study from a time of astonishing musical and artistic openness and communication, a time that, to my ears, has continued repercussions but has never been surpassed in the succeeding forty years. In the 1960s, as I have stated previously, jazz, classical music and music from around the world merged in ways that preceded the often self-conscious meldings that we now call "World Music." My chapter on Coltrane's legacy constitutes an attempt to demonstrate how two artists from two succeeding generations assimilated and transcended Coltrane's accomplishments in this diverse musical arena; yet, Coltrane's legacy is as vast as the music itself and merits much further examination.

My greatest hope, both for my work and for that of the few scholars exploring creative improvised music, is that the results of our efforts will not remain solely within academic circles. A more nuanced understanding of the processes that govern improvised music that exists tangentially to conventional chord changes would lead to a reassessment of the jazz canon and, possibly, to the broadening of improvisational rhetoric encouraged in

performance situations. When a Beethoven symphony is performed these days, by any orchestra in the country, it is clear that a seachange in performance practice has taken place, especially when comparisons to Beethoven interpreters of yesteryear are made. Tempi are often faster, textures usually leaner and vibrato is used sparingly, all resulting from the study of period practice. In other words, scholarship informs performance, and the recorded performances are then used to teach emerging musicians and scholars. Yet, despite forty years of improvisational freedom, the innovations documented by Coltrane and his 1960s contemporaries have not entered mainstream jazz performance. In many ways, adventurous improvised music is even more marginalized than ever, seeking a haven on smaller labels and in grass roots festivals around the world.

Academia bears some responsibility for this disconnect, both in terms of scholarship and in the classroom. It is generally accepted that the first jazz record was made in 1917, but only the initial forty-five years of recorded jazz are presented with anything approaching completeness in the jazz courses I have attended. Innovations beyond 1965 are all but ignored, or they are relegated to a position at the end of the course; similarly, the music of the 1960s is marginalized in recent television documentaries purporting to present its history. Given that jazz as a recorded entity is a mere ninety years old, the lack of material from the 1960s and beyond is inexplicable at best, inexcusable at worst.

In a sense, a series of anti-trajectories, or parallel trajectories, needs now to be outlined. As Coltrane's journey toward the avant-garde was fraught with a mixture of uncertainty and advancement, the history of improvised music has followed a similarly and increasingly circuitous path over the last forty years. However, a lack of simplicity does not justify the music's neglect. More than ever, recorded documents abound that encapsulate

multiple histories, or document intertwining perspectives on the same history. If Coltrane's work comprises such an important part of the multifarious traditions associated with improvised music, then it is also necessary to follow his legacy down paths on which the comfort of conventional analysis and easy categorization is no longer enough. The music has gone beyond the pioneering analytical paradigms established by such notable scholar/performers as Gunther Schuller and George Russell; their approaches are based primarily in the exploration of harmony and scale, but improvised music has now also encompassed multivalent timbres and textures, often in the service of non-conventional temporal structures. These elements are of primary importance and should be taken into account for an analysis to be effective. The time is more than ripe to come to terms with this music as music. Any attendant sociopolitical and philosophical explications should not place the radical sounds and structures in a place of subservience, and it has been my intention to construct an analytical model that would function along these lines.

John Coltrane's late works offer challenge and reward in equal measure for those willing to explore them, and those he first mentored and with whom he later collaborated impart equally important views of this music's rich and complex history. As disunity gives rise to a new structure in Coltrane's last compositions, the New Black Music, and the many varieties of improvised music to follow, should be seen as a continuing revolution with deep roots in an equally multifarious past.

## Appendix A

John Coltrane Solos Transcribed by Andrew White (Used by permission)

JOHN COLTRANE  
TENOR SOLO  
WJC#453

1. with "Miles Davis in  
Stockholm"  
DRAGON DRLP90-91  
also DRCD-228

### ALL BLUES March 22, 1960 - Stockholm, Sweden

The musical score is written on ten staves. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 9/8. The notation includes various musical symbols such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and rests. There are several first and second endings marked with '1' and '2' in boxes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 below the notes. Breath marks are shown as curved lines above the staff. The score is a transcription of a tenor saxophone solo.

453-1

1994 © ANDREW'S MUSICAL ENTERPRISES, INC.  
Andrew's Music, 4830 South Dakota Ave., N.E., Wash. D.C. 20017, U.S.A.  
Unauthorized Copies Forbidden

2.

A handwritten musical score for a piece labeled '2.' The score is written on ten staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals. There are several measures with triplets (indicated by a '3' in a circle) and some measures with a '5' in a circle. The score is written in a style that suggests it is a working draft or a personal manuscript. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The notation is dense, with many beamed notes and complex rhythmic patterns. The staves are numbered 1 through 10 at the bottom left.

453-2

3.

This page contains a handwritten musical score for guitar, consisting of 12 staves. The notation is dense, featuring many complex chords and rapid passages. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 below notes. Arrows indicate string direction. Trills and triplets are marked with '3'. A '5' in a box appears on the third staff. At the bottom left, the text '453-3' is written. The score is written in a single system across the page.

4.

A handwritten musical score for guitar, consisting of 12 staves. The notation is dense, featuring many complex chords, often with multiple accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and accidentals within the same measure. Numerous triplets are indicated by a '3' in a circle. Some measures are marked with a box containing a number, such as '6' on the second staff and '7' on the eleventh staff. The key signature is mostly one sharp (F#), with some changes to one flat (Bb) and one sharp (F#). The time signature is mostly 4/4, with some measures in 3/4. The score ends with a double bar line on the eleventh staff.

453-4



5.

A handwritten musical score consisting of ten staves. The notation is in a single system, likely for a piano or similar instrument. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The music features a variety of note values, including eighth, sixteenth, and thirty-second notes, as well as rests. There are several measures with triplets, indicated by a '3' over the notes. The score is written in a fluid, cursive style. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The piece concludes with a double bar line on the tenth staff.

453-5

6.

A handwritten musical score on ten staves. The notation is complex, featuring many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes, often grouped with slurs. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is not explicitly written but appears to be 4/4. A measure number '10' is enclosed in a box at the start of the fourth staff. Various fingerings are indicated by numbers 1 through 10. The piece concludes with a final cadence on the tenth staff.

453-6

7.

11

CONCERT

453-7



Handwritten musical score on ten staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings. The score is numbered 2 at the top. The bottom of the page features a publisher's address.

356-2

3.

Handwritten musical score for a piece in 3/4 time. The score consists of ten staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music is written in a fluid, handwritten style. The second staff contains a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff has a slur over a group of notes. The fourth staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The fifth staff continues the melodic line. The sixth staff starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats, and includes a measure marked '15)'. The seventh staff contains a triplet of eighth notes. The eighth staff has measures marked '16)', '17)', and '18)'. The ninth staff has measures marked '19)' and '20)'. The tenth staff ends with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats, and includes a measure marked '356-3'.

Andrew's Music, 4830 South Dakota Ave., N.E., Wash. D.C. 20017, U.S.A.



4.

1) 2) 3)  $D^b$  4)  $G^b$  5)

6) 7) 8) 9) 10)  $D^b$

11)  $G^b$  12) 13) 14)

15) 16)  $D^b$  17)  $G^b$  18) 19) 20)

Andrew's Music, 4830 South Dakota Ave., N.E., Wash. D.C. 20017, U.S.A.

## APPENDIX B

### List of Sound Examples

\*All examples have been used with the permission of the respective record labels.

#### Example

- 1.1 “Listening Together 3,” from Spontaneous Music Ensemble,  
*Summer 1967*  
(EmanemDisc, EMANEM4005, 1995, 0:00-1:10).....33
- 1.2 “Later, During a Flaming Riviera Sunset,” from AMM,  
*AMM Music 1966* (Matchless Recordings/ ReR Megacorp.,  
ReR AMMCD, 1989, 0:00-1:00).....35
- 3.1 “Dial Africa,” from Wilbur Harden & John Coltrane,  
*The Complete Savoy Sessions*  
(Savoy Jazz 92858-2, 1999, 0:00-0:48).....90
- 3.2 “Gold Coast,” from Wilbur Harden & John Coltrane,  
*The Complete Savoy Sessions*  
(Savoy Jazz 92858-2, 1999, 0:00-0:40).....90
- 3.3 “What’s New,” from Cecil Taylor,  
*Nefertiti: The Beautiful One has Come*  
(Revenant 202, 1997, 1:00-1:50).....94
- 3.4 “Africa,” from John Coltrane,  
*The John Coltrane Quartet: The Complete Africa/Brass Sessions*  
(Impulse!, IMPD-2-168, 1995, 0:22-1:06).....97
- 3.5 “India,” from John Coltrane,  
*The Complete 1961 Village Vanguard Recordings*  
(Impulse!, IMPD4-232, 1997, 0:00-0:44).....97
- 3.6 “All or Nothing at All,” from John Coltrane,  
*The Classic Quartet: Complete Impulse! Studio Recording*,  
(Impulse!, IMPD8-280, 1998, 0:00-0:37).....99
- 3.7 “Ascension,” from John Coltrane, *Ascension: Edition 1*,  
(Impulse!, 314-543 413-2 DG01, 2000, 0:00-0:50).....102
- 3.8 “My Favorite Things,” from John Coltrane,  
*My Favorite Things: Coltrane at New Port*  
(Impulse!, B0009076-02, 2007, 8:40-9:45).....104



3.9 “My Favorite Things,” from John Coltrane, <i>My Favorite Things: Coltrane at New Port</i> (Impulse!, B0009076-02, 2007, 12:00-12:40).....	105
3.10 “Dearly Beloved,” from John Coltrane, <i>The Classic Quartet – Complete Impulse! Studio Recordings</i> (Impulse!, IMPD8-280, 1998, 0:00-1:00).....	105
3.11 “Mars,” from John Coltrane, <i>Interstellar Space</i> (Impulse!, 314-543-415-22000, 0:00-0:33).....	107
3.12 “Ogunde,” from John Coltrane, <i>Expression</i> (Impulse!, GRD-131, 1993, 0:00-0:50).....	108
3.13 “My Favorite Things,” from John Coltrane, <i>Live in Japan</i> (Impulse!, GRD- 4-102, 1991, 14:44-15:54).....	113
3.14 “My Favorite Things,” from John Coltrane, <i>Live in Japan</i> (Impulse!, GRD-4-102, 1991,16:35-17:10).....	114
3.15 “My favorite Things,” from John Coltrane, <i>Live in Japan</i> (Impulse!, GRD-4-102, 1991, (18:10-19:00).....	115
3.16 “My Favorite Things,” from John Coltrane, <i>Live in Japan</i> (Impulse!, (GRD-4-102, 1991,19:20-20:20).....	115
3.17 “AltruVista,” from Alice Coltrane, <i>A Monastic Trio</i> (Impulse!, IMPD-267, 1998, 0:00-2:00).....	119
3.18 “Homage to Coltrane,” from Noah Howard, <i>Live at Judson Hall</i> (ESP 1064, 1967, 10:00-11:00).....	123
4.1 “Composition 131,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>Five Compositions (Quartet) 1986</i> (Black Saint, 120106-2,1:00-2:00).....	130
4.2 “Composition 26B,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>Solo: Live at Moers Festival</i> (Moers Music 01002, 1976, 0:00-0:50).....	130
4.3 “Night in Tunisia,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>The Charlie Parker Project 1993</i> (Hat Hut Records, Hatology2-612, 1995, 1:35-2:35).....	132

4.4 “Night in Tunisia,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>The Charlie Parker Project 1993</i> (Hat Hut Records, Hatology2-612, 1995, 3:40-4:40).....	132
4.5 “Dewey Square,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>The Charlie Parker Project 1993</i> (Hat Hut Records, Hatology2-612, 1995, 1:20-2:00).....	132
4.6 “Dewey Square,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>The Charlie Parker Project 1993</i> (Hat Hut Records, Hatology2-612, 1995, 4:05-4:55).....	133
4.7 “I’ll be Seeing you,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>Solo Live at Gasthof Heidelberg Loppem 2005</i> (Locusloppem, 2007, 1:00-2:11).....	135
4.8 “Giant Steps,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>Solo (Pisa) 1982</i> (Leo Records, GY28, 2007, 0:00-1:05).....	135
4.9 “Giant Steps,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>Solo (Pisa) 1982</i> (Leo Records, GY28, 2007, 2:00-2:40).....	136
4.10 “Composition 184,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>Four Compositions (Quartet) 1995</i> (Braxton House, BH-005, 1997, 0:00-0:40). ....	140
4.11 “Composition 354,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>9 Compositions (Iridium)</i> (Firehouse Records, FH12-04-03-001, Track 1, 0:00-0:40).....	140
4.12 “Composition 354,” from Anthony Braxton, <i>9 Compositions (Iridium)</i> (Firehouse Records, FH12-04-03-001, Track 4, 0:00-1:00).....	142
4.13 “Mandala,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>Spiritual Empathy</i> Rare Music, RM024, 1994, (0:00-1:00).....	150
4.14 “Mandala,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>Spiritual Empathy</i> Rare Music, RM024, 1994, (1:10-2:10).....	151
4.15 “Mandala,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>Spiritual Empathy</i> (Rare Music, RM024, 1994, 3:10-4:10).....	151
4.16 “Part 2,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>Solo Soprano Saxophone</i> (FRM Records, FMRC167-i0805, 2005, Complete track).....	152

4.17 “I Wish you Peace,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>I Wish You Peace</i> (Cuneiform Records, RUNE203, 2004, Part 1, 0:00-2:00).....	156
4.18 “I Wish you Peace,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>I Wish You Peace</i> (Cuneiform Records, RUNE203, 2004, Part 1, 5:35-7:35).....	158
4.19 “I wish you Peace,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>I Wish You Peace</i> (Cuneiform Records, RUNE203, 2004, Part 2, 2:45-3:25).....	158
4.20 “I Wish you Peace,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>I Wish You Peace</i> (Cuneiform Records, RUNE203, 2004, Part 2, 13:50-14:30).....	158
4.21 “I wish you Peace,” from Paul Dunmall, <i>I Wish You Peace</i> (Cuneiform Records, RUNE203, 2004, Part 3, 17:05-19:05).....	160

## DISCOGRAPHY

### John Coltrane Anthologies

*Live in Japan*, MCA Records, Inc., GRD-4-102, 1991.

Miles Davis, *In Stockholm 1960 Complete*, Dragon, CD 228, 1992.

*Miles Davis and John Coltrane: The Complete Columbia Recordings 1955-1961*, Sony 65833, 2000.

*One Down, One Up: Live at the Halfnote*, Impulse! IMPDCD 000238002, 2005.

*The Complete 1961 Village Vanguard Recordings*, Impulse! IMPD4-232, 1997.

*The Classic Quartet: Complete Impulse Studio Recordings*, Impulse!, IMPD8-280, 1998.

*The Heavyweight Champion: The Complete Atlantic Recordings*, Rhino, R2 71984, 1995.

*The Miles Davis Quintet: The Legendary Prestige Quintet Sessions*, Prestige Records, PRC4-4444-2, 2006.

### John Coltrane Album Reissues

*A Love Supreme*, Impulse! 314 589 945-2 (Deluxe Edition, 2002)

*Ascension*, Impulse! 314-543 413-2 DG01, 2000.

*Expression*, GRP Records, GRD-131, 1993.

*Interstellar Space*, Impulse! 314-543 415-2, 2000.

*Kulu Sé Mama*, Impulse!, 314 543 412-2, 2000.

*Live at the Village Vanguard Again!*, Impulse! IMPD-213, 1997.

*Meditations*, Impulse! IMPD-199, 1998.

## **Anthony Braxton**

*Ensemble (New York) 1995*, Braxton House, BH-007, 1997.

*Four Compositions (Washington, D.C.)*, Braxton House, BH-009, 1998.

*9 Compositions (Iridium) 2006*, Firehouse 12 Records, FH12-04-03-001, 2007

*Sextet (Istanbul) 1996*, Braxton House, BH-001, 1996.

*Solo Live at Moers Festival*, Moers Music 01002, 1976.

*The Charlie Parker Project 1993*, Hat Hut Records, Hatology2-612, 1995.

.

## **Paul Dunmall**

*I Wish you Peace*, Cuneiform Records, RUNE 203, 2003.

*Love, Warmth and Compassion*, Future Music Records, FMRC155-10804, 2004.

*Manjah, DUNS, L.E.007, 2001.*

*Spiritual Empathy, Rare Music, RM024, 1993.*

## **Miscellaneous**

Albert Ayler, *My Name is Albert Ayler*, Black Lion, 760211, 1996.

Alice Coltrane, *A Monastic Trio*, Impulse! IMPD-267, 1998.

Alice Coltrane, *Transfiguration*, Warner Bros., LP 3218, 1978.

AMM, *AMM Music 1966*, Matchless Recordings/ ReR Megacorp., ReR AMMCD, 1989.

Cecil Taylor, *Nefertiti, The Beautiful One has Come*, Revenant 202, 1997.

Charlie Parker, *Charlie Parker: The Complete Savoy and Dial Studio Recordings 1944-1948*, Savoy Entertainment Group, Inc., 92911-2, 2000.

Faust, *Abzu*, private release, 2003.

Jelly Roll Morton, *The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax*, Rounder CD 11661-1888-2, 2005.

Koop, *Waltz for Koop*, Cookin' Records, JCR021-2, 2001.

Miles Davis, *In Stockholm 1960 Complete*, Dragon Records, DRCD 228, 1992.

Spontaneous Music Ensemble, *Summer 1967*, EmanemDisc, EMANEM4005

Tony Conrad, *Early Minimalism, Volume 1*, Table of the Elements, TOE 033CD, 1997.

Tony Conrad, *Inside the Dream Syndicate, Volume 1: Day of Niagara 1965*, Table of the Elements TOE 74CD, 2000.

The Art Ensemble of Chicago, *The Art Ensemble, 1967-68*, Nessa Records, ncd-2500, 1993.

#### **DVD**

Ira Cohen, *Invasion of Thunderbolt Pagoda*, Arthur 001DVD, 2006.

## Bibliography

### Books

- Anthony, Donald B. "A General Concept of Musical Time with Special Reference to Certain Developments in the Music of Anton Webern." Ph. D. diss., Stanford University, 1968.
- Attali, Jaques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Trans. by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- Bailey, Derek. *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1993.
- Baker, David. *The Jazz Style of John Coltrane: A Musical and Historical Perspective*. Lebanon, IN: Studio 224, 1980.
- Baraka, Amiri. *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. Harper Perennial, 1999.
- Benston, Kimberly. *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Berliner, Paul F. *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Bowers, Faubian. *Scriabin: A Biography*. NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996
- Butler, Christopher. *After the Wake: An Essay on the Contemporary Avant-Garde*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Cardew, Cornelius. "Towards an Ethic of Improvisation." *Treatise Handbook*. London: Edition Peters, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Stockhausen serves Imperialism*. London: Latimer New Dimensions Limited, 1974.
- Cole, William. *John Coltrane*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1976; reprinted New York: Da Capo, 1993.
- Cone, Edward T. *Musical Form and Musical Performance*. New York: Norton, 1968.
- Davis, Miles, with Quincy Troupe. *Miles: The Autobiography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.
- Dean, Roger. *New Structures in Jazz and Improvised Music since 1960*. Open University

- Press, 1991.
- Deveau, Scottt. *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*. University of California Press, 1999.
- DeVito, Chris., et al. *The John Coltrane Reference*. ed. by Lewis Porter, New York: Routledge, 2007
- Ferrell, Jerry. *Indian Music and the West*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Fraim, J. *Spirit Catcher: The Life and Art of John Coltrane*. West Liberty, OH: Greathouse Co., 1996.
- Greene, David B. *Mahler, Consciousness and Temporality*. New York: Gordon and Beach, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Temporal Processes in Beethoven's Music*. New York: Gordon and Beach, 1982.
- Goldberg, Joe. *Jazz Masters of the Fifties*. New York: MacMillan, 1965.
- Hall, James. *Mercy, Mercy Me: African-American Culture and the American Sixties*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Heffley, Mike. *The Music of Anthony Braxton*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Hester, Karlton E. *The Melodic and Polyrhythmic Development of John Coltrane's Spontaneous Composition in a Racist Society*. Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.
- Jost, Ekkehard. *Free Jazz*. Graz: Universal Edition, 1974; reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1994.
- Kahn, Ashley. *"Kind of Blue": The Making of The Miles Davis Masterpiece*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *"A Love Supreme": The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album*. New York: Viking Press, 2002.
- Kernfeld, Barry. *"Adderley, Coltrane and Davis at the Twilight of Bebop: The Search for Melodic Coherence (1958-59)." Ph. D. Diss., Cornell University, 1981.*
- Kofsky, Frank. *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*. New York: Pathfinder, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1998.
- Kramer, Jonathan. *The Time of Music*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1988.



- Levy, David. *Beethoven: The Ninth Symphony*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1995.
- Litweiler, John. *The Freedom Principle: Jazz after 1958*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984.
- Lock, Graham. *Forces in Motiun: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1988.
- Monson, Ingrid. *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*. Oxford University Press, 2007
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Nisenson, Eric. *Ascension: John Coltrane and His Quest*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993; reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1995.
- Ortiz, Walton. *Music: Black, White and Blue*. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1972.
- Owens, Thomas. *Bebop: The Music and Its Players*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Porter, Lewis. *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed., *The Coltrane Reference*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Pressing, Jeff. *Improvisation: Methods and Models*. Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Prévost, Edwin. *Minute Particulars*. Copula Publishing, 2004.
- Priestly, Brian. *John Coltrane*. London: Apollo Press, 1987.
- Radano, Ronald M. *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxtgon's Cultural Critique*. University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music*. University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Russell, George. *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization for Improvisation*. New York: Concept Publishing Company, 1959.
- Saul, Scott. *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the 1960s*. Harvard University Press, 2003.

Schuller, Gunther. *Musings: The Musical Worlds of Gunther Schuller*. Oxford University Press, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*. Oxford University Press, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945*. Oxford University Press, 1991.

Smedthurst, James. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. University of North Carolina Press, 2005

Simpkins, Cuthbert Ormond. *Coltrane: A Biography*. New York: Herndon House, 1975; reprinted by Black Classic Press, 1989.

Smith, Wadada Leo. *Notes: 8 pieces*, Hamden, 1973.

Stockhausen, Karlheinz. "The Concept of Unity in Electronic Music," trans. Elaine Barkin. In Benjamin Bortez and Edward T. Cone, eds., *Perspectives on Contemporary Music Theory* (New York: Norton, 1972): 214-25.

Such, David. *Avant-Garde Jazz Musicians: Playing "Out There."* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.

Thomas, J.C. *Chasin' the Trane: The Music and Mystique of John Coltrane*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1975.

Washington, Michael. "Beautiful Nightmare: Coltrane, Jazz, and American Culture." Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 2001.

Whaley, Preston. *Blows Like a Horn: Beat Writing, Jazz, Style, and Markets in the Transformation of U.S. Culture*. Harvard University Press, 2004.

White, Andrew Nathaniel, III. *Trane 'N Me: A Treatise on the Music of John Coltrane*. Washington, D.C.: Andrew's Musical Enterprises, 1981.

Wild, David. *The Recordings of John Coltrane: A Discography*. University of Michigan Press, 1979.

Williams, Martin. *The Jazz Tradition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford University Press, 1993.

Wilmer, Valerie. *As Serious As Your Life*. Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1980.

Woideck, Carl. ed., *The John Coltrane Companion*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1998.

## Articles

- Allan, Lorraine G. "The Perception of Time." *Perception and Psychophysics* 26, No. 5 (1979): 340-54.
- Arlow, Jacob A. "Disturbances of the Sense of Time, with Special Reference to the Experience of Timelessness." *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 53 (1984): 13-37.
- Anderson, Iain. "Jazz outside the Marketplace: Free Improvisation and Nonprofit Sponsorship of the Arts, 1965-1980." *American Music* Vol. 20, No. 2. (Summer, 2002): 131-167.
- Bass, E. C. "Musical Time and Space in Berlioz." *Music Review* 30 (1969): 211-24.
- Ballantine, Christopher. "Towards an Aesthetic of Experimental Music." *Musical Quarterly* 58 (1977): 224-46.
- Block, Steven. "Pitch-Class Transformation in Free Jazz." *Music Theory Spectrum* 12/2 (fall 1990): 181-202.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "'Bemsha Swing': The Transformation of a Bebop Classic to Free Jazz." *Music Theory Spectrum* Vol. 19, No. 2. (Autumn, 1997): 206-231.
- Baskerville, John D. "Free Jazz: A Reflection of Black Power Ideology." *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 24, No. 4. (Jun., 1994): 484-497.
- Blume, August. "An Interview with John Coltrane." *Jazz Review* (January 1959): 25.
- Cacioppo, Curt. "Color and Dissonance in Late Beethoven: The Quartet Opus 135." *Journal of Musicological Research*, 6 (1986): 207-48.
- Carno, Zita. "The Style of John Coltrane." *Jazz Review* (October 1959): 17-21, and (November 1959): 13-17.
- Cardew, Cornelius. "Notation-Interpretation, etc." *Tempo* No.58 (Summer, 1961): 21-33.
- Clouzet, Jean, and Michel Delorme. "Entretien avec John Coltrane." *Les Cahiers du Jazz* 8 (1963): 1-14.
- Coltrane, John, with Don DeMichael. "Coltrane on Coltrane." *Down Beat* (September 29, 1960): 26-27.

\_\_\_\_\_. Liner notes from *Live at the Village Vanguard Again*, MCA Records Inc., IMPD-213

\_\_\_\_\_. Liner notes from *Live in Japan*, MCA Records, Inc., GRD-4-102

Cone, Edward T. "Musical Form and Musical Performance Reconsidered." *Music Theory Spectrum* 7 (1985): 149-58.

Dargenpierre, Jean-Claude. "John Coltrane: Un Faust Moderne." *Jazz Magazine* (January 1962): 21-25.

DeMichael, Don. "John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Jazz Critics." *Down Beat* (April 12, 1962): 20-23.

Demsey, David. "Chromatic Third Relations in the Music of John Coltrane." *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 5 (1991): 145-180.

Feather, Leonard. "Honest John – The Blindfold Test." *Downbeat* (February 19, 1959): 39.

Gitler, Ira. "Trane on the Track." *Down Beat* (October 16, 1958): 16-17.

Haywood, Mark, S. "Order and Chaos in Bird and Trane." *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 9 (1997-1998): 133-143.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Harmonic Role of Melody in Vertical and Horizontal Jazz." *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 5 (1991): 109-120.

Horenstein, Stephen. "L'Offrande Musicale de Coltrane." *Jazz Magazine* 283 (February 1980): 32-33.

Kernfeld, Barry. "Two Coltranes." *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 2 (1983): 7-66.

Kramer, Jonathan D. "Moment Form in Twentieth Century Music." *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 64, No. 2. (Apr., 1978): 177-194.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Multiple and Non-Linear Time in Beethoven's Opus 135." *Perspectives of New Music* Vol. 11, No. 2. (Spring - Summer, 1973): 122-145.

Liebman, David. "John Coltrane's *Meditations* Suite: A Study in Symmetry." *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* Lanham: Scarecrow Press 8 (1996): 167-180.

Lewis, George E. "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives." *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 16, No. 1. (Spring, 1996): 91-122.

- Lochhead, Judy. "Hearing Chaos." *American Music* Vol. 19, No. 2. (Summer, 2001): 210-246.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Temporal in Beethoven's Opus 135: Where Are Ends Beginnings?" *In Theory Only* No. 7 (1979): 3-30.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Temporal Structure in Recent Music." *Journal of Musicological Research* 6 (1986): 49-93.
- Logan, Wendell. "The Case of Mr. John Coltrane: A Compositional View." *Numus-West* 2/2 (1975): 40-45.
- McDonald, Michael Bruce. "Traning the Nineties, or the Present Relevance of John Coltrane's Music of Theophany and Negation." *African American Review* Vol. 29, No. 2, (Summer, 1995): 275-282.
- McRae, Barry. "John Coltrane: The Impulse Years." *Jazz Journal* 24 (1971): 2.
- Merod, Jim. "Intellectual Collaboration in the Age of Technological Overdetermination: Miles Davis and John Coltrane." *Boundary 2* Vol. 24, No. 1. (Spring, 1997): 79-112.
- Modirzadeh, Hafez. "Aural Archetypes and Cyclic Perspectives in the Work of John Coltrane and Ancient Chinese Music Theory." *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 21, No. 1. (Spring, 2001): 75-106.
- Nettl, Bruno. "Thoughts on Improvisation." *Musical Quarterly* 60 (1974):1-19.
- Potter, Keith. "Boulez and Stockhausen, Bennett and Cardew." *The Musical Times* Vol. 122, No. 1657. (Mar., 1981): 170-171.
- Porter, Lewis. "John Coltrane's 'A Love Supreme'; Jazz Improvisation as Composition." *Journal of American Musicological Society* (fall 1985); 593-621.
- Postif, François. "John Coltrane: Une Interview." *Jazz Hot* (January 1962): 12-14.
- Pressing, Jeff. "Pitch Class Set Structures in Contemporary Jazz." *Jazzforschung* 14 (1983): 133-72.
- Marmande, Francis. "The Laws of Improvisation, or the Nuptial Destruction of Jazz." trans. by Carol Johnson. *Yale French Studies* No. 89. (1996): 155-159.
- Stockhausen, Karlheinz. "Structure and Experiential Time." trans. Leo Black. *Die Reihe* 2 (1959): 64-74.

---

. "Momentform." In *Texte zur Electronischen und Instrumentalen Musik 1* (Cologne: DuMont, 1963): 189-210.

Tirro, Frank. "Constructive Elements in Jazz Improvisation." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 27, No. 2. (Summer, 1974): 285-305.

Wilmer, Valerie. "Conversation with Coltrane." *Jazz Journal* 15, No.1 (January 1962): 1-2.

## **Interviews**

Ali, Rashied. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, October 4, 2005.

Dixon, Bill. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, February 2, 2007.

Dixon, Bill. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, March 9, 2007.

Dunmall, Paul. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, October 4, 2005.

Dunmall, Paul. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, March 3, 2005.

Dunmall, Paul. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, May 25, 2005.

Dunmall, Paul. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin. July 9, 2006.

Dunmall, Paul. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, December 11, 2007.

Keepnews, Orrin. phone interview, conducted by Marc Medwin, May 25, 2007.