Investigating Improvisation:
Music Performance and the Disciplinary Divide

by

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To my family and friends: this thesis is dedicated to you.
I. Introductions

On introductions

The introduction of any extended piece of academic writing is indispensable to the establishment of the work’s scope, methodology, context—indeed, its entire raison d’être. The introduction chapter is an art form of sorts. It not only provides a frame, but a placement of that frame in (to borrow from Goehr) a specific museum of academic works—or, in the case of our examination, the work’s placement in a concert hall, orchestra pit, smoky club, or private studio. The introduction establishes the work’s aim, agenda, and tone of voice. It ostensibly establishes the author’s authority in its inclusion of his/her real-world experiences with the topic, personal background, and theoretical foundations. And more often than many would like to admit, the introduction is used as a sole representation of the work: a more succinct read of each chapter’s argument, a motivation to continue reading, or a reason to stop doing so entirely.

Introductions can contain interesting anecdotes, relevant opening quotations, and captivating descriptions of the work’s necessity for existence. In more scientific-minded pursuits, there are literature reviews and explanations of methods used. Most important in every introduction—whether it is a single paragraph or in preparation of a multi-volume epic, is the statement of the work’s thesis or hypothesis in light of its self-declared disciplinary affiliations, methodologies, and theories. Sometimes the introduction is composed at the start of the writing process; sometimes the author saves the process for the end to provide a more accurate account of the final product.
There is no universal standard for the structure or content of a scholarly introduction, just the understanding that one must exist in order to present the work in an appealing and convincing light.

In a sense, this thesis is a study of introductions. Generally speaking, it is an examination of how scholars locate themselves in larger disciplinary canons and what that categorization tacitly or rigidly stipulates about their objects, arguments, and methods of inquiry. This might be called a discourse analysis, a music-discipline historiography, an interdisciplinary treatise, or some offshoot of musicological critical theory. My efforts to avoid rigid classification in this thesis reflect its broadest proposition: that scholars often get so lost in the currents of their declared disciplines that they inadvertently perpetuate ideological myopies within those disciplines. There should be just as much of a place for interdisciplinary dialogues on mutual areas of inquiry as there should be a place for hyper-specialized case studies based purely on personal field research or primary source analysis, because both are necessary for a holistic understanding of any topic and its significance.

Given the importance this study places on the art of introductions, I plan to provide a complete one of my own: a statement of my topic, purpose, positionality, and argument; a description of my methods and sources; an outline and explanation of my chapters.

**On improvisation**

Let’s pretend for a moment that we are sitting in a darkened hall in anticipation of a solo performance by an anonymous piano player. She walks empty-handed onto the stage and seats herself at the Steinway. After a brief pause, she closes
her eyes and begins playing a technically demanding, stirring piece of music. The audience is blown away—their thoughts are stimulated and their love for music and piano performance is renewed—but no one can recognize the music as the work of a specific composer. As we walk out of the concert hall, only then are we handed a piece of paper telling us about the performer and the origins of the piece of music…

This hypothetical performance could be the result of a number of processes: the pianist could have read and eventually memorized a pre-composed work written by someone else; she could have used a notated piece as the foundation for improvisational elaboration and variation; she could have written the work herself and played some version of it from memory; or she could have thought up every note on the spot. Though the audience’s experience during the performance was the same regardless of the above options, how the music-making process is ultimately explained and categorized dramatically changes the way the music produced is later received, reviewed, studied, analyzed, or not analyzed at all.

How, then, would we decide which of the above options is the result of an improvisatory process rather than a compositional one? Does such a clear distinction exist? What is this thing we call improvisation? Derek Bailey’s observation that “improvisation enjoys the curious distinction of being both the most widely practiced of all musical activities and the least acknowledged and understood” remains as important as it is oft-quoted.¹ Improvisation is still referred to as a “type” of music or music-making process, even in recent scholarship—musicological and ethnomusicological alike—implying that it is something practiced only in specific

circumstances. For an inquiry ostensibly evaluating improvisation studies, perhaps an initial definition is in order, considering the still very disparate understandings and uses of the term in modern scholarship, and modern understanding in general. Or perhaps finding an adequate definition of this simultaneously revered and demeaned musical process—if one exists at all—is the end goal of our inquiry. Either way, I shall suggest a few initial descriptions here.

First of all, there is much to learn just from the word we use to represent a concept as elusive as improvisation. Regardless of whether the term emerged as a result of a conceptual shift in perceptions of music performance or if the spread of the word itself produced a change in the West’s general understanding of the music-making process, it is notable that the linguistic distinction between improvisation and composition is relatively new. “Improvisation” first emerged as a noun (rather than an assortment of adverbs and adjectives referring to subtle differences in performance practices) in European-derived languages no earlier than the nineteenth century, and later gradually entered common usage as a verb. The word’s Latin roots *im-prō-vidēre* translate literally as “not previously considered,” implying that music made *improvisus* involved no preparatory efforts dedicated to the performance—stylistically or structurally—before the instant of its occurrence. The emergence of the new word had an impact on conceptions of Western art music as well as music considered to be improvisational. As Laudan Nooshin suggests, “it is interesting to note that such umbrella terms emerged at a time when improvisational practice itself

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was starting to decline in Europe.”

This period Nooshin mentions involved some of the first proto-ethnomusicological investigations including those by folklorists like Béla Bartók and comparative musicologists attempting to historically analyze and evaluate musical systems from around the world. The fact that terms like “improvisation” and “extemporization” were becoming standard while non-Western musics were being examined and deemed less compositionally sophisticated can be seen as symptomatic of larger polarizing trends in Europe’s conceptions of the creative process. And “improvisation” is still used extensively in modern musical discourse. Though the following contemporary definitions will demonstrate how dramatically both the denotations and connotations of the word have evolved, there remain significant (if subtle) remnants of its initial implications. Most notably, the word still stands in opposition to the idea of pre-composition and preparation in general. See Table 1, altered from an article by Stephen Blum, below.

Table 1: Selective list of adverbs and adverbial phrases in European writings, to 1810

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ex improvise</td>
<td>de improvise</td>
<td>a l’improvuvue</td>
<td>unvorsehender Weise</td>
<td>unexpected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ac improvisa</td>
<td>all improvista</td>
<td>a l’improviste</td>
<td>unversehens</td>
<td>extemporaneously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex tempore</td>
<td>alla sproveduta</td>
<td>impromptu</td>
<td>auf der Stelle</td>
<td>spur of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex sorte</td>
<td>sprovedutamente</td>
<td>sur-le-champ</td>
<td>aus dem Stegereif</td>
<td>moment by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fortuita</td>
<td>estemporaneamente</td>
<td>de tete</td>
<td>auf zufallinge Art</td>
<td>chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>repente</td>
<td>all’ impronto</td>
<td>a plaisir</td>
<td>aus dem Kopfe</td>
<td>on the sudden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ad placium</td>
<td>alla mente</td>
<td>a phantasie</td>
<td>unbedachtsam</td>
<td>accidentally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ad labium</td>
<td>ad arbitrio</td>
<td>sans regle ni dessein</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sine arte</td>
<td>di fantasia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>senza arte</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Laudan Nooshin, "Improvisation as ‘Other’: Creativity, Knowledge and Power: The Case of Iranian Classical Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128, no. 2 (2003). 248. Nooshin appropriately adds, “It was also perhaps no coincidence that the very period when Europe was consolidating its colonial power was also the time that improvisation started to become devalued in favour of the solidity, permanence, and strength represented by the great, notated, nineteenth-century masterworks.”


Moving on to more contemporary meanings, the Oxford English Dictionary uses the word’s verbal form for its principal definition, which is interestingly the most recently established part of speech after the adjectival and nounal forms. There are two main entries: “to compose (music or verse) or utter or do (anything) on the spur of the moment,” and “to provide or construct (something) as makeshift.”7 The American Heritage Dictionary presents similar definitions, but adds a single illustrative example about a cook improvising dinner from ingredients left in the refrigerator.8 Such depictions of the word’s meaning reflect a modern understanding of improvisation—be it musical, culinary, or otherwise—as something executed when the more desirable and respectable option of thoroughly preparing a performance is not viable.

The Oxford Dictionary of Music gives a more specific stance of the nounal form, adding a token concluding sentence in what seems to be an effort to emancipate the word from its acknowledged connotations: “a performance according to the inventive whim of the moment, i.e. without a written or printed score, and not from memory. It has been an important element in music through the centuries.”9 In asserting that improvisatory performance cannot include memorized components, this definition certainly excludes many of the non-Western musics European scholars were first investigating as the word was becoming popularized, and a significant portion of American jazz (otherwise recognized as an inherently improvisatory

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musical tradition, if it can be effectively categorized as a single tradition at all), to name a few examples.

To take the concept of improvisation a step further, the most recent Grove Dictionary, self-proclaimed as “the unsurpassed authority on all aspects of music,” indeed contains the most progressive of existing published definitions of the word—an appropriate characteristic especially considering that its author, Bruno Nettl, is one of the most prolific and innovative scholars of musical improvisation to date. The beginning of his Grove entry states that improvisation is:

The creation of a musical work, or the final form of a musical work, as it is being performed. It may involve the work's immediate composition by its performers, or the elaboration or adjustment of an existing framework, or anything in between. To some extent every performance involves elements of improvisation, although its degree varies according to period and place, and to some extent every improvisation rests on a series of conventions or implicit rules.\(^\text{10}\)

Despite its hint of indecisiveness, this definition is simultaneously the most accurate depiction of improvisation (as the following pages will demonstrate) and a negation of the necessity for the very term it is defining. The definition intimates that if improvisation is a thing at all, it is a thing existent to some degree in every live musical performance and never existent just on its own. In this way, Nettl is returning to the pre-nineteenth century notion of improvisation as something that might be more fitting as a variation of words in adjectival or adverbial form to specifically describe the degree or kind of interpretation music makers contribute during the performance process.

The ultimate point of presenting these multitudinous and differently-nuanced definitions of improvisation is simply to demonstrate the dearth of a consensus producing a number of contradictory conclusions about which musical traditions and methods of performance can be deemed improvisatory as opposed to something else entirely. That “something else,” is a matter of debate as well, but is generally described as the pre-composed music mentioned earlier in this section, notated specifically to be read by a performer acting as messenger delivering the music to the audience rather than some sort of creative agent. Of course, the Western classical tradition has been the primary manifestation of this conception of composition.

To provide a very recent example of America’s nebulous understanding of improvisation: the most recent Grammy awards had a category for the “Best Improvised Jazz Solo,” changed from the “Best Jazz Instrumental Solo” of previous years. There is little explanation as to the category’s titular change, but we can suppose that it was in the interest of further specifying which types of solos are eligible for consideration. But does this specification imply that there are non-improvised jazz solos? Or, considering that there is no longer a category for another type of instrumental jazz solo, does the categorizational scheme only mean to more explicitly state that all jazz solos are improvised? Maybe the change simply meant to accentuate that the award was intended specifically to honor a jazz artist’s abilities to spontaneously compose. Regardless, the change makes one wonder what definition of “improvisation” the Grammy committees might offer. I do not mean to pose the Grammys as having any sort of definitive authority on the matter, but the awards certainly serve both as a barometer and an influence of popular culture’s general
perspective on musical concepts like improvisation. If nothing else, the example shows that the word itself signifies something strongly enough to deem mentioning even in the context of a genre like jazz, which is itself another problematic categorization that allows for infinite and often-conflicting definitions. The exact nature of what the use of improvisation in this context signifies, of course, remains ever-ambiguous.

**On the musical -ologies**

Definitions of improvisation can only get us so far, as the word addressed above is merely a symbol of larger underlying categorizations, analyses, and other evaluations of the music-making process. The chief academic agents of such evaluations (at least in America, which is the focus of this investigation) fall into what have become two distinct disciplines: musicology and ethnomusicology. Considering that both disciplines aim to foster the academic investigation and analysis of music’s position in culture, this thesis seeks to interrogate the nature and necessity of the assorted disparities between what I have dubbed the two “musical –ologies.” Though the following chapter will discuss at length the complex relationship between these two disciplines as they have evolved, I will give a very general overview of their fundamental qualities and differences here to orient and introduce our investigation.

Musicology became organized as a discipline in The States when the American Musicological Society was founded in 1934. Though its initial mission was heavily centered (at least ideologically) around European “art music,” the current so-called “mainstream” musicology now focuses on a wide range of musical genres, a
majority of which still exist within (or in relation to) Western culture. Musicology arguably views its musical object primarily as a text, and studies it in that form (through various modes of analysis) before investigating more ephemeral renderings. However, recent developments in the discipline, many of which are categorized under what has been dubbed “new musicology,” have begun to question the role of text in musicological investigation. The now-notorious Western canon—immutable and with scores intended for exact reproduction in their live performances—is still a central focus of the various incarnations of musicology, along with a significant dose of self-aware examination into its continued significance.

Ethnomusicology’s American society (the Society for Ethnomusicology, or SEM) was founded in 1954 to expand drastically upon musicology’s limited methodologies and objects of inquiry and explore, primarily through ethnography, the many musics of non-Western cultures in a more comprehensive and comparative way. Ethnomusicology has since expanded its scope to almost any genre and tradition.

This explosion of methodological, theoretical, and objectival realignments within both musicology and ethnomusicology in recent years has sparked considerable debate about the disciplines’ natures in relation to one another. What is the essence of their distinction today? Is the distinction necessary at all? The following chapters seek to answer such questions through a more comprehensive examination of improvisation than has been offered in this context.
On this investigation

In acknowledging recent developments in the musical disciplines’ comprehensive understanding of improvisation, this thesis proposes that such developments should be organized and utilized to enable scholars to more deliberately situate their studies within the theoretical and methodological complexities of modern musical scholarship. The necessity for continued investigation into improvisation’s role at this current juncture was outlined quite suitably by Gabriel Solis in 2009:

I suggest that we stand at a moment when studies of improvisation can be useful in shifting the discourse in the field in general...The focus on music making that Christopher Small proposed and that we follow here can be the core of a new musical scholarship that moves beyond the division between a historical musicology that focuses only on the Western classical tradition and an ethnomusicology whose purview is the rest of the world. What would this mean in terms of the study of improvisation and of music, generally, if we follow out its logic?...Without question it would mean that the study of performance per se—the study of music making—would have to take on a more central role in all of musicology, not just certain areas of ethnomusicology, and that improvisation would have to become central to the teaching of music more generally.11

Making sense of the past and present stances of musicology and ethnomusicology in terms of their perspectives on improvisation, I propose, can help these two branches of music scholarship—and music education—see “music” as more of a verb than a noun (as Small proposed), and see “improvise” as more of an adjective than a verb. The musical text is certainly worthy of extensive study, but the text is not the music

itself. As Ferruccio Busoni put it, “notation is to improvisation as the portrait is to the living model.”

My own motivations for this investigation are the result of an assortment of experiences highlighting the importance of interdisciplinarity. I came to Wesleyan as a violinist with a background primarily in Western classical music, and was then exposed to a music department influenced much more significantly by ethnomusicology. And while studying classical music in a department specializing in world music (yet another complex and problematic term), I was taking classes towards a second, interdisciplinary major in African American studies. I grew curious as to why there was a field like AfAm at universities around the country expecting each of its scholars to integrate any number of disciplines—sociology, anthropology, history, art history, or literary studies, to name a few—and use their discretion to apportion such disciplines and their diverse palette of methodologies according to what is most relevant or useful.

This inter-disciplinary (or perhaps I should say trans-disciplinary, as was proposed in our AfAm colloquium) approach to a naturally interdisciplinary area such as African American studies seemed as though it would be quite useful for music, too, as musical issues have been studied by more disciplines than I care to list here. At the same time as I was taking the interdisciplinary African American studies colloquium mentioned above, I was auditing a graduate seminar intended to provide an introduction and overview of musicology to Wesleyan’s ethnomusicology graduate students. The tensions I experienced in that classroom between the musicology

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professor and the ethnomusicology students, however, were jovial in comparison to the tensions I witnessed when I studied abroad the following year at the music department of Kings College London, where I took some classes populated jointly by musicology students from Kings and ethnomusicology students from the School of Oriental and African Studies.

What I drew from these experiences, and why I mention them here, is the observation that these two disciplines with distinct and often-oppositional identities are overlapping in their interests and approaches more and more in contemporary scholarship—which, I think, is why SOAS students were taking classes at Kings in the first place, an occurrence my professor noted was a relatively recent—leading me to wonder why there were still such feelings of conflict between scholars of my generation. This question, fueled by my experiences with the interdisciplinarity of African American studies (which led me to the focus of this thesis and offers much scholarship to be considered in the upcoming discussion of musical performance, meaning, and interpretation according to the two musical –ologies) is one this thesis seeks to answer. This investigation and its agenda is at least unique in the sense that I affiliate neither with musicology or ethnomusicology entirely, both because of my relative lack of experience and my combination of studies on both sides of the musical disciplinary divide.

My sources, therefore, come from a range of disciplines, from philosophy, sociology and biography to various incarnations of music theory, musicology and ethnomusicology—none of which, I must note, is particularly novel to musicological or ethnomusicological investigations. I draw from literature exposed to me by African
American studies, as well, which will prove particularly useful in the upcoming discussion of musical improvisation and what the concept has signified in “jazz” and the assorted disciplines addressing “improvised music.” In the interest of at least nominally practicing what I preach, I have endeavored to incorporate a range of methodological approaches in addressing my research questions, from analyzing the above sources and the musical texts in question to conducting a number of interviews with (ethno) musicologists and completing a sort of meta-fieldwork at academic conferences of different disciplines which occurred in the past several months.

The body of this investigation is divided into two main sections. First is a dual disciplinary history of musicology and ethnomusicology in the American context, focused on the progression and comparison of scholarship on improvisation from a myriad of musical traditions. This chapter seeks to answer the broader question of “how have the two disciplines arrived at their current complex juncture in relation to one another?” while asserting that the lens of improvisation studies will more clearly illustrate some of the more elusive and theoretical aspects of both the disciplines’ differences and intersections. This first chapter, too, is intended to show that musical “improvisation” is a construction perpetuated by the musical –ologies that does not helpfully describe a “type” of music, but rather serves as a clear indication of how each person using the word views and prioritizes the different aspects of music and the music-making process.

The second chapter takes such conclusions about disciplinary positionality and methodology along with a revised and broadened perspective of improvisation and asks the question, “what makes the improvisation of Robert Schumann different
from the improvisation of Charlie Parker, and how are these two bodies of music studied accordingly?” This question will bring issues of creative role, musical genre, and even race into conversation in the interest of pointing out where investigative options within the musical disciplines fall short, and proposing a more wide-ranging palette of options free of disciplinary constraints for scholars studying music-making in its multitudinous improvisatory forms. I will examine the work of each composer/performer and compare scholarship on their music, from biographies to ethnographies to analyzed notations of their music-making.

As Nicholas Cook stated, “Only now, in retrospect, is it becoming clear to many musicologists—and perhaps ethnomusicologists too—that a major convergence of interests between musicology and ethnomusicology has taken place, and that as a result there is as yet untapped potential for the sharing or cross-fertilization of methods for pursuing them.” The examination of largely disconnected discourses about “improvisation” is the perfect place to begin such cross-fertilization.

II. A History of Improvisation Studies: The Otherization of Extemporization

Introduction

If what we call “improvisation” can encompass everything from an embellished performance of a meticulously-notated manuscript to an entirely unprepared series of sounds played without stylistic or structural intentionality, a true history of improvisation would be a history of all music, but examined from a different standpoint. We established in the introduction that the idea of improvisation is rather a connotative categorizational tool that evolved into a word used to describe music with different performance processes than the highly notation-oriented style that had become prevalent in Europe by the nineteenth century. This categorization—whether performed music is described first as improvised or composed—is one of the main distinctions between the areas of study of the two musical-ologies. As Ingrid Monson explains, “the mysterious process of improvisation…is so often taken as one of the central points of difference between Western music and the repertories more typically explored by ethnomusicologists”14 And so, this chapter aims to provide a more complete account of how the idea of improvisation became so ingrained in the missions of the two disparate disciplines by tracing the concept’s development and use from well before musicology and ethnomusicology were established in America up until the present-day.

Examining the trajectory of the improvisational/compositional distinction through the lens of a disciplinary history will clarify the disciplines’ current stances

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and reveal any aspects that may require reconfiguration. If, as the introduction proposed, improvisation is not a single type of musical performance at all but present in every live performance to some degree or another, what might that fact imply about musicology’s focus on its supposedly-composed, notated texts, or even ethnomusicology’s continued and frequent use of the term “improvisation” to describe a distinct form of music-making at all? But we get ahead of ourselves…

The rise of music literacy

Once upon a time, music was something only played and perceived, intangible and preservable only in memory. As long as there have been communities there have been musical forms, sacred and secular, functional and aesthetic, passed down through various manifestations of oral traditions in what has been retrospectively dubbed the pre-literate era of humanity. And then, sometime around the eighth and ninth centuries, clergy of the early Christian church in Rome developed a system to notate monophonic chants accompanying Latin texts used in worship. Of course, forms of notation have existed in a number of other traditions and eras. There is evidence, for example, of performance instructions written on tablets as early as 2000 B.C. in the region of present-day Iraq, and around 450 B.C. the Ancient Greeks developed a notational system designating pitch, rhythm, and some harmony that lasted centuries until around the decline of the Roman Empire. But from the

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15 Interestingly, “preliterate” is a term teleologically applied to contemporary cultures without formal writing (or musical notation) systems, perhaps demonstrating modernity’s designation of textuality as superior and more “advanced” than orality.
notational seed planted in eighth century Rome, the written tradition of “Western classical music” sprouted and branched out into the amorphous and multifaceted genre it has become in modern discourse. Despite countless contrasting definitions of what constitutes such a genre, one feature common throughout is an acknowledgment of its literacy. As Taruskin puts it, Western music was “disseminated primarily through the medium of writing. The sheer abundance and the generic heterogeneity of the music so disseminated in ‘the West’ is a truly distinguishing feature—in perhaps the West’s signal musical distinction.”

Such a notational system enabled Western music to circulate beyond its areas of origin (the initial intention for its transcription), to outlive the generations of its use, and to be examined later on by disciplines like musicology.

If we were to narrow the definition of improvisation from the beginning of the chapter to encompass non-notated performances, most Early Music (and certainly none performed outside of the Church) would still be considered improvised. Even by the Baroque and Classical eras, when music literacy had become common enough to allow for individual musical authorship, the scores authors produced were seen chiefly as outlines for individual performances. Respected performers and writers-down of music were most often the same people; the act of adding extensive embellishments in live performance was what established a composer’s reputation. In 1738, for example, an acquaintance of Bach said of his playing, “one thinks it is a piece of concerted music and as if the melody he plays in the right hand were written

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20 Ibid.1.
beforehand. I can give a living testimony of this since I have heard it myself.” Later on, composers like Mozart and Clementi engaged in extemporization competitions to solidify their reputations as music-makers. Improvisation, in the sense of performing something not written down, was as essential as it was ubiquitous in live performances until well into the nineteenth century. The individual scores “composers” produced were not seen as fixed musical works, but rather as tangible evidence of their creative abilities.23

The nineteenth century: composers and their works

Continuing with our whirlwind summary of the changing perceptions of performance in the Western world, we arrive at the advent of the nineteenth century, when music makers formerly bound to patrons and aristocratic dignitaries benefited significantly from the emergence of a rising professional middle class, enabling them to gain a new creative independence.24 Their status in society as a whole, then, changed from artisan to artist, and the products of their labor took on a new value. Composers portrayed their musical creations as being inspired from God, as absolute art, further elevating their positions in society.25 Such new views of music-making led to the idea of intellectual property and copyright laws attributing the musical ideas in scores to their individual authors. And so the concepts of “authority” over these new fixed musical objects and “authenticity” of the objects themselves emerged. To

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establish one’s greatness as a music-maker was to be a composer of original works carefully notated to ensure their immortality.

The newly established celebrity of current nineteenth-century composers was also imposed upon composers of yore. New editions of manuscripts by Bach and Mozart, to continue our previous examples, were released and regularly performed in concert halls being built to showcase them. The term “classical music” emerged. Emblematic of this era, Franz Liszt proposed a regularization of these commemorative performances in 1835: “In the name of all musicians, of art, and of social progress, we require the foundation of an assembly to be held every five years for religious, dramatic, and symphonic music, by which the works that are considered best in these three categories shall be ceremonially performed every day for a whole month…In other words, we require the foundation of a musical Museum.”

To meet such demands for performances of popular works, free-agent professional musicians and non-amateur symphonies began to emerge. Popularity precipitated canonization. The nature of notation increased, too, to allow composers to more accurately communicate their musical ideas. “The need for a fully specifying notation really became urgent,” Goehr notes, “when it became the norm for music to travel independently of the composer, when one and the same composition began to be repeated in numerous performances.” The act of music performance no longer necessitated elements of extemporization, and so the skill of improvising for an audience became independent of score-based performance or pre-composition.

By the first half of the nineteenth century, performers were not necessarily composers, and composers were not necessarily performers. Music, like any high art form, now had its material artifacts worthy of reproduction and examination, just as literature had its novels and fine art had its paintings and sculptures.

Nineteenth century Europe, therefore, saw an emergence of scholarly investigations into music, both concerning its own shiny new canon of musical works and the music of other musical traditions. The term Musikwissenschaft was first used in German in 1827, and the French musicologie emerged soon thereafter, both designating the study of music as a science of its own.28 In his 1869 Histoire de la musique, Francois-Joseph Fetis produced a five-volume study describing European folk music and non-European musics from China and India, laying the groundwork for the discipline of comparative musicology, one of the earliest ethnomusicological endeavors.29

Stephen Blum lists the simultaneous emergences of this first generation of ethnomusicology in the late 1800s: “those of cultural anthropology in the United States, of musical ethnography in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, of musical folklore and national programs of musical research in many parts of Europe and Latin America, and of comparative musicology in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris.”30 In the same article, Blum discusses the first European forays into African music, resulting in conclusions that African people were incapable of forming musical

29 Ibid.
systems, their music consisting of “simultaneous occurrences of otherwise unrelated sounds”⁴¹. Such initial impressions of non-European approaches to music-making enabled the word “improvisation” enter common parlance during that era, in the ways discussed in the introduction.

Performances involving improvisation (then more commonly termed “extemporization”) were still existent in Western classical musical circles by the middle of the nineteenth century, but such performances had taken on different significance. During the time Liszt wrote the above quotation, for example, he was just beginning to establish himself as one of the most virtuosic improvisers of the century, accruing a rockstar-like status involving violent performative choreographies and gaggles of eager female fans.⁴² But while he was gaining a reputation as an exceptional extempore performer, Liszt was concurrently composing and performing works note-for-note, as improvisation alone was no longer seen as more than, as Goehr put it, “a popular spectacle comparable to a circus act.”⁴³ Liszt was certainly not alone in this split-personality performance/composition practice, as the discussion of Schumann in the following chapter will demonstrate. Improvisation was a separate but equally valued skill. But as the nineteenth century came to a close (right as the proto-ethnomusicological disciplines mentioned above were catching on, not coincidentally), the frequency of improvisational performances in the Western

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³¹ Ibid.
classical tradition began to decline. The Grove dictionary from 1880 demonstrates this trend in its definition of “extemore playing”:

The art of playing without premeditation, the conception of the music and its rendering being simultaneous. The power of playing extemore evinces a very high degree of musical cultivation, as well as the possession of great natural gifts. Not only must the faculty of musical invention be present, but there must also be a perfect mastery over all the mechanical difficulties, that the fingers may be able to render instantaneously what the mind conceives, as well as a thorough knowledge of the rules of harmony, counterpoint, and musical form, that the result may be symmetrical and complete…But the practice of publicly extemorizing, if not extinct, is now very rare…Even in the Cadenza of a concerto, which was once the legitimate opportunity for the player to exhibit his powers of improvisation, is now usually prepared beforehand.

The dictionary maintained the same definition of “extemporize” from this entry until after the turn of the twentieth century. The implications are quite clear indeed: improvisation is an admirable skill requiring a sophisticated understanding of style, structure and the technicalities of performance. The practice of playing extemporaneously had fallen out of style by the time the entry was written, but the author of the entry seemed disappointed and perplexed by such a decline.

If we move forward in our improvisation chronicles to the beginning of the twentieth century, we arrive at the advent of an entirely new mode of music-making and reception: the invention and spread of the phonograph and the age of mechanical reproduction. If we identified the mode of performance prior to the establishment of notation as “pre-literate” and the widespread acceptance and use of notation as

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“literate,” then this new mode would be "post-literate," no longer requiring the mediation of musical text for the reproduction or reception of a performance. The effects of this were immeasurable—music had now transitioned from something entirely ephemeral to something able to be purchased and experienced in the same exact way (aurally, at least) an infinite number of times. Recording technology also ushered in a new epoch in music scholarship. Performances derived from the same notated scores could be compared and evaluated. The creative efforts of particular performers could be preserved and compared, where before only composers’ scores lasted beyond the moment of performance. “Improvised” music of any style or tradition could be recorded, notated, and subsequently analyzed.

The expectations of musical performance slowly shifted in the West as a result of recording culture and its multitudinous functions, with audiences becoming more accustomed to exact replications of musical experiences. Live classical performance practice was shaped by studio performance trends—the same musicians, after all, were playing on the stage and in the studio—encouraging flawless executions of the score so that any “errors” would not be emphasized with repeated listenings. The Grove Dictionary definition of improvisation was adjusted to reflect these changes, showing an astounding turn from the definition posited at the end of the nineteenth century. The following is from the 1927 edition, which remained unaltered for decades:

The art of thinking and performing music simultaneously. It is therefore the primitive act of music-making, existing from the moment that the untutored individual obeys the impulse to relieve his feelings by bursting into song.

36 Pre-literate, literate, and post-literate are Taruskin’s terms as explained in his Introduction to The Oxford History of Western Music.
Among all primitive peoples, therefore, musical composition consists of extemporization subsequently memorized, and the process can proceed no farther until some method of notation is devised to record the composer’s musical thoughts independently of his musical performance…The folk music of all countries, so long as it has existed without notation, has been developed in this way. The composer extemporizes a melody either to a poem or to the movements of the dance, and memorises it for repetition later. Where memory is imperfect the power of extemporization is called in again, either by the original composer or by some other, and so the melody is gradually molded in the passage of time.37

Improvisation, then, had transformed from an indicator of musical genius and sophistication to a mark of the “primitive” Other. In America at the time of the Grove entry, jazz was becoming more popular, spreading from New Orleans to Chicago and New York, and race records were becoming a widespread phenomenon. Such records contained “race music,” a mix of blues, jazz, and Negro spirituals which soon spread from their intended African American consumer base to white audiences, often served as the sole representation of culture on the other side of the color line. The definition above was written in the midst of these musical trends and is surely reflective of them.

The American Musicological Society

In 1885 a professor of music history at Prague named Guido Adler wrote an extensive treatise entitled "The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology" as the first entry in the first journal of musicology, Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft.38 In the article, Adler stipulated why and exactly how musicology should be considered as

a legitimate academic discipline alongside the already-established art history or any of the natural sciences, many of which were undergoing meaningful developments at the time.\(^{39}\) Adler’s article, as its translator and leading scholar asserts, “proved to be a potent formative influence on the establishment and development of the academic discipline of musicology in Europe and elsewhere, notably the United States of America, an influence that is strongly felt to the present day.”\(^{40}\) Adler’s musicology was divided into two complementary sections, a historical and a systematic, reflecting his overall effort to reveal the scientific nature of music and the necessity to study it as such (after all, Musikwissenschaft, the German word for musicology, translates directly as “the science of music”). In the first paragraph of his article, Adler explains that music is first a tonal art that can only be understood by its performers and audiences once it is organized and analyzed:

Musicology originated simultaneously with the art of organising tones. As long as natural song breaks forth from the throat freely and without reflection; as long as the tonal products well up, unclear and unorganised, so long also there can be no question of a tonal art. Only in that moment when a tone is compared and measured according to its pitch… can one speak of a musical knowledge as well as an art of working with tonal material.\(^{41}\)

Adler’s description of music’s first unorganized stage (as tonal products welling up without reflection) foreshadows the tenor of the 1927 Grove article’s description of improvised music (when the “untutored individual obeys the impulse to relieve his feelings by bursting into song”). And this is Adler’s proposed task of musicology: to

\(^{39}\) The disciplines of geology, biology, and organic chemistry had all experienced rapid strides: scientists had recently discovered that fossils were divided into tertiary strata, elevating paleontology into a full-fledged science and supporting the theory of evolution, which severely affected biology as well as approaches to history and sociology and their theories of social evolution.


\(^{41}\) Ibid. Emphasis added.
document and organize tonal data which in turn informs music-makers of its discoveries, allowing the tonal art to advance. Adler seems quite opposed to the idea of art worthy of musicological inquiry being improvised in any way. Later on in the article he stated, “Performing artistes have taken a creative role, at a specific juncture… This feature owed its appearance to unnatural impulses, and, in the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries, like a creeper or parasite, threatened to smother or deplete of nourishment the healthy tree.”\textsuperscript{42} In this way musicology’s relationship with improvisation was born: with a rewriting of improvisational histories and a portrayal of it as something that smothers the important underlying musical structures which are actually worthy of scholarship.

During the time of the Grove entry mentioned above, musicological scholarship in America was trailing that in Europe (in terms of support in universities and the organization and communication amongst individual scholars), quite unlike the more established disciplines of music theory and composition. There had been the beginnings of a musicological organization in New York in the first decade of the twentieth century, but a lack of support and interest during World War I left them with $5.05 in their bank account in 1916.\textsuperscript{43}

The inclusion of (and familiarity with) musicology in American universities slowly increased after the war ended, but not without struggle—Harvard’s President Lowell was said to have exclaimed, “you might as well call it grandmotherology!” when the idea of adding the discipline to his university was first proposed.\textsuperscript{44} A large

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
part of the reluctance in academia, Oliver Strunk of the Library of Congress explained in 1932, was the problem of the discipline’s "marked tendency to emphasize the cultural aspects of the subject at the expense of the scientific."\textsuperscript{45} In line with Adler’s musicological vision of 1885, Strunk portrayed these “cultural” facets of music (however they might be designated) as less worthy of study than the “scientific” ones. Such contrasts are still at the heart of much musicological discourse, in the forms of seeking to be objective (i.e. involving systematic examination of given data) over subjective, and pursuing textual analysis over larger contextual inquiries.

In June of 1934 support for musicology in the states had increased enough to successfully found the American Musicological Society, with Otto Kinkeldey as president and Charles Seeger as vice president. The society’s first full-fledged meetings (starting off in December of 1935) were certainly diverse in the types of papers given, welcoming scholars from a myriad of disciplinary backgrounds, the only requirement being that their studies pertained to music in some way.\textsuperscript{46} These meetings included papers on topics which might now be categorized more under the European systematic musicology or ethnomusicology. Increasing numbers of papers emerged in journals like \textit{The Musical Quarterly} founded in 1915, and later \textit{JAMS}, the journal of the AMS.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} W. Oliver Strunk, \textit{State and Resources of Musicology in the United States : A Survey Made for the American Council of Learned Societies} (Washington, D.C: American Council of Learned Societies, 1932). This is a 75-page, detailed portrait on the field of musicology at the outset of the great depression.
\textsuperscript{47} Note that the American musicological situation was unique in its relative lack of a national musical history. Nationalist agendas had guided much of musicological studies from the 19\textsuperscript{th} into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Because of this, American musicology had an additional incentive to investigate the native and folk musics of the territory, further provoking early ethnomusicological study. See Kerman 1986.
If improvisation was mentioned in these early musicological compilations, it was most often in the context of jazz or other “primitive” musics. Right around the time of the first AMS meeting, for example, an ethnomusicologist named George Herzog published the following in the society’s bulletin: “Primitive musical forms cannot be taken either as the primordial forms of musical development, or as the spontaneous self-expression of a ‘primitive mind’. Improvisation proper is not common, outside of Africa; songs are very often committed to the new generation through teaching, and are practiced meticulously before performance.”

Herzog was seeking to dispel the (then more widespread) assumptions that many non-Western musics involve the untrained, spontaneous production of sounds, suggesting instead the presence of more developed structures and laws despite a dearth of formal Western notation. Herzog’s aside implying Africa’s lone position as the home of “improvisation proper” is indicative of the fact that “improvisation” had acquired a firm connotative link to blackness in America, a complete reversal from just half a century earlier.

**Ernst Ferand**

In 1938 Ernst Ferand of Hungary published the first musicological treatise exclusively about improvisation, receiving a rather subdued response in Europe and the states alike, especially considering the severe implications of his endeavor. Perhaps, as Bruno Nettl hypothesized, the lack of enthusiasm on the part of reviewers and fellow musicologists demonstrated how little scholars were concerned with

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49 For example, see A. E, "Review: [Untitled],” *Music & Letters* 20, no. 3 (1939). 337-39.
Improvisation and the performance process in general. Improvisation in European art music had fallen almost entirely out of practice at this point, and the word itself had become associated almost entirely with jazz.

Ferand’s attitude towards improvisation and the process of music performance, however, was extremely forward-thinking in the assertion that improvisatory practices require comparable amounts of preparation and understanding to that of pre-composed works, though understanding is only part of the performer’s task in the moment:

In improvisatory performances it is always a question of a process arising out of musical feeling, out of musical subconsciousness, sometimes as a reaction to an actual outward or inward stimulant which breaks out spontaneously and takes its course according to determined music-psychological laws by completely or at any rate predominantly excluding the intellect…It is true that this kind of musical creativeness presupposes more or less extended practice, and indeed the case of the higher form of artistic improvisation extremely severe and long-sustained practice.

Ferand goes on to include meticulous analyses of notated improvisations from a number of “primitive” musics and various stages of Western art music alike, concluding that improvisation and composition are perhaps related processes requiring comparable amounts of musical sophistication and preparation. These conclusions were essentially unnoticed in musicological scholarship until almost four decades later, and only the most recent Grove Dictionary definition (quoted in the

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52 While understanding that innovations in musicological thought take time to become incorporated as a whole into the field, Diodato and Smith, “Obsolescence of Music Literature,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 44(2): 101-112, 1993 shows the average time it takes for scholarship in music to become obsolete and, conversely, to become incorporated and sited in related
introduction) has acknowledged the concomitant nature of the improvisational and compositional processes, if such processes can be neatly separated at all. Why, then, was there such reluctance in musicology to consider the improvisational side, as Ferand proposed? This reluctance, I suggest, is a result of the increasingly positivist direction musicology took as a discipline. Its identity and methodological toolbox underwent a dramatic shift with the rise of the new discipline of ethnomusicology, which hinged upon ideas underlying the improvisational/compositional opposition.53

The Society for Ethnomusicology

In 1950 a comparative musicologist from Amsterdam named Jaap Kunst published a small booklet “intended as a general introduction to ethno-musicology,” a word which had not previously appeared in music scholarship.54 The opening lines of the book explain his use of this new term:

To the question: what is the study-object of comparative musicology, the answer must be: mainly the music and the musical instruments of all non-European peoples, including both the so-called primitive peoples and the civilized Eastern nations...The name of our science is, in fact, not quite characteristic; it does not ‘compare’ any more than any other science. A better name, therefore, is that appearing on the title page of this book: ethnomusicology. The importance of this, still young, science for our own musical culture is as yet insufficiently realized in wide circles which really ought to be better informed.55

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53 Ferand says, “There is scarcely a single field in music that has remained unaffected by improvisation, scarcely a musical technique or form of composition that did not originate in improvisatory performance or was not essentially influenced by it. The whole history of the development of [Western art] music is accompanied by manifestations of the drive to improvise?”


55 Ibid. 7.
Kunst goes on to discuss the expanse of factors the ethnomusicologist should consider, providing many examples along the way: tonal patterns, style, function, the role of the gramophone, issues of transcription. His book was at the beginning of a new stage in the musicological community, where comparative musicologists and musical anthropologists in America were becoming increasingly conscious that the musicology of the AMS was falling short of its far-reaching claim to be “a field of knowledge, having as its object the investigation of music as a physical, psychological, aesthetic and cultural phenomenon.”

Three years after Kunst’s formative appeal for an ethno-musicology, three anthropologists of music—David McAllester of Wesleyan University, Willard Rhodes of Columbia, and Alan Merriam of Northwestern—struck up a conversation at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association about the necessity for better communication among the many American scholars of non-Western musics. Rhodes later recounted their conclusion: “the ethnologist with a basic training in musicology is as rare as the musicologist who has worked seriously in anthropology. The progress of ethnomusicology has been limited by the small number of workers who have been able to meet the double qualifications of the discipline.” After enlisting the help of Charles Seeger and sending out a newsletter to gauge interest (which was found to be great), the Society for Ethnomusicology was founded in November of 1955.

57 SEM website, history section: http://webdb.iu.edu/sem/scripts/history/sem_history_founding.cfm
58 Willard Rhodes, “Toward a Definition of Ethnomusicology,” American Anthropologist 58, no. 3 (1956).
Ethnomusicology, since its solidification in the founding of SEM, has been viewed primarily as an American discipline, different in its approach than the systematic or comparative musicologies, which still exist outside of the American academic sphere.\textsuperscript{59} Though ethnomusicology’s aims are diverse and ever-evolving, one of the original agendas was to research, record, and examine fast-disappearing music in the interest of historical preservation.\textsuperscript{60} This preservation and examination inevitably includes some sort of transcription, either from a live performance or a recording of one—to be subjected to some sort of analysis. I say “some sort” because of the innumerable forms that putting music on paper can take; but regardless of a scholar’s choice of form, the act of transcription itself—of transferring music from its original oral form to a written one, intended as a translation for outsiders of that musical tradition—is an act of interpretation and prioritization in itself, not simply of preservation. Does the transcriber choose traditional Western notation, or invent one that imposes fewer ideologies of meter, scale, and pitch on the music in question? In the case the many ethnomusicological objects perceived primarily as “improvised,” does the transcriber focus on the structural skeleton, the imaginary outline a la Early Music, upon which the musician elaborates, or does he/she try to notate the music precisely as it is performed?

\textsuperscript{59} Richard Parncutt provides a description of systematic musicology’s distinction as a musical discipline which is as helpful as it is playful: “Pinker famously compared music with cheesecake: something that people enjoy although it has no obvious adaptive (evolutionary survival) function. Stretching this analogy in the direction of musicology and its internal structure, systematic musicology may be regarded as a discipline that poses general questions about cheesecakes such as their contribution to a balanced diet or their role in human rituals (meetings, parties, celebrations), while historical musicology and ethnomusicology survey the detail and diversity of cheesecakes from different cultures and historical periods.”

These are but a few of the notational questions central to studying “improvised” music, indeed also central to the field of ethnomusicology. As Mantle Hood put it, “I am not sure whether it is reassuring or discouraging to point out that almost a century [after Piggott’s 1893 concern with the inherent inaccuracy of transcriptions] we are still concerned with the same chronic problem… of fitting square pegs into the round holes of Western notation.” As we continue to progress through the twentieth century, it is important to note that how scholars approach this issue of transforming an ephemeral performance or imagined “work” into a fixed text is a window into the progressing perceptions of “improvised” music (perceived as the exact opposite of notated manuscripts). The necessity in modern scholarship to provide and analyze notated music, too, is a reminder of the American ethnomusicologist’s (and musicologist’s) perpetual and difficult task of translating different musical systems and their ideologies, be it across a temporal or geographical divide.

**Recognizing improvisation: 1960 and beyond**

It was the sign of a new stage in ethnomusicological thought when Alan Merriam famously declared that the discipline “is the study of music in culture,” and “not a category in which is studied certain *kinds* of music, but rather a method of study which searches for certain goals in certain ways and which is applicable to any of the varied musical systems of the world.” In accordance with similar ideological shifts in the discipline of anthropology, ethnomusicologists largely expanded their

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aims beyond simply the acquisition of musical materials intended for analysis or archival purposes to document the qualities of different non-Western or “primitive” cultures at various forms of their supposed development.

This proposition of Merriam’s marked the beginning of a debate between the ethnomusicologists who had branched off from anthropological scholarship and those with primarily musicological backgrounds: was music principally a cultural product, or was it rather something independent, or even transcendent, of culture requiring analysis and comparison on its own terms? The latter viewpoint was slowly subsumed by the musicological discipline, while Merriam’s argument for a largely ethnographic consideration of cultural context provided a united platform in the ethnomusicological discipline.

Around the same time as Merriam’s treatise, Hood published an article contending that the ethnomusicologist—indeed, any scholar of music—should be able first to perform and engage in the music they are investigating, as it had been customary for ethnomusicologists to engage in field work and the transcription process without necessarily having trained their ears to understand the music they were attempting faithfully to record. Becoming familiar with performing the musical idioms of non-Western cultures meant investigating more closely the art of improvisation: a process, we recall, the Grove Dictionary was still defining in 1960 as “the primitive act of music-making, existing from the moment that the untutored individual obeys the impulse to relieve his feelings.” Hood continued in his article to say,

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The crowning achievement in the study of Oriental music is fluency in the art of improvisation. This is only possible after the student has become proficient in the technical demands of the art, so that he is free to follow the musical inventions of his own imagination. Needless to say, his inventions must be guided through the maze of traditional rules that govern improvisation. These can be consciously learned but can be artistically used only when the whole tradition has been assimilated.\textsuperscript{64}

This deeper exploration of the cultural and psychological mechanisms of improvisation led to a flood of writing by scholars of Iranian, Indian, Javanese Gamelan, and even African music (to name a few of the main areas) about the finer nuances of performing without a notated manuscript.\textsuperscript{65} Soon thereafter scholars began to assert that all improvisatory performance is not created equal—or more accurately, not created by the same processes, or towards the same ends.

Right as Merriam and Hood were publishing their ethnomusicological commentaries in 1960, Albert Lord finished a book entitled \textit{The Singer of Tales}, presenting a literary theory of the oral tradition of Homeric and medieval epics.\textsuperscript{66} In his book, Lord delves into previously uncharted particulars about the experience of spontaneous performance, making the seminal claim that such oral performance is indeed an act of composition on the part of the live performer. Lord states that “the singer of tales is at once the tradition and an individual creator. His manner of composition differs from that used by a writer in that the oral poet makes no conscious effort to break the traditional phrases and incidents; he is forced by the

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 58.
rapidity of composition in performance to use these traditional elements.\textsuperscript{67} Lord’s investigation into these oral processes—of thematic formulas structured into a vocabulary of macro-units rather than individual words used to produce required rhymes and meters—shed new light on parallel processes in the musical realm.\textsuperscript{68} His oral theory pointed out to music scholars that complex performances around common themes and styles needed neither to be pre-established works subsequently memorized (as the current Grove article stipulated) nor pieced together by the performer word-for-word or note-for-note during the moment of performance.

Of course, the early 1960s were also a time of extreme social change in America, where the ideas of improvisation and jazz came to symbolize both musical and social freedom\textsuperscript{69}—ushering in yet another dramatic shift in the connotations associated with the idea of improvisation, one that filtered through to musicological writing. The free jazz of Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor and countless others were challenging perceptions of what “jazz” really meant (and didn’t mean), altering formerly standardized structures, tempi, chord changes, and certainly approaches to the idea of improvisation. Boundaries were blurred in categorizations of “jazz” and conceptions of the process of jazz improvisation. Only at this point, too, did a notable body of musicologically-based scholarship on jazz begin to emerge, becoming relatively widespread by the mid-1970s; beforehand, jazz writing had consisted primarily of the occasional historian or sociologist,\textsuperscript{70} and knowledgeable musicians,

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid. 5.
\textsuperscript{68} Solis and Nettl, \textit{Musical Improvisation : Art, Education, and Society}. 52.
\textsuperscript{69} Nettl and Russell, \textit{In the Course of Performance : Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation}. 149.
\textsuperscript{70} See Howard Becker, Morroe Berger, and Neil Leonard
critics, and even literary authors,\textsuperscript{71} the majority of whom did not aim to interrogate or evaluate aspects of the music itself.\textsuperscript{72} Mark Tucker states that jazz studies became “a catchphrase for all manner of discographical, biographical, historical, critical, and analytic work,” remaining an establishment centered outside of the musical academy well into the 1990s.\textsuperscript{73} Though the expansive and elusive genre of jazz would appear to be the perfect place of intersection for the American Venn Diagram of music studies—with a track record of extensive discourses about race and ethnicity, about its African and Western elements, about its compositional and improvisational properties—this period of the 1960s into the 1970s remained relatively unexplored by either of the musical –ologies. We will revisit the nature of this (theoretical) intersection in the following chapter.

As ethnomusicology was turning more towards the anthropological and ethnographical, performance-based studies of improvisation were emerging more prominently in the discipline, musicology had distinguished itself primarily as “historical musicology” in America, collectively expanding from a focus on Early and classical music to music as late as the nineteenth century by the 1970s.\textsuperscript{74} As Kerman reflects, the 1970s in musicology (in the broadest sense of the discipline) were also a time of consolidation, where scholars of myriad persuasions joined forces for the upcoming publication of a \textit{New Grove Dictionary}, a dramatic overhaul of the 1954 edition both in terms of the diversity and theoretical progressiveness of its

\textsuperscript{71} To name a few: Gunther Schuller, Andre Hodeir, Max Harrison, and Martin Williams as performers and music critics; and Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, Amiri Baraka, and Nat Hentoff as various other brands of writers.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. 133.
Ethnomusicology, too, was included in the 1980 edition, which its editor Stanley Sadie marked as the single “biggest departure” from the earlier version, as over a million words are dedicated to matters ethnomusicological.

And yet even in the supposedly consolidating decade of the 1970s, the AMS and SEM had ceased to hold joint meetings, something that would take over two decades to occur again after the previous one in 1966. By the end of the decade, George List exemplified what had then become the clear distinction between the two American musical disciplines in an article specifying the nature of ethnomusicology. He asserted that the field had surpassed its previously interdisciplinarity status (lingering between anthropology and the original musicology) to become a discipline in its own right utilizing a much expanded palette of methodologies, markedly distinct from the musicological world from which it had stemmed: “the written or printed score that forms the guide to a performance is not the focus of our discipline. In this we differ from the so-called historical musicologist. He focuses upon the written or printed score, we focus upon the performance of music whether or not a written prescription for its performance exists.” Improvisational scholarship followed this trajectory as well, with musicology treating it generally as a somewhat superfluous skill of the concert performer, and ethnomusicology exploring it in a piecemeal fashion in the Indian, Indonesian, Middle Eastern and African contexts most common at the time.

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75 Ibid. 224.
In the middle of the 1970s, too, Bruno Nettl published an article which was the first to propose that improvisation and composition are not opposed processes, but in fact constructed and largely inaccurate means of describing an infinitely divisible creative process conceptualized in drastically different ways by different musical traditions. As Nettl explains, “as evidenced here, in certain Asian cultures improvisation is recognized as just one concept of musical creation. Yet it is interesting to see that the composition-improvisation dichotomy is not evidenced; rather, a series of different points along our continuum are struck.” 79 Much like Ferand’s seminal proposition about improvisation four decades earlier, Nettl’s went largely unheeded in language concerning “improvised” musics, at least until much else had transpired in the musicological world.

In his article, Nettl implored a re-evaluation of Western conceptions (constructions) of composition and improvisation in order to more clearly understand non-Western notions of musical creativity. By the end of the 1970s, Charles Seeger, who never explicitly identified entirely with either musicology or ethnomusicology, made a request in the same vein as Nettl’s, testifying that “it is time we cease analyzing and evaluating other musics, or even other idioms of our own music, in terms of the Occidental fine art alone. The last attempt to account for the non-European languages in terms of Latin grammar…was before 1800.” 80 It was not until the following decades—in the midst of considerable disciplinary reconfigurations and theoretical developments—that Seeger’s request began to be addressed in the context of musical improvisation.

79 Ibid.7.
In 1985 Joseph Kerman published his book *Contemplating Music*, an enormously influential treatise criticizing the positivistic leanings of musicology and urging that the entirety of the musical disciplines—musicology, ethnomusicology, and music theory alike—make a shift from seemingly-scientific methods like musical analysis towards something more like a musical brand of literary criticism. Kerman instead advocated for a more humanistic take on music studies, one that moved away from seeing any music as absolute or reducible to a score, but an inherently social and performance-centered activity. Around the same time AMS conferences began to espouse a new collection of causes, containing papers with words indicative of the movement which Kerman retrospectively (and somewhat facetiously) compiled: “meaning, value, criticism, literary theory, deconstruction, narrative, canon, women, gender, sexuality, feminism, society, culture, politics, ideology.”

More new contributions to musicological scholarship than can be adequately highlighted here began to proliferate from this point into the 1990s, forming a body of literature that has been dubbed the “new musicology.” This new school of musicological thought was an amalgamation of post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, deconstructionism, and feminism which revisited, theoretically positioned, and revised much of music history as it stood in search of musical meaning and social significance, rejecting musicology’s former agenda of (as Nicholas Cook put it) discovering the “how” of music without questioning the “why.”

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What did all of these paradigmatic shifts mean for the treatment of improvisation? If we were to imagine the ideal effects of new musicology’s turn away from text and towards a history of musical performance and reception, there would be a renewed interest in Ferand’s brand of inquiry. Musicologists would reaffirm that the majority of the previously work-oriented Western canon was in fact centered around improvisatory performances merely outlined in scores, where composers were but a mere fraction of the creative musical process. Modern musical scholars would collaborate with performers and educators to incite the re-establishment of an improvisatory approach to the performance of historic music, and in so doing a more widespread understanding of the mysterious improvisatory process would arise. Preludes wouldn’t be pre-composed, cadenzas would be extemporized, arias would be ornamented. No two recordings originating from favorite Baroque manuscripts would sound alike…

And yet, historical musicology in the 1980s was overtaken by an Early Music performance practice movement devoid of improvisation or even the recognition that improvisation was an essential component of musical experience until well into the nineteenth century. It struggled to retain an unassailable name (dubbed at points the “authenticity movement,” “early music movement,” “historical performance practice,” and “historically informed practice,” “HIP”), as its main premise was a more historically “authentic” approach to performing music of past centuries, an attempted snapshot into how the “works” of Bach and Mozart were first played. It was perhaps simultaneously a culmination of and a reaction to the new theoretical trends of the decade, trends which shed light upon more details of past musical eras
while threatening the very idea of *werktreue* that bound classical music to its entire scholarly canon of great composers and their written works.

Any claims of “authenticity” in the “authenticity movement” were demolished almost single-handedly by Richard Taruskin (thankfully, as the abundance of strategic quotations was becoming near-unnavigable), who heralded the trend as one of the most modern styles of performance to date. In terms of improvisation, Taruskin declared that “the modern reconstructionist movement has produced many scrupulous realizers of musical notation but has yet to produce a single genuine master of improvisation, which we all know to have been nine-tenths of the Renaissance and Baroque musical icebergs.”

And despite an increasing awareness in musical scholarship of the nuances of improvisatory practices within the classical tradition, few performances have deviated from the most accepted editions of their exact notations, even today.

If the turn to performance over text and knowledge of musical context over content sounds familiar, it is because these central ideologies of the “new” musicology were taken almost verbatim from ethnomusicological treatises from the past several decades. Shelemay wrote in 1996 that “the ‘new musicology’ seems not so startlingly new, at least not to someone familiar with the last half century of ethnomusicological research, not to mention considerable earlier work in historical musicology itself that engaged fully with issues relating to culture, society, and

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Studies resulting both from the new musicology and the ethnomusicology that was standing by during musicology’s self-absorbed renovations became more and more indistinguishable from one another in terms of the subjects of their studies, the myriad methods they employed, and even the ultimate agendas of their inquiries. Musicologists acknowledged that field work is an essential aspect of understanding the process of performance, and ethnomusicologists actively expanded their areas of study to nearly every conceivable musical tradition, from jazz to all eras of Western classical to an ever-expanded listing of its traditional areas of the world. What is the purview of musicology as separated from ethnomusicology after the methodological pandemonium of the 1990s? How have the starkly opposed constructions of composition and improvisation in both Western and non-Western music survived such an ideological overhaul?

* * *

Just in the past few years a number of texts from both musical –ologies interrogating improvisation more critically have emerged: Solis and Nettl’s 2009 interdisciplinary compilation of essays, *Musical Improvisation: Art, Education, and Society* which was quoted in the introduction, \(^85\) a seminal exploration of the philosophy of improvisation by Gary Peters, also from last year, \(^86\) and Dana Gooley’s upcoming musicological investigation of Robert Schumann’s improvisational career, to give a few examples. \(^87\) It is clear that both disciplines recognize that the process of improvisation is remarkably pervasive and requires further exploration; this study’s

\(^{84}\) Ibid. 50.
contention, however, is that as such investigations increasingly occur on either side of the disciplinary divide, such an ideological and institutional divide will be proven obsolete.
III: 
Schumann, Parker, 
and the Compositional Continuum

Two improvisers, two traditions

Let us return to our example from the introduction and modify it a bit. Again we find ourselves sitting in a darkened hall in anticipation of a performance by an anonymous musician. He walks to the middle of the stage. After a brief pause, he closes his eyes and begins playing a technically demanding, stirring piece of music following the harmonic rules of his particular genre and an understood overall structure; his audience is engaged and entertained, therefore, by his musical decisions and deviations. The musician elaborates increasingly upon his central idea and inserts clear references to well-known themes by other music-makers. He showcases both his technical skill and his creative abilities, tailoring his playing to the unique factors of this particular performance. Perhaps he is playing with another several musicians who understand the general framework of the performance, either from a notated guide or from experience, and participate accordingly. This time it is clear to us that the musician is not simply reconstituting a composition memorized straight from a score, but is rather utilizing his developed technical and theoretical capacities in combination with a certain amount of thematic premeditation (completed by himself or others) to create a musical experience, a communication, between himself and his listeners.

If our anonymous musician was a saxophonist and his particular genre was jazz, the above scenario would not sound all that unusual. If the musician was a “classical” pianist, either playing by himself or in conjunction with a few other
players, however, we would probably inquire further: is this pianist also a recognized composer preparing an upcoming work or album, or is he a musician trained in another tradition (like jazz) applying his skills to this different idiom? In modern performance practice, improvisation is not associated with the “classical” genres traditionally studied by musicology. And yet, the above (albeit non-specific) description could be applied just as accurately to music-making situations in which Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven found themselves during their lifetimes of composition and performance.

Essentially, this chapter investigates the differences between placing Robert Schumann, nineteenth century pianist and composer, and Charlie Parker, saxophonist and bebop innovator, in the above performance scenario. As the preceding history has demonstrated, perceptions and studies of improvisation have undergone a number of dramatic shifts from the musical disciplines’ early stages in the nineteenth century until the present-day. Each improviser has been chosen for two main purposes: first, because his performing and composing career has spanned—and indeed, significantly influenced—one of the most significant paradigm shifts in the impressions and treatments of improvisation; second, because the body of scholarship surrounding each music maker is emblematic of the differences between the disciplines that traditionally study each improviser.

“Improvisation” in the context of this discussion is used in the same manner as the majority of scholarship surrounding both Schumann and Parker—that is, to

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88 The scare quotes are added simply to acknowledge the amorphous nature of the term “classical.” Here I am referring to the colloquial connotation of “Bach, Beethoven, and the Boys” as David W. Barber put it, or, as Taruskin specified in his History of Western Music, the tradition beginning in Europe which developed and utilized the now-standard staff notation.
designate choices made by the performer (most significantly in pitch and rhythm rather than less essential properties like dynamic or tempo) which have not been previously and specifically designated in notated form. In this sense of the word, both Schumann and Parker were improvisers. But, as we have already discussed, such a notation-based, composition-opposing terminology erases much of the nuance differentiating between the myriad non-notated processes of music-making. It is this nuance that requires further exploration.

**Robert Schumann, improviser**

Schumann, who lived from 1810 until 1856, is widely recognized as one of the most venerated composers of the nineteenth century. In addition to his compositions, he is also known for his abundant music criticisms and his role as a teacher (most notably of Brahms). Though a number of biographical accounts have been written about his remarkably tumultuous life, the primary impression Schumann has left on musicological consciousness is of his role as a composer, contributing harmonic and stylistic innovations to the body of works from the Romantic era. In addition to a collection of piano literature that could stand on its own in terms of its abundance and diversity, later on Schumann also wrote various lieder, an opera, four finished (and a number of unfinished) symphonies, concertos, and a myriad of other choral and chamber works.

Schumann had not originally aspired to be a composer, however, and his oft-mentioned hand injury from the fall of 1831 was not, as many have hypothesized, the sole cause of a series of changes in his musical life from his start as an amateur.

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pianist to a prolific composer of works.\textsuperscript{90} A more detailed account of Schumann’s music-making career, then, might be useful in the interest of our improvisational queries.

In the first years of his life, Robert Schumann demonstrated notable musical talent, composing short pieces and playing the piano while also cultivating skills as a writer of poetry and prose. His father August Schumann, a bookseller and novelist, was his main source of artistic encouragement and the boy became known for his skills improvising at the piano. But August died when Robert was 16, prompting him to pursue a law degree rather than one in music.\textsuperscript{91}

After several catastrophic years in law school, however, Schumann made the decision to devote himself entirely to music. In 1828 he took up lessons with Friedrich Wieck, who promised to turn Schumann into “one of the greatest pianists now living.”\textsuperscript{92} As Claudia Macdonald notes, Wieck’s “obsession with the mechanical production of music was at odds with Schumann's love and, as an amateur, habit of spontaneous music making—up to the time when he decided, under Wieck’s guidance and following his prescriptions, to become a professional musician.”\textsuperscript{93} Despite their different perspectives on music-making, Schumann and Wieck engaged in daily lessons, the pupil often practicing six to eight hours a day in the interest of becoming a prominent virtuoso performer.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Macdonald, "Schumann's Piano Practice: Technical Mastery and Artistic Ideal."529.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. 535.
During this period, however, the figure of the virtuoso as a highly revered category of performer was being seriously called into question—spontaneous technical display (and incidentally swept up with it, *all* improvisational playing) was being portrayed as frivolous, vain, and essentially a waste of musical effort. Two major journals of the 1830s, Schumann’s own *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* of Leipzig and the Parisian *Revue et gazette musicale*, disparaged the highly performance-oriented music-making of virtuosos like Paganini and Liszt. In the place of the virtuosic tradition, critics urged towards more “worthy” musical endeavors as the production and re-performance of fully composed notated works in the manner of (the recently deceased and highly revered) Ludwig van Beethoven. Though Beethoven himself was a known virtuosic improviser, the reception and ensuing examinations of his compositions marked the solidification of the concept of the fixed musical work. Today, of course, Beethoven’s name is synonymous with some ideal conception of the Western “composer.”

Schumann, who had become recognized as a music critic by the 1830s, was in fact a central figure in this promotion of the art of “serious composition” rather than what he portrayed as flashy technical displays without much content. The tension in Schumann’s mind—between flashy, virtuosic improvisational technique as an extraneous replacement for actual musical creativity, and his later improvisational practices directed towards creative musical innovation, and eventually compositions—is essential to recognize when examining his complex relationship

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96 See Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*. Goehr herself uses Beethoven as the representation of the turning point in Western consciousness between a more nebulous conception of notation and the “work.”
with the different methods of music-making. These two types of improvisation, first extremely distinct in Schumann’s conception,\(^97\) were gradually conflated during the process of striving to create more lasting works. Certainly not all types of improvisation were created equal, though by the time of Schumann’s death all improvisation was being portrayed as the type Schumann himself was eager to criticize: trivial, superfluous, unoriginal, and the antithesis of thought-out, respectable, lasting works.

This musical work, the object of endless musicological debate in recent years, signified at that juncture (and arguably still does in many ways) the ideal rendition of a written score without any modifications or notational deviations on the part of its performer. The solidification of this conception of the musical work around the time Schumann decided to pursue performance caused a rift between the roles of composer and performer which had never previously been so distinct. The virtuoso figure often sampled and modulated from one composition to another, precluding or adding variations to themes, always while dazzling audiences with extreme technical prowess. This idea of music-making starkly contrasted that of fixed works like those of Beethoven, as critics and composers of the 1930s were quick to mention.

One can only guess what Schumann would have achieved if he had continued on as a virtuosic pianist; in the fall of 1831 he injured his right hand and was rendered unable to continue his pursuit of becoming “the greatest pianist now living.”\(^98\) After that point he focused his attentions more towards composition and music criticism,

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\(^97\) Macdonald poses this tension between types of music-making (both in Schumann’s mind and more generally during the era) as that between the amateur, non-analytic type of creativity Schumann fostered in his early career and the highly technical, virtuosic skills encouraged by figures like Wieck.

\(^98\) The exact nature of his injury is still under debate, but most sources agree the cause was related to overuse from vigorous and prolonged practice sessions.
continuing to improvise regularly in private, which was an indispensable component of his composition process. As Schumann’s compositional skills progressed, however, his journals show that he began to see improvisation—a manner of playing he employed before he could even read music, let alone study the rules of composition or theory—as the antinomy of composition rather than a possible component or class of the composition process. Improvisation was preconscious, subjective, and un-intellectual; composition was more pure, the result of cultivation, and certainly the more worthy pursuit of a great, creative musical mind.

Schumann’s first “works,” or the scores with assigned opuses which have been recurrently studied and performed, were mostly written for the piano. The composer had either written ideas down in his sketchbooks to be used later in performances which necessitated a certain amount of improvisation (either in the form of preludes, free improvisations, fantasias, fugues, and even sonatas), or he had been improvising and decided to turn the idea into a more finished piece. Claudia Becker described this combination of approaches in her description of Schumann’s impromptu compositions:

Schumann’s early "sketches" in fact were often fragments, even short pieces, conceived at the keyboard and already complete in most of their textural details. The Impromptus are unusual and significant precisely because their devices of variation and fugue, their singular development of short, pregnant motives, all of which signal a desire for greater control, come into direct confrontation with his almost irrepressible inclination toward improvisation.

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Early piano works like the Impromptus provide a window into Schumann’s transition from depending primarily upon (and championing) improvisation in his music-making, to acquiescing to the musical trends of his era which saw spontaneous music-making as a novelty, something to be channeled towards more productive purposes.\textsuperscript{101} Towards the end of his musical career, Schumann advised music students to “beware of giving yourself up, too often, to a talent that will lead you to waste strength and time on shadow pictures. You will only obtain mastery of form and the power of clear construction through the firm outlines of the pen. Write more than you improvise therefore.”\textsuperscript{102} By the mid-1850s, Schumann had composed over 130 works for a variety of instrumental combinations, which were edited, organized, compiled and published by Clara after his death in 1856.

Scholarship about Schumann and his music has been offered almost exclusively by the disciplines of musicology and music theory. The two main types of research about the composer are biographies and more analytical examinations of particular scores. With the rise of new musicology, combinations of such historical biographies and analyses have also emerged, giving a greater context and narrative to the different “works” he produced. Sketchbooks were scoured for hints about his finished compositions; diary entries were deciphered for the composer’s motivations for writing such works. And yet discussions more often used the word “improvised” to describe an aesthetic quality (which would certainly be an admirable achievement for a highly premeditated composition) rather than the process by which the text was produced. And never did the discussion of the “improvisatory nature” of Schumann’s

\textsuperscript{101} Gooley, \textit{Rethinking Schumann}. 11.
works indicate that ensuing performances should incorporate any sort of improvisation on the part of the musicians.\textsuperscript{103}

**Charlie Parker, composer**

Charlie “Bird” Parker, born in Kansas City in 1920, revolutionized the genre of jazz harmonically, rhythmically, and melodically during his short lifetime. Before anything else, modern biographies and discussions of his work mention his gift for rapid improvisation, for tailoring his musical decisions to the context of each specific performance, for communicating very specific feelings and ideas through his skills of instantaneous composition. As Carl Woideck expressed in the first page of his 1998 biography of Parker, “for him, much like for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, there was seemingly no separation between conception and execution.”\textsuperscript{104} During the first part of Parker’s career, however, his improvised music—to be sure, any music in America described as “improvised”—was not venerated in such a way. Parker’s music would not have been juxtaposed with that of the canonized Mozart, even in the comparative sense of compositional quickness Woideck intended; indeed, few probably would have acknowledged the improvisatory nature of Mozart’s music-making process at all.

By the time Parker was first breaking out in the jazz scene in late 1930s New York, musicological thought had thoroughly internalized the nineteenth century sentiments valuing calculated and composed musical works. The alternative to such compositions, we recall, came to be portrayed in sources like the Grove Dictionary as

\textsuperscript{103} Take, for example, Linda Correll Roesner, “Schumann’s "Parallel" Forms,” *19th-Century Music* 14, no. 3 (1991): “The finale is a return to the world - and the basic premise - of the first movement. It begins as if in the middle of an improvisation.”

the spontaneous musical urges of “untutored individuals bursting into song.” In the classical realm, the extremely notation-specific works of composers like Schoenberg and Stravinsky were modernizing musicological modes of thought, inspiring the writings of theorists like the young Theodore Adorno and certainly not going unnoticed by players like Parker in the jazz world. The American popular music industry was segregated, with swing bands headed by white leaders being mass marketed to the public, largely disregarding the African American (improvisatory) roots from which the swing style was derived. Masses of white fans were unwittingly dancing the West African-derived Charleston and listening to music with rhythmic syncopations and song forms taken and arranged from the black New Orleans jazz of the previous decades.

With the 1930s explosion of major music labels like Columbia and Decca quickly dominating the music market, creative royalties regulated by the U.S. Copyright Act gave monetary credit almost exclusively to songwriters, composers, and publishers rather than the actual performers, operating upon the assumption that works requiring copyright protection were written rather than recorded, composed rather than improvised.105 The musical consciousness of American audiences and academia alike had arrived at a series of interrelated binaries placing African American, improvised, primitive music on one side and European-derived, composed, cultivated music on the other. Where Schumann had been urged to “produce something finished”106 from his many improvisational sketches and performances

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105 Ingrid T. Monson, *Freedom Sounds : Civil Rights Call out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 29. Interestingly, this act was not amended until 1972, giving copyright protection to sound recordings, as well.

106 Gooley, *Rethinking Schumann.*
almost a century earlier, figures of musical authority in 1930s America saw the new musical ideas and aesthetic of jazz as being “now clearly in the hands of the sophisticated composer,” asserting that “what we need now is the proper guidance of the Jazz germ.” At this point the idea of musical improvisation as Other was as entrenched in American consciousness as the dire state of race relations in the Jim Crow south and the north alike.

If we fast-forward a decade, we find Charlie Parker in New York leading a series of recording sessions with Miles Davis, Dizzie Gillespie, and Max Roach (among others) for Savoy Records in 1945. During one of these now-legendary sessions, Parker initiated a tune he had developed over the changes of the well-known “Cherokee,” stopping the first take of the song to guide the other players away from the original tune and play around his new one. The result was what many consider to be the first bebop tune ever recorded, with its quick notes, new structure, and renewed emphasis on improvisation. In many ways, the bebop style was the twentieth century rebirth of the improvising virtuoso, with highly technical streams of sound much more difficult to reduce to a big band score. In Blues People, Amiri Baraka saw this movement into bebop and the genre’s ensuing popularity as the triumph of black American music over the commercialized white swing which had previously dominated the country’s musical attentions.

Though there is too little space here to discuss the complex social and musical circumstances of bebop and its diverse descendants (from free improvisation to modal

jazz to avant-garde) within the larger American musical scene from the mid-1940s until Parker’s death and beyond, suffice to say that with improvisation as a principle musical tool and symbol, bebop and the many diverse branches of jazz gradually became known to many as “America’s classical music.” The attachment of an improvised genre to the term “classical” (implying, of course, a certain level of musical sophistication and authority) after the erasure of improvisational practices in musicological memory is a notable one. The esteem bebop had established certainly affected the way improvisation was approached in academia more generally, as well. Louis Harap, a Harvard sociologist (and polymath) who moved to New York City around the same time as Parker, took an interest in musicology and issues of race in America at the time. Harap is responsible for the earliest source this study has found that advocates directly for the reassessment of musicological memory regarding the music-making processes and intentions of canonized composers. In his article “The Case for Hot Jazz” of 1941, he wrote:

Thus, if we are to understand jazz at all, we must first dislodge the prejudice that fine music can be created by us only by that extreme division of labor to which we have been accustomed in the art for the past hundred and fifty years. Before this time performers were expected to improvise on the melody; during the Middle Ages the Church was plagued by the elaborate inventions of choir singers; instrumentalists in the 17th century devised their own accompaniments to the main theme given by the composer; and musicians as late as Beethoven regularly improvised.

Harap’s early (and seemingly unnoticed) appeal for recognition of the essential improvisatory nature of much of Western “art” music was derived not from

112 Harap, "The Case for Hot Jazz." 51. It is interesting to note, in terms of our argument, that Harap did not recognize the improvisatory nature of composers after Beethoven, like Schumann.
problematic questions of “composer” or “work” internal to musicology but rather his urge to spread understanding and appreciation of jazz. It is this reevaluation process, perhaps prompted by the influence of the bebop innovations at the time, which allowed for the shift back towards recognizing and investigating improvisatory processes in the twentieth century American musical –ologies.

The first such wave of musicological scholarship on Parker began about two decades after his death, consisting (as with the scholarship of Schumann discussed earlier) either of biographical accounts or closer examinations of the music itself. In the latter category were musicologists like Max Harrison, James Patrick, and Thomas Owens, all of whom relied on transcriptions of Parker’s enormous body of recorded, improvised solos from various points in his career to textually analyze his music. Owens’ dissertation was the most influential and representative of these early analytical studies. He provided a thorough examination of the motivic patterns in almost two-hundred of Parker’s improvisations organized by key and piece. He conducted Schenkerian analyses of a number of excerpts to demonstrate that Parker’s music can be submitted to musicological analysis as rigorously as the works of classical composers for whom the analytical method was originally derived. Owens states his perspective on his object of study—a perspective quite representative of musicology’s stance in the 1970s—very clearly in his introduction:

Jazz is largely a blend of musical elements of two traditions. Its metronomic sense and rhythmic precision, some of its rhythmic patterns, and its sense of spontaneity produced by improvisation comes from Africa; its harmonic vocabulary, most of its melodic vocabulary, its instruments, and its form come from Europe. This music had a folk origin, but by the 1940s had evolved into an art form, appreciated by a relatively small audience.\textsuperscript{113}

At the end of his extensive analysis, Owens comments that “research into jazz is practically virgin territory for the musicologist. Potential projects of substantial size abound...Analysis of more of this material, perhaps along the lines followed in this study, will bring into sharper focus the importance of this flourishing contemporary tradition of improvised art music.”

If we fast-forward another two decades, Henry Martin’s *Charlie Parker and Thematic Improvisation* answers Owens’ appeal. Martin’s study analyzes transcriptions of Parker’s works in a similar vein, but criticizes Owens’ conclusions that Parker’s solos are melodically unrelated to the songs in which they are situated. But despite this shift in interpretation, Martin’s analytical methods of solely studying the textual documentation of Parker’s music-making remains steadfast. In his introduction, Martin sums up well his musicological stance on the significance of his analytical endeavor, a stance remarkably unchanged in the 1990s from that of Owens’ in the 70s: “It is highly probable that Parker did not plan or intend many, if any, of the relationships to be cited in the analyses to follow, yet if they can be demonstrated, his work—at its best unsurpassed as self-contained improvisation—is further enhanced through closer association with the original compositions.” Martin does acknowledge that the improvisational nature of Parker’s solos necessitates a certain prioritization of analysis which would be conceived differently for a more pre-composed work: “under the best circumstances, [musical quotations] are entertaining and well-integrated into the solo; at other times, their informality and spontaneity

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114 Ibid. 130.
require that we not evaluate them too seriously.”\textsuperscript{116} This aspect of Martin’s study simultaneously reveals the extreme subjectivity of analysis and proves its continued usefulness when applied in a way conscious of the circumstances of the music’s creation.

In contrast to Owens’ and Martin’s musical analyses of Parker’s body of solos, are some ethnographical forays into jazz studies that emerged around the time Martin published his analysis. To respond to the two general areas of scholarship on jazz artists like Parker—historical biographies and textual analyses—ethnomusicologists like Paul Berliner and Ingrid Monson emerged to examine the cultural and experiential aspects of the tradition.\textsuperscript{117} Instead of treating artists like Parker solely as an archival issue, they talked and collaborated with practicing musicians, going backwards to evaluate the significance of Parker’s contributions as they live on in modern performances. The ethnomusicological questions deal more with the context than the precise musical content, especially of any performance or solo in particular. For example, how does one first learn how to improvise, and what are the different psychological processes musicians go through in their performances? What is the role of notation for improvising musicians, and how much do they actually use and value it? It is interesting to note that few musicians in Berliner’s and Monson’s books voluntarily used the word “improvise” when discussing their music-making processes—not specific enough, too loaded—something Nettl also discovered.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid. 114.
in his investigations of myriad “improvising” traditions, from Native America to Iran. Many, in fact, refused to call what they did “improvisation” at all.\footnote{Monson, \textit{Saying Something : Jazz Improvisation and Interaction}. 101.}

**Fantasie, Op. 17**

Schumann’s Fantasie in C major was first composed in 1836 when he was twenty-seven years old and still writing primarily for solo piano. The piece was originally intended to be a “Grand Sonata” in honor of Beethoven, but by the time of its completion he had added two more movements and altered the score to be significantly more structurally fluid and programmatic in nature. The final version had three movements referencing the course of Beethoven’s life: “Ruins”, “Triumphal Arch” and “Starry Crown.”\footnote{Alan Walker, “Schumann, Liszt and the C Major Fantasie, Op. 17: A Declining Relationship,” \textit{Music & Letters} 60, no. 2 (1979). 156.} At different points the piece was dedicated to Beethoven, then to Clara in one of his letters to her, and finally to Liszt at a high point of the two composers’ tumultuous friendship.\footnote{Ibid.} After “grand sonata” was no longer suitable, the piece was entitled “Dichtungen” (poems), which was later scratched out and retitled “Fantasie,” as evidenced in Figure 1 on the following page. In another sweeping editing process, Schumann changed the piece from op. 16 to op. 17, removed the titles of the movements and instructed the publishers to replace them with three stars each (see figure 2); at some point he also pasted pieces of paper with edits over a number of sections and transitions throughout the piece.\footnote{Ibid.} There are a number of autograph scores in collections around the world, all written at various

\footnote{Ibid.}
stages of the Fantasie’s development. In addition to the full manuscripts, there are numerous sketches with material used in Op. 17 and for other scores written around the same time.

The final title of “Fantasie” upon which Schumann decided associates the piece (at least in name) with the Fantasia, a musical form dating back to Renaissance instrumental pieces described as springing “solely from the fantasy and skill of the author who created it.” The Fantasia form had sustained this meaning into the nineteenth century with “free fantasies” becoming a popular improvisatory genre which Schumann surely performed.

Figure 1:

All three excerpts from Schumann’s final edit of the Fantasie can be found Walker (1979), which contains the only facsimiles of this particular rendition of the manuscript.

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123 Ibid, 12.
125 Ibid.
Musically, the Fantasie is teeming with references to other melodies and compositions particularly from Beethoven, as is appropriate to the piece’s original purpose. Such references were especially common in the improvisatory fantasies, impromptus, and preludes from the same period.\footnote{Goertzen, "By Way of Introduction: Preluding by 18th- and Early 19th-Century Pianists." 299.} A number of these references were intended for Clara’s amusement in her reading of the piece, one of which she specifically noted in a letter by jokingly calling Schumann a “musical thief.” He replied, saying that he had intentionally inserted the reference but had not intended to publish that version. He continued, “Sillyhead! If I steal, I begin much more subtly, as you yourself know from your own experience—namely with your heart.”\footnote{Marston, Schumann, Fantasie, Op. 17. 35.} Aside from illustrating Schumann’s wit, this exchange shows how ideas of musical property were already well established, leading eventually to the copyright laws in America discussed in the previous section. Such ideas, indicated in Schumann’s distinction between a published “work” and one intended for other performance purposes, become quickly confusing with improvised music. The exchange between Robert and
Clara also indicates that the Fantasie was (at least at a certain point) not necessarily intended to be a calculatedly structured, published “work” but perhaps more of a clever, improvisatory transcription. Figure 3 shows the final lines of the last version of the Fantasie, where a fifteen-measure quotation of Beethoven’s “An die ferne Geliebte” is crossed out and a simple arpeggiated ending replaces it.\textsuperscript{128} Perhaps this section was the one to which Robert and Clara were referring in their letters.

\textbf{Figure 3:}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.png}
\end{center}

In support of the hypothesis that the Fantasie was not initially intended to be read as a serious “work” are the many aforementioned anomalous qualities of the piece. In terms of the harmonic character, Linda Roesner describes Schumann’s “adventurous treatment of tonality—C major at that!—in the Fantasie, op. 17… in which little can be taken for granted, in which little can convincingly be predicted or

explained from the standpoint of tradition." Nicholas Marston concludes one section of his analysis stating that “we are at a loss to identify any one statement as the definitive theme from which the material flows.” There are multiple rapid modulations, the utilization of aspects of a number of forms (including sonata, rondo, and fugue) and thematic sections inserted without return, all characteristic of improvisational practices at the time.

Scholarship on the Fantasie, however, refers to it (and certainly treats it analytically) as something intended as a fixed work, delving into often-meticulous investigations about its complex structure and improvisatory aesthetic. Nicholas Marston’s book of 1992 provides the most thorough investigation of the piece to date. Marston subjects Schumann’s score to Schenkerian analysis, examines the pre-compositional sketches for their relation to what Schumann eventually decided to include, and tries to make sense of the work’s highly anomalous form. What is interesting about such discussions as Marston’s, however, are their omissions: any mention of improvisation. Walker concludes his article by explaining that “today the Fantasie stands before us as perhaps Schumann's very greatest keyboard work. The discovery of the Szechenyi manuscript adds an extra dimension to its colourful historical background and will ensure that this masterpiece remains perennially fascinating to scholars and performers alike.” Such readings of the Fantasie are certainly illuminating in terms of its complex musical inner-workings. But perhaps a

129 Roesner, "Schumann's "Parallel" Forms." 265.
131 Ibid.
132 Marston’s book mentions “improvisation” once in his 100-page book on page 14 in a discussion of one of the sketches possibly used for the Fantasie.
different kind of reading, one that sees the Fantasie as an extended transcription of his improvisatory style, would be instructive in a different way, as a rare window into the largely un-documentcd improvisational practices of Schumann and his contemporaries. If we detach ourselves from the idea of a fixed work (Schumann himself sent around multiple, highly-divergent copies of the Fantasie for different reasons), works like this one could be used for a number of other purposes. If we see the Fantasie as more of a transcription of one particular improvisation of Schumann’s, could a more outline-oriented score be written to demonstrate underlying structures, common Schumann riffs and motives, and melodies, original or referenced? What would such a reworking imply for performance practice?

Koko

The above suggestion that we might view certain works by Schumann the improviser as evidence of his music-making practices is essentially how “works” of jazz like Parker’s “Koko” are treated by scholars and performers. It is certainly worthwhile to intimately analyze individual improvised solos—recorded or notated, transcribed by the composer or by someone else—as this method of examination can tell us much about the decisions the improviser made in the course of performance. But such examinations only inform us about one particular incarnation of such a “work,” of which there are as many variations as performances.

If a transcription of even the first performance of a “work” of jazz does not encapsulate its ontology, what are its essential, unchanging qualities? While containing elements of an implicit melody, soloists need not adhere to more than the understood progressions over which they are playing. These underlying chord
changes, however, are neither unique to any one tune, nor is any one piece required to adhere religiously to the original changes. The instrumentation and number of musicians is variable. There are often substitutions, alterations, extensions, or complete rewritings of the harmonic narrative of a piece. The progression of a jazz song’s life is a sort of oral history, with the song’s originator and its subsequent performers meriting comparable creative roles.

“Koko,” at the time of its acknowledged “composition” during the 1945 Savoy session described earlier, was merely a significant elaboration on British bandleader Ray Noble’s “Cherokee (Indian Love Song),” written in 1938. Noble’s swing tune, written in B♭ and containing relatively slow harmonic movement and a common A¹-A²-B-A² form, became an opportune vehicle for experimentation with highly technical improvisation in jam sessions in the ensuing decade. Parker’s “Koko” was at first simply another elaboration on the changes of the original tune (the first few lines of which are below).

**Figure 4:**

![Cherokee Sheet Music](image)

The notation of “Cherokee” in Figure 4, of course, is not representative of any particular performance of the song; it is a lead sheet attempting to bring together the essential qualities of the work, a theoretical common intersection set of the many recorded and potential performances of the piece upon which performers are expected to improvise. But if Parker’s new tune is effectively derived from the lead sheet of “Koko,” what gives the song its separate identity? Figures 5 and 6 below are standard notations of the “Koko,” which highlight aspects Parker’s solos as the distinguishing factor.

Figure 5:

![Image of sheet music](image)


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Figure 5, above, from *The Charlie Parker Omnibook* simply goes through every note Parker plays in its rendition, from the unison head to the seven measures of rest for Dizzy Gillespie’s solo, and onwards to Parker’s extended improvisation. Figure 6, instead, skips straight to Parker’s memorable solo at the start of the “Cherokee” progression. Recorded versions of the song by other artists use some combination of the head, references to Parker’s well-documented solo, the underlying changes, and virtuosic bebop style.

In the midst of Parker’s solo in the initial recording of “Koko,” one can hear the familiar melody of “Tea for Two” faintly emerge in his rapid melodic movements. Just as Schumann improvisatorially referenced a number of Beethoven’s works as a commentary on the purpose of his Fantasie, here Parker inserted this ironic allusion to an idyllic white musical realm, remarking (as Rutkoff argues) upon a history of unacknowledged appropriation of African-American music by the commercial swing genre.\(^{135}\) Parker’s “Tea for Two” reference, too, is woven so organically into his complex improvisation that (as with Schumann’s comment to Clara about more subtle

\(^{135}\) Rutkoff and Scott, "Bebop: Modern New York Jazz." 110.
integrations of other composers into his music) it would be difficult to pin down the
actual melody for copyright reasons, another commentary on bebop’s elusive and
self-aware nature.136 In these ways Parker is signifying with his solo, embedding a
number of meanings in a dialogic fashion—a conversational act historically more
suitable to fleeting, improvisational forms than fixed ones.

“Koko,” then, serves as a good example of the organic and collective creative
process required for a “work” of jazz to be fully realized and maintained in
performance. Though Parker had a significant influence upon the birth of bebop and
the shift in musicological perceptions of improvisation, he was only one creative
agent in a long continuum of composing performers. The fact that each and every
performer of “works” like “Koko” contributes a certain amount of creativity and
positionality is not singular to jazz, just more overt; works like Schumann’s
“Fantasie” emerged from an improvisatory process and necessitate some amount of
interpretation by their performers, as well.

**Performing composition, performing improvisation**

In one of the previous quotations about Schumann’s Fantasie, Alan Walker
concluded his article stating that new discoveries about the piece “will ensure that this
masterpiece remains perennially fascinating to scholars and performers alike.”137 The
assumption that new understandings of a particular text would have an impact on how
performers use the score is certainly not unusual for a musicological study. The
performance practice of almost all “classical” music is tacitly treated either as some
degree of a historical re-enactment or as an informed departure from its historically

136 Ibid.
dictated performance stipulations—even (and especially) in cases when performers claim that they are allowing the scores to “speak for themselves.”\textsuperscript{138} All such decisions about how to treat historical scores in modern performances, then, requires a certain amount of musicological awareness. And yet, where are performances of the several different documented renditions of the Fantasie? Where are recordings of musicians improvising from scores written by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, or even Schumann? Where are improvised preludes and cadenzas to performances of works in the common repertory? In an era with more virtuosic performers on more instruments than ever before, such virtuosity seems to be all the more keenly directed towards the most exact adherence imaginable to the score. Ushering in a new generation of improvising performers of Bach and Beethoven, however, would blur the boundaries between these “great men” of yore and the modern, technically trained middle-men regrettably necessary for our musical experience. And though this would be a slightly hyperbolic description of contemporary classical performance practice, it highlights an undeniable dynamic which would necessarily be upset if historically appropriate amounts of improvisation were incorporated.

Though Robert Schumann chose to notate his compositional contributions and Parker’s were transcribed after the fact, there is substantial evidence that both men’s creative processes stemmed directly from their virtuosic performance abilities in combination with improvisational inspiration. Performances of the “works” of both men, however, seem to diverge based on these different means of notation rather than the processes which led to the actual musical experience. Perhaps a note-for-note

\textsuperscript{138} In the first essay of \textit{Text and Act}, Taruskin addresses the familiar explanation of “letting the music speak for itself,” concluding that such a claim is not adequate in justifying a dearth of (historically- or otherwise aesthetically-minded) interpretive measures in modern performances.
performance of Parker’s “Koko” would be as worthy a performance endeavor as improvisatory elaborations in the style of Schumann based off of any of his well-known compositions.

**Composition, Improvisation, both?**

This chapter has briefly outlined the careers of two improvisers, one from the middle of the nineteenth century and one from the middle of the twentieth. These music-makers have been chosen to represent what this study has identified as the two most fundamental paradigm shifts in treatments of improvisatory practices in American musicological consciousness. It is important to identify such shifts because they inform and hone our knowledge both of the music itself and the simultaneously-formed ideological architectures of the disciplines governing our examination of the music.

To summarize, then, improvisation in Western consciousness did not exist as a singular concept previous to Schumann’s era. At that point the musical work was invented, the idea of improvisation emerged as its opposite, and was soon thereafter posited as its Other. This dualistic conception of music-making was gradually universalized and applied to all musical objects of inquiry, musicological or ethnomusicological, from Mozart to middle-eastern music to a number of non-classical traditions closer to home. As this dialectical relationship intensified in the social and musical currents of early twentieth-century America, the ideas of composition and improvisation were mapped more explicitly onto race and exemplified by the relationship in musicological thought between Western classical music and jazz.
Charlie Parker’s era signified the inception of the second major paradigm shift—from improvisation as an Other (or as the musical activity of the Other) to improvisation as a symbol of musical talent and freedom of individual expression and creativity. The new and more focused consideration given to the process of improvisation in both Western “art” music and the many ethnomusicological areas of inquiry was certainly influenced by innovations in jazz back at home, as such innovations illuminated qualities about the music-making process which were, and are, relevant to both disciplines.
IV. Conclusions

“Linguistics is the study of all the languages of man. Astronomers do not limit their field to a single galaxy; nor do biologists to insects with six legs. The need for an ethnomusicology of the fine art of European music is as urgent as for that of any other ‘high culture.’ Ultimately, there would be no roles for separate studies, musicology and ethnomusicology; but there would still be a distinction between the musicological and ethnomusicological approaches, the first, to the thing in itself, the second, to the thing in its cultural context as one of quite a number of other contexts, mathematical, logical, philosophical, aesthetic, moral, economic, political, religious.”

Charles Seeger, 1971

“It may be suspected, furthermore, that it is often where two or even all three systems [of musicology, ethnomusicology, theory] can be said to compete for the intellectual control of territory that we will find the most promising fields of study.”

Joseph Kerman, 1985

“At a time when disciplinary boundaries are becoming ever more blurred—indeed, when the whole notion of such boundaries is being called into question—and when interdisciplinarity has perhaps never been so important, I would suggest that we cocoon ourselves in our disciplinary bubble at our peril.”

Laudan Nooshin, 2001

Post- new- ethno- (music)-ology?

The prefix “ethno-” from the Greek “ethnos” designates race, people, or culture. In terms of its function for the musical discipline of ethnomusicology, where such a titular addition might seem redundant when taken for its meaning alone—for what is music but something which happens between people, within culture?—it is a differentiator. Its initial inclusion, especially in the American context, separated ethno-musicology from the more mainstream musicology at the time of its formation. It tacitly demonstrated that this new branch of music study encompassed the

140 Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Musicology in Context*. 15
142 Merriam noted (1964): “Music sound cannot be produced except by people for other people, and although we can separate the two aspects conceptually, one is not really complete without the other. Human behavior produces music, but the process is one of continuity; the behavior itself is shaped to produce music sound, and thus the study of one flows into the other.”
traditions of more than one race, people or culture. It gave a new identity to its scholars. It implied a shift in perspective, in approach, in methodology, in politics. For Philip Bohlman has reminded us (in the spirit of Foucault) that musicology is a political act, most especially during the instances during which it has attempted to maintain an apolitical agenda.

The suffix “-ology” is from the Greek “logos,” originally meaning “to speak,” and is attached to words in English to indicate “the study of,” usually implying “the scientific study of.” Music jumped on the -ology bandwagon during the explosion of disciplinary formation in the late nineteenth century, asserting its worthiness as a discipline at a time when associations with scientific (rather than “historical,” or humanitarian) methods of inquiry lent scholarly authority. Waldo Seldon Pratt first made the case for a musical –ology in 1890: “music should rank among the great subjects of intellectual research, like biology, political economy, or literature.” If this thesis has demonstrated anything, it has depicted the extreme diversity of approaches to the study of music and the types of music to be examined—approaches certainly represented in the separate existing branches of musical academia.

The names “musicology,” “ethnomusicology,” and even “new musicology” are themselves perfect representations of the complex and layered genealogy of music studies in the English-speaking world: such titles have come to contain either just as many or significantly more individual letters dedicated to establishing disciplinary positionality and authority as characters symbolizing the music itself. Now that we have concluded the first decade of this new century and “new” musicology is no

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longer all that new, perhaps it is time for the musicological thesis and the ethnomusicological antithesis to re-evaluate their collective identities and names which, as Laudan Nooshin put it, “must score pretty highly on the scale of ‘mouthful’ disciplinary titles.”

The quotations at the beginning of this section remind us that the urge for such a synthesis is not new; indeed, scholars who have spent ample time on both sides of the disciplinary divide have advocated the most ardently for such institutional and ideological collaborations. The first and perhaps most notable of these advocates for closer disciplinary association was Charles Seeger himself, a principal actor in the establishment of both American musical -ologies. Seeger arguably never fully identified with either discipline during his prolific career as a music scholar, as the above quotation written towards the end of his career reveals.

Considering the turn in musicological thought towards a consideration of context alongside text, meaning alongside structure, and (as we have explored here) perhaps even improvisation alongside composition, we are prompted to ask the inescapable question. What, then, is the essential differentiator between the two disciplines as they stand today; what are the enduring implications behind the “ethno”? There has been substantial enough overlap in the fields’ objects of inquiry—recall Peter Jeffrey’s ethnomusicology of Gregorian Chant, or any of the myriad presentations on subjects like Japanese hip hop or jazz migrations from the most recent meeting of the American Musicological Society. Besides, the world has always been the ethnomusicologist’s objectival oyster, at least in theory.

Or, as many have proposed, perhaps the current differentiation between the two disciplines lies in their methodologies. But does ethnomusicology have a

\[144\] Stobart, The New (Ethno)Musicologies. 73.
monopoly on field work, especially considering the now-pervasive recognition in musicology as well that music can only be holistically understood after its social, cultural, and political functions have been interrogated? If the ethnographic work of ethnomusicologists is still a useful differentiating factor, how do we define its anthropological Other in an increasingly globalizing world of increasingly intertwined musical traditions? Is cultural or geographical distance still necessitated (or even preferred) at all between the (ethno)musicological subject and its object of inquiry? And if not, would a classical musician’s examination of modern classical performance practices involving live observation and the collection and comparison of recordings be all that different disciplinarily from an examination of the music of Columbian New Yorkers by a Columbian scholar from New York?\footnote{I am referencing here the work of Amy Blier-Carruthers, one of my former musicology professors at Kings College, London, and the current project of ethnomusicologist Jorge Arevalo Mateus of Wesleyan University.}

While acknowledging and celebrating the fruitful histories of both musicology and ethnomusicology, this investigation proposes that if the already-prominent cross-fertilization of both areas and methods of inquiry were to be recognized on a wider scale, in the ways university departments and conferences are coordinated, myriad musical investigations would benefit. This is certainly not to say that every study should incorporate some idyllic assortment of every method available, but simply that scholars should be given the resources (institutionally and otherwise) to pick and choose their own tools with equal amounts of ease from an expansive musicological toolbox. As of now, those tools are divided somewhat randomly into a number of smaller and less convenient boxes.
Where does the idea of improvisation fit into this disciplinary discourse? The short answer is “everywhere,” which is exactly the point: if the most recent Grove definition of “improvisation” explicitly states that “to some extent every performance involves elements of improvisation,” should investigations into music-making processes falling somewhere on a continuous (and I would argue, hardly two-dimensional) spectrum be divided into disciplines according to the music’s relative adherence to a specific type of notation? The range of intentionality behind composers’ uses of Western notation differ infinitely, and their expectations of notational adherence or elaboration fall on as broad a spectrum as that of improvisation, distorting yet another former point of implicit musicological solidarity.

The meanings behind scores written by “classical” composers like J. S. Bach and Igor Stravinsky, for example, arguably have much less in common than the music-making processes of Robert Schumann, Charlie Parker, Iranian *radif* musicians, or *niraval* singers in South Indian classical music.\(^\text{146}\)

**Sister disciplines**

Though this thesis has focused on the relationship between the two musical –ologies, it should be said that music theory has also been intimately involved in the disciplinary relations and theoretical/methodological innovations discussed in the previous chapters. Certainly, a discussion of the differing treatments of musical texts (or the absence thereof) amongst all three disciplines could fill books. The remarkably interwoven nature of studies by musicologists and music theorists is a testament to the fact that these disciplines, too—while each possesses a valuable set

\(^{146}\) Nettl, “Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach.” 8.
of central approaches and agendas—are not wholly distinct from one another. The role of analysis, the fixed nature of the text, the extremely varied compositional processes and how their musical products should be examined accordingly—such deliberations and many more have already been introduced in music theory discourse and would certainly relate back to our discussion of improvisation.

Jazz studies focuses simultaneously on theoretical and practical aspects of the improvisational process as a central tenet of its identity, incorporating musicological and ethnomusicological investigations, historical and biographical studies, and most importantly collaborations with performers. As the jazz tradition never detached the concept of the musical work from the process of performance as distinctly as musicology and theory did with Western “art” music, the continuing dialogue in jazz studies between scholars and performers (let alone between different types of scholars approaching similar subjects) is quite logical, and something the other musical disciplines should take as an example. This continuing dialogue is a fundamental one, as the amount of artistic agency required of every jazz musician necessitates a familiarity with the theory and history (in addition, of course, to the many technicalities) of the art, enabling every player to improvise/compose as appropriate during the instance of performance.

**Towards a new Music Studies**

This investigation has contended that the binary of improvisation and composition is false, and more importantly, that drawing upon such a binary proves detrimental to examinations of the music-making process. By the time musicology’s and ethnomusicology’s oppositional relationship had come to fruition in the midst of
the twentieth century, their differences of scope and method could be read as centered around the constructed framework of composition and improvisation. Musicology sought to investigate the nature of notated works by canonized composers of the explicitly literate Western “art” tradition; ethnomusicology subsequently emerged to study musics around the world initially perceived as improvisational for their lack of fixed texts. As the compositional binary was gradually deconstructed, however, the methods and objects of both musicological disciplines began to intermix accordingly, as compositions not contained wholly by their notations require further investigation than hermetic modes of analysis, and cultures with primarily oral traditions of music-making require more than just contextual understanding.

If there are indeed elements of improvisation in all music, if no music is ever fully embodied by its text but can still be represented by some mode of notation, and if we are indeed confronting an increasingly globalized musical world in which no tradition—be it originally musicological or ethnomusicological in nature—remains unaffected, I propose that it is time for a dramatic shift in disciplinary identity. I propose that a synthesis of the two musical –ologies and a shedding of their titular appendages into a more inclusive (but still appropriately diverse) “music studies” would allow for a wider range of approaches to musical scholarship. It is the hope of this investigation that the concept of improvisation itself will consequently be rendered obsolete.
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