

EPISTROPHY

Call for papers
Epistrophy, a jazz journal - n°1

Jazz and Modernity

Coordination:
Thomas Horeau, Édouard Hubert, Raphaëlle Tchamitchian

Since its birth, jazz has often been perceived as a musical paradigm for the modern age, a technological and rhythmical age characterized by an unprecedented “acceleration”¹, considered as a danger by some philosophers. The idea of modernity, which has been progressively legitimized and used within the field of aesthetics, is generally defined as a distance taken from the tradition and/or an orientation toward the future². The argument of modernity and positioning in relation to tradition is at the core of controversies relating to jazz legitimacy, from Berendt and Adorno, Panassié and Vian, to the recent controversy about the nomination of Olivier Benoît as director of the French Orchestre National de Jazz. Then, can and/or must one consider jazz a “modern” music, considering it is often constituted by a tension between rupture and continuity.

In jazz history, modernity — here understood as an “era” or a “period” — was often associated with bebop³. However, there are other approaches: French musicologist and pianist Laurent Cugny for instance chose to start modernity in jazz in 1959⁴, for Bataille or Ellison, jazz is modern as early as the 1920’s⁵, and free jazz has sometimes been called “modern jazz”⁶, like so many other styles from the moment they are topical and somewhat progressive. There are so many perspectives on this issue that we thought it could be more productive to follow Baudelaire’s lead and define modernity as a “manner”, a “qualitative category” or an “attitude” to borrow Foucault’s term⁷, rather than a “period”, a “moment” or a “chronological category”. This is how we call to question the way jazz can contribute to thinking (or re-thinking) modernity, and the way modernity may in return shed light on jazz differently. In other words, how do jazz and modernity shed light on each other ?

This is also how we analyze the modernity of jazz players’ open-minded practice. From the new expressivity of Armstrong’s improvised solo on “Tight Like This” (1928) to John Zorn’s current multi-faceted work, or Coleman Hawkins’ contribution to Max Roach’s *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*

1 ROSA Hartmut, *Accélération. Une critique sociale du temps*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010.

2 SOURIAU, *Vocabulaire d’esthétique*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1999.

3 HODEIR André, *Hommes et problèmes du jazz*, Marseille : Parenthèses, 1981 [1954] ; DEVEAUX Scott, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1997. In this book, Scott DeVeaux calls bebop the « first modern jazz style ».

4 CUGNY Laurent, *Analyser le jazz*, Paris, Outre Mesure, 2009.

5 “Consider that at least as early as T. S. Eliot’s creation of a new aesthetic for poetry through the artful juxtapositioning of earlier styles, Louis Armstrong, way down on the river in New Orleans, was working out of a similar technique for jazz.” ELLISON Ralph, “A Completion of Personality: A Talk with Ralph Ellison” in HERSEY John, *Ralph Ellison: a Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall [1974].

6 PEREC Georges, « La chose », in *Le Magazine littéraire*, n°316, décembre 1993 [probably written in 1967].

7 “Je me demande si on ne peut pas envisager la modernité plutôt comme une attitude que comme une période de l’histoire. Par attitude, je veux dire un mode de relation à l’égard de l’actualité ; un choix volontaire qui est fait par certains ; enfin, une manière de penser et de sentir, une manière aussi d’agir et de se conduire qui, tout à la fois, marque une appartenance et se présente comme une tâche.” FOUCAULT Michel, « Qu’est-ce que les Lumières ? » [1^{ère} éd. 1984], in *Dits et écrits, IV, 1980-1988*, NRF Gallimard, Bibliothèque des sciences humaines, 1994, p. 568.

sessions (1962), there are many events in the history of jazz that, by their (r)evolutionary nature, invite to think modernity.

Keeping in mind the fact that modernity is a pluralist and multi-layered notion, here are a few non exhaustive and open leads that can pave the way to think jazz and modernity.

Modernity, contemporaneity and postmodernity

What does “modern” jazz mean today? To what extent can one speak about “modern” jazz at a time when “postmodernity” has taken over numerous aesthetics discourses? Here are questioned the current jazz forms, and the categories of performance, improvisation, spontaneity, and the figure of what one may call a “super-musician”, who finds in all kinds of musics the inspiration for a “creative” or “postmodern” music. One may also study the way modernity “has found itself grappling with counter-modern attitudes”⁸, and maybe also with itself, regarding the fact it sometimes became tradition⁹.

Jazz in its time

The history of jazz has followed a parallel path to the one of recording techniques¹⁰: it would be interesting to pursue the thought on the relation between jazz and sound recording or technology in general (particular system, video recordings of improvised performances, marks, diffusion modes, listening modes, recording techniques as part of creation, computer-assisted improvisation, etc.). If jazz is associated with technical modernity, it has also embodied a certain primitivism¹¹: what of this contradiction now and then? What does it say about its time? Moreover, what can jazz, understood as a social phenomenon, reveal about its time?

Jazz and other arts

Here one may interrogate the way theatre, cinema, literature, etc., can use jazz as a paradigm of modernity, and by extension the way jazz is represented on and off stage, its relation to the body, dance¹² and the scene. One may study as well the relationship between jazz and other musics, especially Poulenc’s or Stravinsky’s “modern music”, which lay in between strict typological separation and mutual influence. For instance, is John Lewis a modern musician simply because he so labels his quartet, or because he explicitly refers (among others) to Bartok or Schoenberg, or for any other reason, or is he even not?

The issues that are sketched are aesthetic as well as musicological, historical, sociological, anthropological, etc. Every subject is welcome. Please send contributions **before 31 December 2014** to epistrophy@epistrophy.fr with a title, an abstract and a short bio-bibliography. Contributions can include photos, music and/or videos in separate files, according to the norms indicated in the guideline [link].

8 Michel Foucault again: “Plutôt que de vouloir distinguer la "période moderne" des époques "pré" ou "postmoderne", je crois qu'il vaudrait mieux chercher comment l'attitude de modernité, depuis qu'elle s'est formée, s'est trouvée en lutte avec des attitudes de "contre-modernité"” (*Ibid.*).

9 COMPAGNON Antoine, *Les cinq paradoxes de la modernité*, Paris, éditions du Seuil, 1990.

10 GONZALEZ Éric, « Le jazz : modernité, modernisme, identité », in *Revue française d'études américaines*, Hors-Série: Play It Again, Sim... Hommages à Sim Copans, décembre 2001, pp. 84-96.

11 MARTIN Denis-Constant, ROUEFF Olivier, *La France du jazz. Musique, modernité et identité dans la première moitié du XX^e siècle*, Marseille, Parenthèses, 2002.

12 JACOTOT Sophie, « Corps dynamiques, corps mécanique, corps modernes... Imaginaire des danses jazz dans les années 1920 », in Vincent Cotro, Laurent Cugny, Philippe Gumpłowicz (dir.), *La catastrophe apprivoisée. Regards sur le jazz en France*, Paris, Outre Mesure, 2013.