

# Jazz as a Spontaneous Order

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Bruce Caldwell’s observation that “[b]y the 1960s Hayek was seeing complex orders everywhere” is something that struck a cautionary note in our thinking about jazz (Caldwell 2000, p. 19). Indiscriminate use of the concept (known as “concept creep” in the psychology literature) would of course empty it of meaning, a fate that has befallen many a key term in social philosophy. However contested a concept may be, theorists should be able to: (a) point to the logical independence of spontaneous order (in other words, a given concept shouldn’t be analyzable in terms that presuppose that very concept); (b) pick out and identify all and only the things to which the concept applies (that is, the extensional and intensional adequacy to use philosophical jargon); and (c) explain the functional adequacy as to why one would need a given concept (what work or role would a given concept have to fulfill?). We therefore think it useful to briefly expound upon what we understand the concept to be.

The notion of spontaneous order is inextricably part and parcel of the five-faceted cornerstone to Hayek’s philosophy of social science: the other facets being complexity, the dispersion of knowledge, rationality and methodological individualism. Spontaneous order connotes the idea that as a result of innumerable and perpetually dynamic (tacit and explicit) interactions among multitudes of agents, sociality and culture are emergent phenomena. The idea is that so-called “emergent” phenomena cannot be reduced to their constituent parts without remainder; the corollary being that the consequences of the interaction between the constituent elements cannot be predicted. Spontaneous order is closely related to emergent phenomena in other domains (notably in biology, physics and computational intelligence) and is variously termed as self-organization and complex adaptive systems: all variants have a similar logical form.

For Hayek spontaneous orders are essentially information systems. A healthily functioning spontaneous order or communications mechanism promotes “computational” efficiencies, a complex coordination mechanism for diverse wants, preferences, interests and goals. Tampering with this mechanism is at best going to deliver unforeseen conse-

quences; at worst, unforeseen negative consequences most notably the corroding of sociopolitical freedom. Hayek’s early invocation of spontaneous order had Marxist and socialist centralizing (top-down *immergent*) tendencies as his target. Later this concern morphed into taking to task the general Cartesian constructivism or rationalism (“conscious” *aforethought*) that inheres in much of sociopolitical theorizing, orthodox economics included. The upshot is that for Hayek there is a necessary link between the dispersion of knowledge and sociopolitical freedom in complex societies, or, in the current argot, knowledge economies.

The standard criticism leveled against Hayek’s conception of spontaneous order is that there is a perceived tension in that spontaneous order is deemed incompatible with patterns of traditional behavior that Hayek recommends. To a large degree this aspect loses its force if one grants Hayek the idea that a truly spontaneous order naturally embodies the resources (customs, laws and morals) for both the preservation of existing patterns of behavior but also to accommodate the development and acceptance of other novel patterns of behavior. Though the market is a paradigm example of a spontaneous order, for Hayek, it had no special ontological status—it is one spontaneous order among many (science, law, democracy, language being other prominent orders—see diZerega 2013).

With this in mind we are confident that jazz as a socio-cultural phenomenon is a star instantiation of spontaneous order (Koch 2013). A word of caution. The spontaneous order that is *jazz* does have a double aspect: the socio-cultural-historical soup from which it emerged (Marsh 2017)<sup>1</sup> and the structural dynamic of the music itself with its own internal tensions between tradition and revolution, often congealing around one individual such as Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman, and the last notable, Miles Davis.

While the discussion that follows does not take place under the rubric of aesthetics per se, it does have intimate implications. Jazz music presents specific challenges and *aporia* (puzzles) for the philosophy of music: our present interest here, the ontology of jazz, ontology being a key dis-

discussion area for this journal (di Iorio 2016; Zúñiga y Postigo and Erion 2017).<sup>2</sup> In general terms, ontological thinking about music asks questions such as “what’s the relationship between live performances of ostensibly the same work, the *sine qua non* of music being performance?”; “in what sense does interpretation or novelty relate to musical notation?”; “how does an interceding technology or recording relate to notation and performance?” and so on and so forth. Though jazz is not necessarily improvisational, theorizing on the ontology of jazz has typically centered around the nature of improvisation—and this we take as one of the distinctive features of jazz as a spontaneous order.

Roberto Zanetti’s discussion is through and through concerned with ontology, in particular, improvisation. Zanetti distinguishes between a traditional schema (a *prescriptive* one), and an *informative* model. Zanetti takes the view that jazz music can be based on a different, not pre-determined kind of structure, which he terms the *informative* model. This, he claims, allows one to abandon an inveterate prejudice, i.e. that jazz is anarchic; moreover, it allows a better understanding as to what criteria one should employ in evaluating the creativity at stake in jazz performance. Zanetti does not want to establish a qualitative hierarchy between the prescriptive and the informative model, but would only like to highlight the fact that they give rise to different productive paths in making music.

Stefano Ferrian emphasizes a raft of philosophical concepts that would be familiar to anti-rationalist theorists such as Ryle, Hayek and Oakeshott: rule-following, improvisation, conversation, tacit knowledge. Ferrian’s conception of “conversation” brings to mind Oakeshott’s (1991) famous discussion in which conversation is understood as:

- perpetually provisional and should not be disconcerted by the differences or dismayed by inconclusiveness;
- as “voices” that do not compose a hierarchy: there is no one centralized symposiarch or arbiter, merely a multiplicity of interdependent equals;
- not having a predetermined course; its value is intrinsic, not instrumental;
- an unrehearsed intellectual adventure in which one imaginatively enters into a “flow of sympathy”;
- a manifold profusion of persons, ideas, identities, events, and the associations they form circumstantially meeting and addressing one another in a plurality of languages of self-disclosure and self-enactment.

Ferrian bemoans the pedagogical “hardening of the arteries” so to speak thereby constraining the scope for the genuine development of individuality. This may well be the inevitable manifestation of the cyclic life-cycle of cultural institutionalization. It may well also be because of the depreciation of the liberal arts and humanities generally, caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, higher education institutions are encouraged to be functional to market requirements; while on the other hand, so much of the university is given over to ideological indoctrination, activism masquerading as legitimate inquiry—i.e. the emphasis being on *not how* to think but *what* to think.

Troy Camplin and Kevin Currie-Knight argue that the process of jazz music provides a compelling analogy for understanding distributed theories of cognition and systems approaches to biology. They have picked up on the non-Cartesian body of literature, a loose and internally fluid philosophical and empirical coalition comprising the Dynamical-, Embodied-, Extended-, Distributed-, and Situated approaches to knowledge and cognition. Indeed, the very precondition of knowledge is a generalized exploitation of the epistemic virtues accorded by liberal/civil society’s *distributed* and extended manifold of spontaneous orders and forms of life, giving context and definition, to intimate, regulate, and inform action. Though they don’t specifically invoke the term *enactivism* (yet another non-Cartesian externalist approach to knowledge and cognition), their discussion is consonant with it in their emphasis on the *know-how* that emerges from recurrent sensory-motor coupling and looping between the organism and the artifactual environment.

Michael Granado closes out this issue with his metaphysical discussion, putting the concept of emergence at the very heart of his paper. Granado rightly understands randomness to not only be an essential feature of the universe but also the source of constant creativity, be it viewed in theological terms or scientific terms—and jazz as a superb instantiation of this open dynamic—offers a suggestively apt analogy as a clue to possible consilience. The intelligent design vs. evolution debate has of course been the subject of some of the bitterest conflicts in public policy. Rather than relying on the usual raft of great Victorian thinkers who had much to say on the idea of emergence in all its forms (George Henry Lewes, J. S. Mill, C. D. Broad, Samuel Alexander), Granado focuses on the somewhat neglected American Victorian, Joseph LeConte.

Three concluding points are in order.

First, emergence is one of the slipperiest of concepts in the philosophy of science and, for that matter, in the philosophy of social science.

Second, it should also be noted that drawing a distinction between spontaneous and constructed orders is not as clear cut as some suggest.

Third, the desire for innovative activity to persist from its inception on a permanent basis is unrealistic. Inasmuch as activities are engaged in by a large population, they tend over time to be structured in a way that satisfies the broad population. Given that there are sub-groups that prefer new concepts and of subgroups that prefer static behaviors, there will always be competing forces. Analysis of this by van der Molen (1989, pp. 162-166) has shown that the changing nature of a social environment can lead from a static control oriented authoritarian environment to an innovative turn-over event. Eventually all will revert to a status quo adaptive environment. The upshot is that there is a natural *cyclic* environment in which we exist and that cyclic change is the reality of our lives—from cell to society, and that of course includes jazz too.

While the discussion that follows might well be deemed controversial, we consider this a first tentative step, an opening gambit, an invitation to others to follow up in later discussion.

## NOTES

1. David Stove (1985, 2000), ever the delicious philosophical provocateur, views the “Jazz Age” (the 1920s, when an overly mannered and somewhat effete form of jazz music became mainstream) as an attitude infusing an irrationalist Cole Porterian “anything goes” view of science; Popper, Kuhn and Feyerabend being the pre-eminent targets of his scathing disapprobation. Stove, we think, should rather have focused on the French avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s (they happened to coopt jazz—see Jackson 2003) which properly sewed the *intellectual* seeds for the vulgar postmodern relativism that Stove found so distasteful and whose constructivist and associated authoritarian tendencies have now come into full bloom.
2. There are now even dedicated conferences on the philosophy of jazz: <http://jpic.fm>.

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