

Alone/Together: Simulacral “A-presentation” in and into Practice-as-Research in Jazz

Steve Tromans
Surrey University

Mike Fletcher
Birmingham City University

This paper began life as a conference presentation interweaving live music and spoken word.¹ In what follows, we retain our original format of alternating (individually authored) discourse with video documentation of the performances given by Fletcher and me (on saxophone and piano, respectively). This is to evoke for the reader a sense of the liveness of the original event and, importantly, to retain the balance of spoken word to music-making that we deliberately factored into our presentation. In this respect, the paper should be thought of as a *performance* of artistic research in music, where the knowledge pertaining to that research inhabits and is expressed by both the writing and the music-making in equal measure.

We explore jazz practice with the well-known jazz standard *Alone Together* (composed by Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz in 1932), and enumerate the motives behind our research experiments with the piece. These practices and motives are discussed in relation to the Deleuzian concept of *simulacrum*, which we utilise in modelling jazz practitioners’ approaches to making music with the standard repertoire. We likewise employ a Deleuzian notion of “a-presentational” expression in order to draw attention to the multi-modal format of our paper, and to its evocation of a complex temporal relationship (founded on difference over similarity) between historical renditions of Swartz and Dietz’s piece and our own.

In composing our individual discourses, Fletcher and I took care not to influence each other’s writing; this was a deliberate decision, undertaken to install a genuine act of difference at the heart of our argument. There are, inevitably, similarities of subject, content, and expression: we are, after all, jazz musicians working often on the same

¹ The lecture-recital was part of *The Dark Precursor*, the International Conference on Deleuze and Artistic Research (DARE), hosted by the Orpheus Research Centre in Music, Ghent, Belgium, 9–11 November 2015.

scene, enquiring into our own music practices for the purposes of higher-level research. However, we would advise the reader not to cling to these resemblances in place of the far more important and productive differences that emerge in such deliberate juxtaposition of two authors' (and musicians') outputs. These differences are part-and-parcel of the Deleuzian aspect of our artistic research in music, as we explore in what follows.

1. Deleuze and the simulacral (Tromans)

In his contribution to Adrian Parr's *The Deleuze Dictionary*, philosopher Jonathan Roffe (2010, 253) neatly summarised Deleuze's simulacral critique of identity as "the affirmation of a world populated by differences-in-themselves which are not copies of any prior model." From the perspective of theorising what it is that jazz musicians do when they make new music with the standard repertoire, the usefulness of the Deleuzian concept of *simulacrum* lies in its potential to eschew the hierarchical chronology of, on the one hand, the "original" composition and, on the other, all ensuing performances of "the same." With no prior model to shackle any given rendition of a jazz standard to the predictability of a re-presentation, difference—internal, affirmative, and in-itself—becomes the "groundless ground" (the *sans fond*) that enables novelty in the event of music performance by dint of the singularity of its emergence, in and of time.

Indeed, in his own words, Deleuze (1990, 53) promoted the world of simulacra over the model-copy system specifically to "remove essences and to substitute events in their place"—to re-imagine events in terms of what he memorably described as "jets of singularities." From my own experience undertaking practice-as-research in jazz, I would argue that music-making in performance can (and should) be conceived, epistemologically-speaking, in such "explosive" terms. Far more than providing the mere objects of a musicological analysis, *post festum*, the working processes of those engaged in the act of musical creation in the event of performance offer an insight into what I am calling the "event of knowledge."

In this manner—setting up musical events over musical objects, modes of performance over those of re-presentation—I am drawing focus away from the obvious *effects* of music made in performance to better understand something of the precursory *causes*. By the "effects," I am referring to such criteria as the notes played and the gestures made—in other words, the whole panoply of audio and visual "data" that can be captured, by various documentary means, and presented and re-presented ad

infinitem “in place of” the differential acts of performance in the event itself. In resonance with Deleuze’s infamous attack on what he considered to be the superficiality of the phenomenological method—in which Deleuze (1994, 52) proclaimed “The whole of Phenomenology is an epiphenomenology”—I am concerned to delve deeper below the surface-effects of jazz performance; to evoke a sense of the “dark precursors” at work forever beyond the reach of the modes of the documentary.

However, despite all this talk regarding the epistemological weight of events of music-making in performance, my theorising here is in danger of remaining at the level of the discursive. As performance theorist Susan Melrose (2005) has argued, if we consider the “theoretical” to be solely articulable in “specific registers of writing” we ignore the possibility that expert performance itself “might actually already operate as mixed-mode and multi-dimensional, multi-participant theoretical practices.” Thus, for a musical-theoretical practice to adequately operate in mixed-mode, multi-dimensional, and multi-participant fashion, it is obvious that it must balance the equation of discourse and music-making, and encourage the interplay of different “voices,” both verbally and musically articulated. For this reason, the trajectory of this paper will move into the dimensions of the musical: to Mike Fletcher and his performance of *Alone Together*.

2. Solo performance (Fletcher)

Audio clip XX (01.14.01)

3. Jazz standard as dark precursor: part 1 (Fletcher)

To begin my discourse I would like to take up the critique of “hierarchical chronology” as touched on above. Tromans suggested that Deleuze’s concept of *simulacrum* is useful to us as practising jazz musicians as it allows us to move away from the idea of “original” in its primary and subsequent manifestations, and conceive of each performance as an “event.”

I am grateful that this has already been pointed out as it makes the following admission somewhat easier; I confess that I have neither heard the original recorded version of *Alone Together* nor seen the first published version of the sheet music. Rather, my knowledge of the piece is a composite of all the iterations of the piece in which I have participated as a performer and experienced as a listener. Nevertheless, I would argue that rather than evidencing a lack of rigour on my part, this fact is actually indicative of the way an expert jazz musician engages with standard repertoire and

creates no impediment to my ability to expertly interpret the piece as a performer—to which I hope the audio examples that accompany this text will attest.

However, should it be the case that we are not performing a version of the “original” *Alone Together*, how should we understand the event that took place?

Consider the way that my solo performance unfolded. I—the performer—played a piece that, although largely improvised, was based on the jazz standard. The other people in attendance—the listeners—witnessed what I played. We were all participants in the unfolding music, but as I have already mentioned, the “original” was not—and, of course, can never be—explicitly evidenced during this process. Yet I have clearly and confidently asserted that the music I played was based on the standard and thus it should be understood as what I shall call—in reference to Tromans’s earlier “event of knowledge”—an “*Alone Together* event.” How can this be so?

At this point I turn to Deleuze and his concept of the dark precursor. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1994, 119) wrote, “Given two heterogeneous series, two series of differences, the [dark] precursor plays the part of the differentiator of these differences. In this manner, by virtue of its own power, it puts them into immediate relation to one another.”

In the present case we are examining the way that participants in this “*Alone Together* event”—be they performer or listener—might contextualise the ostensibly unique musical occurrence as it relates to previously experienced renditions of the piece. In this respect, I propose a model based on the above in which *Alone Together* occupies the role of dark precursor, and each participant’s unique cumulative experience of the piece represents one heterogeneous series—an “*Alone Together* series.” The conceptualising of Deleuze’s words in this way affords us a way of mediating between the differences that are revealed within the multiple heterogeneous series while simultaneously accounting for the identity of the composition.

In reference to identity, Deleuze (1994, 119) observed, “There is no doubt that *there is* an identity belonging to the precursor, and a resemblance between the series which it causes to communicate,” but that these identities and resemblances are akin to “an illusion” or “an effect”: “a functional product, an external result” (ibid., 120).

Taking these words into account, I propose that an understanding of an “*Alone Together* event” might better be articulated as the communication of the multiple heterogeneous “*Alone Together* series” that are brought to bear on the music by the

participants present. Thus, it is only during the performance that the identity of the piece is revealed.

For me as a jazz musician, this concept offers an extremely illuminating way of conceptualising the way I engage with standard material. As our performances have demonstrated, it is possible for a “standard event” – i.e. a performance of a “jazz standard” to occur independently of—or at least without direct reference to—the “original.” The privileging of difference over identity serves, in this case, to liberate the musician from the notion of “hierarchical chronology,” and thus freely engage in the “event.”

To sum up, once we turn our attention to difference *in itself*, the external—whether conceived in terms of identity, resemblance, *or* difference—is of secondary importance compared with the fundamental differences operating *internally* to the thing itself. Although—as Deleuze himself advised—the identity of the dark precursor will always remain indeterminate, perceiving the jazz standard as a dark precursor ensures that engagement with standard repertoire remains a relevant and active part of contemporary jazz practice.

4. Solo performance (Tromans)

Audio clip 01.14.02.

5. *Alone Together* and the Deleuzian simulacral (Tromans)

As highlighted at the head of this chapter, we are deliberately interposing our two different approaches to jazz-standard practice (both discursively and in the making of music), with the intention of utilising that difference productively by means of an experiment in artistic research. That experiment is concerned with foregrounding difference as a positive, creative force, above and beyond its subjugation to the same and the identical that have long taken precedence in our understandings of things in the world—things including, in the case of our research, pieces from the canonical repertoire in jazz.

Take *Alone Together*: there *was*, of course, a song called *Alone Together*, co-composed by Schwartz and Dietz, which debuted in the (not particularly successful) show *Flying Colors* in 1932. Later that same year, Leo Reisman reached the top ten in the US charts with *Alone Together*. Several years later, in 1939, and again in 1941, the clarinettist Artie Shaw made studio recordings of *Alone Together*; while in 1950, and

then in 1955, the trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis cut their respective studio sessions—again, of a tune called *Alone Together*. In 1977, Sun Ra gave the piece the Arkestral treatment on the album *Mayan Temples*, and in 1997, Anthony Braxton and Ran Blake bounced their way through a particularly playful rendition on *A Memory of Vienna*. There are, of course many other recordings worthy of note (Ray Charles and Betty Carter in 1961, Paul Desmond with Jim Hall in 1963, Mal Waldron in 1988, Brad Mehldau in 2000), not to mention the countless performances undocumented. For each of these releases I have highlighted, the music is credited as originating from the aforementioned Dietz and Schwartz, and, given the chronology I have just sketched out, this of course makes perfect, rational sense.²

Such a chronology wends its linear temporal way through the last eight decades of jazz practice right up until 10 November 2015 (the date of our original conference presentation), and, accordingly, would include the performances given by Fletcher and myself as part of that long lineage. However, if instead we focus our attentions on the *differences* that inhere in each of these music performances—differences not conceived in negative relation to points of divergence from an ideal, original source, but in their own creative, productive terms—then there is a marked change of temporal/hierarchical perspective. Not least is the way we approach the presentation of music-making in performance with jazz standards. I say “presentation” out of (academic) habit, but, following Deleuze into a simulacral world of differences upon (and in relation to) other differences, I should rather stress the *a*-presentational heterogeneity of such music-making. In other words, there is not so much something *presented*, in jazz-standard practice, as there is a complex temporal process *enabled*, wherein differences internal to each and every performance of a given standard enter into an event-heightened condition of resonance with one another. For Deleuze (1994, 278), such resonance enables communication via “systems of simulacra [that] *affirm* divergence and decentring” (my emphasis). And that “affirmation,” here, is key to understanding the practical-theoretical usefulness of Deleuze’s philosophy of difference, operating through systems of simulacra, as opposed to the binary “either-or” of model and copy.

The term “simulacrum” (and its plural “simulacra”) is from Plato, for whom it was the most degraded kind of copy, removed from the essential aspect of the model by

² The information for this chronology of recordings of *Alone Together* comes from Ted Gioia’s *The Jazz Standards: A Guide to the Repertoire* (2012, 18–20).

two whole degrees. The hierarchy ran thus: first and foremost, the model; second, the copy; third, the copy of the copy—the simulacrum. Deleuze, however, *reversed* Platonism on this point, writing how: “The simulacrum is not a degraded copy. It harbours a *positive* power which denies the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction” (Deleuze 1990, 262, my emphasis). Affirming the creative differences operating at the heart of all instantiations of *Alone Together* allows us to move beyond the linear-temporal limitations of assuming a 1932 genesis (or 1939, 1941, 1950, etc.) for all that unfolds on the stage of its performance and, instead, approach instances of its actual expression on their own “differential” terms.³ In other words, as events in their own right, albeit in productive resonance with all such events across a wide temporal field, construed in non-linear and complex relation. In such a way, far from being the degraded copies of a long-past original essence, all new performances of *Alone Together* are enabled to creatively “interfere” with our (ongoing) understandings of what constitutes a performance of *Alone Together*.

6. Jazz standard as dark precursor: part 2 (Fletcher)

I previously postulated that we might interpret the “heterogeneous series,” as conceived by Deleuze, in terms of our individual experience of a given jazz standard. I would now like to revisit this concept to examine more closely how the way that we musicians experience the difference in “standard events” is implicated in jazz performance practice.

Tromans briefly outlined some of the recorded examples of *Alone Together* that—at least in terms of the order in which the events first occurred—form a chronological series: the discographical canon of *Alone Together*.

However, in reality, we—the performers—are highly unlikely to have engaged with these events in such strict chronological order, and, as I alluded to in my first discourse, they are equally unlikely to have experienced each one of them. Furthermore, it is probable that we will have experienced more “*Alone Together* events” than simply those on record. I, for one, have played this piece on countless occasions as well as having practised it alone in my studio. As a result, I have been privy to manifestations that make my particular “event series” unique—as is the case for each one of us.

³ I am using the Deleuzian term “differential” here to indicate what Paul Patton (1994, xi–xii) refers to as the creative act of making or becoming different.

Moreover, as well as the differences between the series themselves, the internal difference of a singular event is perceived by the musician in relation to the differences already experienced via their “event series.” In his examination of the act of artistic expression, Dewey (1934, 63) observed that “things retained from past experience . . . become coefficients in new adventures.”

Every time we engage with a new “*Alone Together* event,” we contextualise its internal difference in terms of the collated events we have previously witnessed.

Therefore, should Tromans and I listen to an erstwhile unexperienced recording of *Alone Together* together, we each experience its difference differently.

What is common to us all, however, and what allows us to make sense of these many differences, is the differentiator, the dark precursor—in this case *Alone Together*. As Deleuze (1994, 119) explained, “by virtue of its own power, it [the differentiator] puts them [the series] into immediate relation with one another.” I would argue that, in the case of a musical performance, the differentiator actually operates on two levels simultaneously. It serves to differentiate, first, between series and, second, between the unfolding event in relation to previous events.

When I played a solo version, I used music to make discursive the way I related the current performance with my own “event series.” Of course, in that instance, I was the only one in the room with the means to musically participate. In essence, I was playing “alone.”

When we play “together,” things get much more interesting. When two or more jazz musicians engage in a “standard event,” we then have the situation whereby each individual musician not only engages in the same process of relating the real-time event to those previously experienced but also employs his or her expert musicianship in the spontaneous dialogue between musical voices. Inevitably, this phenomenon is not best served by language, so, to finish our a-presentation, we will leave you with a final duo performance.

7. Duo performance

Audio clip 01.14.03

References

- Deleuze, Gilles. 1990. *The Logic of Sense*. Translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. Edited by Constantin V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press. First published 1969 as *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit).
- . 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press. First published 1968 as *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France).
- Dewey, John. 1934. *Art as Experience*. New York: Milton, Balch.
- Gioia, Ted. 2012. *The Jazz Standards: A Guide to the Repertoire*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Melrose, Susan. 2005. “Words Fail Me: Dancing with the Other’s Familiar.” Keynote address at *Towards Tomorrow?*, Centre for Performance Research, Aberystwyth, 6–10 April 2005. Accessed 19 June 2017. <http://www.sfmelrose.org.uk/wordsfailme/>.
- Patton, Paul. 1994. Translator’s preface to Deleuze 1994, xi–xiii.
- Roffe, Jonathan. 2010. “Simulacrum.” In *The Deleuze Dictionary*, edited by Adrian Parr, rev. ed., 253–54. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.