

Lars Brinck

Bringing drumsticks to funerals

Jamming as learning

Abstract

Dette etnografisk inspirerede feltstudie anvender social praksisteori i en analyse af New Orleans jazz og funk musikeres jam som læring. Gennem analyse af deltagerobservation og kvalitative interviews argumenteres for at musikernes deltagelse i kollektivt improviserede musikalske praksisser som jam sessions karakteriseres ved en iterativ opdagelse af nye handlemuligheder i forfølgelsen af et 'fælles tredje', den gode musik.

Endvidere argumenteres for, at musikernes konstant ændrede deltagelse i jam praksis og udviklingen af selve den improviserede musik ikke kan adskilles og er indbyrdes afhængige.

At lære at jamme argumenteres at være situeret i jamming som social praksis, hvorved læring analyseret som improviseret udvikling af praksis *per se* fremstår prototypisk.

Afsluttende diskuteres studiets konklusioner og disses potentiale for udviklingen af undervisningsmiljøer for rytmisk musik.

Keywords: jam, læring, social praksisteori, legitim perifer deltagelse, New Orleans

Introduction

An introduction to the study's offspring is followed by an account of the cultural and social

context of the study's empirical matter. A review of previous research in the field of study precedes a presentation of the applied theoretical framework and methodological approach. The empirical analysis through the lense of key concepts of social practice theory is followed by concluding remarks regarding potential implications for music education environments.

The author's years of music academy teaching gradually brought forward the notion about shortcomings of didactically constructed methods for teaching musicians how to jam. Decontextualized teaching methods seemed quite suitable for developing certain musical skills and knowledge but also clearly seemed to have limited usability when it came to learning how to spontaneously communicate in collectively improvised musical settings. When facilitating the development of students' jamming skills within for instance funk and jazz was detected increasingly significant differences between musicians being familiar with jamming outside school and students more used to playing prearranged music such as note-to-note cover versions or even strictly arranged original rock compositions.

An almost generic open approach to participating in improvised musical practice seemed particularly difficult to pass on through regular

classroom teaching. This also was the case regarding the musicians' ability to navigate in the jams session's seemingly 'chaos' of iterative musical contributions when trying to develop creative musical parts in the course of the music playing 'all over the place'. Seemingly well argued didactic ideas of playing examples of nicely constructed grooves, illustrating systematics of filling gaps, learning to listen for different rhythmical subdivisions etc. appeared to be inconclusive pedagogical approaches in developing the musicians towards becoming better jammers. A culture of basic spontaneous creative musical participation seemed to be in conflict with a 'schoolish' way of learning specific skills at specific times in specific places.

These observations gave rise to the author's theoretical speculations concerning whether participating in jam practice was a prerequisite for learning how to jam and consequently whether a social perspective on learning would contribute to the field of developing musicians' jam skills. For preliminary sketches of this theoretical discussion, see Brinck, 2010 (in Danish).

As early as 1994 I went to New Orleans for the first time. I loved the music of Neville Brothers, The Meters, Professor Longhair, Dr. John and others from 'The Big Easy', and I wanted first hand to encounter the musical culture from which such great music emerged. This led to an increasing interest in New Orleans music culture, gradually intensifying and qualifying the scientific aspects of my studies. Consequently the present study is based on material from almost twenty years of musicianship, research and teaching inspired and informed by living in New Orleans for five periods of three to six weeks each between 1994 and 2012. But why New Orleans? The following account attempts to draw an – admittedly thin but hopefully enlightening – picture of a culture, where diverse improvised musical

practices intertwine as part of people's everyday lives.

New Orleans as empirical context

The city of New Orleans is a unique place when it comes to communities of improvised popular music and where a social practice of jamming prevails. Very few places in the world hold such strong cultural tradition for making music together in unplanned manners and settings (Shapiro & Hentoff, 1955; Rummel, 1994; Ritz et al., 2000; Brinck, 2007; Sakakeeny, 2008, 2010). 2nd line parades with hundreds of people dancing, playing and singing. Funeral processions including a band with a herd of followers, many of which are ready to jump in, to play along, to stomp and clap. Numerous bars and other venues where musicians often are invited onto the stage by the band playing. Improvising, inventing, changing the music in a generally welcoming, open and fluctuating atmosphere of sharing the good times. If you wanna join the music: Do it! That's New Orleans. That's The Big Easy.

Saturday mornings are typical funeral hours and every Sunday for generations the social aid and pleasure clubs have been hosting fund raising parades. And during February's Mardi Gras (the annual carnival) there are several parades daily. The following is a brief personal account of the atmosphere from Joe's Cozy Corner¹, a long narrow bar sizing 4 by 20 meters, formerly situated in the Tremé area of New Orleans, on the corner of Ursulines Ave and North Robertson Street:

1 Joe's Cozy Corner is presently closed. The owner got into trouble with the police after a shootout outside the bar, and decrease in economical activity in the Tremé area after hurricane Katrina has made it difficult to continue doing bar business at that location.

Box 1

'Four musicians on the tiny stage at the back of the room. Nothing has been agreed on as far as repertoire goes. What should we play? Who starts out? How are we gonna stop? Who wants to join? It's all depending on how things develop. Time will show.

The drummer starts a basic groove, he sets up a beat. The bass player listens and chooses a bass figure that he feels fits. The bass figure changes a little, is adjusted. There it is. A circular musical structural unity. Bassline and drum figure are now 'in the pocket' as the musicians say.

The guitarist experiments with a little funky pentatonic figure. Various ideas are being tested, felt, heard. Finally an idea is allowed to linger, to stay, to be strong enough to be repeated over and over, with only small variations. Now they are three 'in the pocket', grooving.

Something's still missing for the groove to be complete. The pianist hits his Fender Rhodes electric piano.

– Could it be this? Eh, maybe not, maybe this is it?

OK, now there seems to be a dynamic and balance that feels right for everybody.'

They sound great together and as some would say, the music "feels good enough not to mess with".

*(A night at Joe's Cozy Corner.
Author's field notes, 1997)*

The four musicians are jamming. They play together 'from scratch' without a fixed form or prerequisite melodic/harmonic frame work. The music is created spontaneously and collectively based on common cultural conventions and individual skills and experiences. Within groove based musical styles such as funk, jamming typically means that all the music is composed and created 'in the moment' by the participating musicians. Typically based on a strong drumbeat and a repetitious bass line. The number and character of instruments can vary greatly. The key characteristics being that the musical framework and structure is

built from the ground and dynamically developed during playing. Pivotal characteristics include strongly circular structures, where the musical material is repeated within 2, 4 or 8 bars, constructed by short recurring rhythmic figures weaving in and out of each other in complex rhythmic networks of tension and release (Danielsen, 2006; Brinck, 2012).

New Orleans music culture holds a vast number of traditions for creating music 'in the moment'. In the perspective of the present study the different types of improvised musical practices represent a continuum ranging from totally open jam sessions starting from scratch (Box 1) to jam sessions around standard New Orleans repertoire, the basic musical framework being predetermined by the structure of a song. In all cases the improvised approach prevails. You never know where the music takes you.

The field of study

Becoming a popular music and jazz musician has been under scrutiny in a number of sociological and anthropological studies contributing with valuable insight to how improvising musicians work, how they reflect on developing their performative skills and identities, and how different practices constitute lengthy learning processes (Martin, 2006; Aldredge, 2006; Fornäs et al., 1995; Berliner, 1994; Cohen, 1991; Becker, 1982; Bennett, 1980).

Analyzing musical communication in the improvising band Simonton (1988) in a cognitive view discloses relations between conscious and non-conscious processes and argues for analytic versus intuitive creativity. Monson's (1996) detailed musicological mapping of the collective aspects of jazz improvisation and interaction has brought important insight to communicational phenomenas of jazz practice, especially regarding the band's rhythm section. In a communications study among groove musicians Brinck (2012) develops a theory on jamming musicians' spontaneous

musical communication described as spiral processes involving four pivotal skills, namely openness to change, prioritized focusing, categorical reflection and artistic realization.

Within educational studies of popular musicians' learning processes Saar (1999) points to how young musicians seem to structure their perception of their own learning processes by means of three dimensions of awareness (contextual, evaluative and temporal) within an overall pedagogical/artistic dichotomy. Studies by Söderman (2007, 2001, 2000) and Söderman & Folkestad (2004) compare in social constructionist and discourse analytical perspective how native and immigrant Swedish hiphop musicians develop musical identities through their creative doings with primarily lyrics. Green (2008, 2006, 2001, 1996) has in her extensive research shown how popular musicians work and reflect on their developing artistic practices and finds evidence for extensive use of peer resources, live as well as from recorded material. Green discusses this insight's implications for music teaching and suggests among other things increasing peer-to-peer activities in school settings.

It seems appropriate to note that creativity research in general also has contributed with important knowledge to the field of improvised music. Sawyer (1992) analyzes jazz performance through the lense of improvisational creativity pointing at the 'relative importance of intuitive and analytic creativity within different domains' based on cognitive creativity research by a.o. Simonton and Martindale. This scientific interest is further elaborated in Sawyer's study from 2006 on group creativity, including a band and a theater group. Seddon (2005) studies modes of communication adopted by jazz students and argues for recognizing 'empathetic creativity' in the assessment of group performance. Generally, though, scientific studies of collective creative processes within artistic practice are scarce (Zeng et al., 2011).

Learning studies within music applying the theoretical framework of social practice theory also appear to be rare. However, analysis of rituals around the religious Santeria music in Cuba (Kristensen, 2000, 2004) through the lense of social practice theory provides an in-depth understanding of the learning processes entailed in passing on Santeria culture. In a subsequent critical-psychological study Kristensen applies this perspective to Danish primary school context (2009). In a psychological study by Nielsen (2006) music academy students' learning is analyzed to be situated in communities of practice constituting a diversity of participant trajectories. The study shows how being enrolled also involves learning more or less implicit dichotomies of 'talent' versus 'hard work', 'concert pianist' versus 'party musician' and 'musician' versus 'music teacher'.

Conclusively, the scientific body of work around the present study reveals considerable interest in jazz, popular music and hiphop musicians' lives and developing identities with a primarily individual understanding of artistic work processes. The collective characteristics of creative popular music making have been shown limited scientific interest, and only few studies analyze learning to be socially situated and deeply contextually embedded.

Methodology

The present study was performed during a period of 15 years as an ethnographical field study using qualitative research methods. Data was collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews (Kvale, 1997; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008) with New Orleans drummers and through participant observation in social practices of New Orleanians with a specific focus on the music culture and its implications for living in New Orleans (Strathern, 1990; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Hastrup, 2003). The study's emphasis on analyzing participant observation as well as the interviewees'

oral accounts through the lense of the cultural context for their utterances alignes with more recent ethnographic research practice.

The study applies a critical social constructivist view in recognizing this written account for a social phenomenon being the researcher's interpretations of what people say and what they do (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000) and where '*social and cultural phenomena (...) always are embedded in a larger historical context and it's processional relations*' (Nielsen, 2010; auth.transl.). Consequently, a methodological assertion throughout the study has been that 'thick' descriptions of practice's cultural context are needed to fully grasp nuances of cultural meanings and connotations (Geertz, 1973). Consequently the presentation of analytic findings aims to provide a holistic picture of the social and cultural conditions under which improvised musical practices are part of everyday life in New Orleans.

As argued by Gupta & Ferguson (1997) '*ethnography's strength has always been its explicit and well-developed sense of location*' and Hastrup in a similar line of thought emphasizes how field work is '*a method providing insight into the conditions that privileges particular historic traces, because people act in certain – in their world – natural ways*' (2010: 56; auth.transl.). This last point to emphasize that doing a field work based study with focus on the historical fact that jamming for many New Orleanians is a common practice embedded in everyday life potentially will produce new scientific knowledge about how other people in other settings (such as schools) may learn to jam. This approach in other words aims to minimize an initial analytical schooling perspective on learning but on the other hand emphasizing and examining diverse meanings of cultural and social practices as conditions for learning (to jam).

The interviews were performed around topics of initial interest to the project with no specific chronological or hierarchical order to

the posed questions, thus allowing points of interest and association on the part of both the interviewee and the interviewer to co-produce data (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2010; Bryman, 2004). Interviews were transcribed and participant observation was documented through video recordings and/or reflected in diaries and field notes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Musicians' names were changed for anonymity.

The theoretical analysis of the material was performed through a proces of noting situations and utterings of interest to the study at hand, in this case indicators catching the author's informed attention concerning learning as a social phenomenon embedded in the practice of jamming. Indicators were then 'sifted' through processes of theorizing governed by the selected four core concepts of social learning theory, namely legitimate peripheral participation, direction, difference and access (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 2011, 2012).

The empirical and analytical process had an apparently 'double-sided' approach. One being an ethnographically inclined interest in understanding and describing jamming as socially and historically embedded practice, the other being the theoretical analysis of jam practice as prototypical context for learning as situated. Findings and discussions are presented in ways to provide the reader with a deep sense of this scientific dialogue between ethnological accounts and theoretical analysis.

Theoretical / analytical approach

The study's theoretical framework is that of social practice theory, where learning is perceived as situated in communities of practice, and as a social rather than cognitive and individual phenomenon (Lave & Wenger, 2003, 1991; Lave, 2012, 2011, 1996, 1988). The comprehensive analytical theory was developed and described by Lave & Wenger (1991) as a '*critique of conventional theories on learning, doing and social change*' (Lave, 2008:283). Through anthropological studies

on apprenticeship cultures and everyday math practices the theoretical framework attempted *'breaking down distinctions between learning and doing, between social identity and knowledge, between education and occupation, between form and content'* (Lave, 1996:143) challenging predominant dualist thinkings of learning, schooling, etc.

Learning in this theoretical perspective is perceived to be development and constitution of shared knowledge and understanding as it occurs through participation in diverse and changing communities of practice – intended or not; structured or not; in school and everyday life; in families and bands. Learning is perceived to be *per se* embedded in social practice, and Lave & Wenger state that *'participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning'* (Lave & Wenger, 1991:98) as *'Agent, activity and the world mutually constitute each other'* (ibid:33).

The theory's problematizing the notion of schooling (and teachers) as a prerequisite for learning is stressed by the analytical observation that *'opportunities for learning are (...) given structure by work practices instead of by strongly asymmetrical master-apprentice relations'* (Lave & Wenger, 1991:91) and that observations *'suggests (...) that engaging in practice, rather than being [teaching's] object, may well be a condition for the effectiveness of learning'* (ibid:93). Practice becomes a pivotal condition for learning and practice even structures opportunities for learning.

For the present study the theoretical perspective of learning as socially embedded aligns with the observations as indicated in the introduction, where decontextualized skill teaching strategies seemed inadequate in passing on crucial knowledge and experience about jamming. A strongly contextualized notion of jamming as a social (work) practice and even as a prototypically (ever) changing practice seemed promising for dissolving the prob-

lematic of 'teaching and learning to jam'. This theoretical argument will be further elaborated through the empirical and analytical accounts to follow.

Empirical analysis

Interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed through the lense of pivotal concepts of the theory of learning as situated in communities of practice; 'legitimate peripheral participation', 'directedness', 'difference and self-evaluation' and 'access and transparency'. The analytical work is arched by the analytical concept of 'common third'.

Legitimate peripheral participation

Box 2

'Another Sunday afternoon 2nd line parade. The music is grooving, the horns are squeeling, the tambourines are rattling. It's 42 degrees Celcius on Martin Luther King Boulevard in uptown New Orleans and people are having a good time around the slowly moving parade.

In front the dressed up dancing members of the hosting Social Aid and Pleasure Club. Then the band, young and old together. And behind and following on the flanks: the 2nd liners, the quintessential followers dancing, clapping, playing their tambourines and empty beer cans.

It's all about community, party, having a good time with your peers.'

(auth.field notes, 2000)

Box 3

It's Mardi Gras, the annual two week carnival of New Orleans.

Two Afroamerican kids of about three and four are waiting on the sidewalk of St. Charles Avenue. They're anxious and uneasy. They stand beside hundreds of other spectators but close to their mother. Waiting for the parade floats and marching bands to pass. They each hold a little plastic horn, one resembling a trumpet, the other a trombone.

They march back and forth on the sidewalk, shouting and singing into their 'horns'. In their minds they are already parading, they are members of a marching band, they are New Orleanians 'making the music feel good'. Their mother smiles.

*(account of video recording,
Feb. 21, 2012)*

A pivotal analytical concept within the social practice theory of learning is 'legitimate peripheral participation', where *'learning is not merely a condition for membership, but it is itself an evolving form of membership'* (Lave & Wenger, 1991:53). Learning in this perspective involves the whole person and the person's development of identity in the world in relation to specific activities. *'Activities, tasks, functions, and understandings do not exist in isolation; they are part of broader systems of relations in which they have meaning'* (ibid.:53). This implies a non-dualistic understanding of coherence between persons, activities, artifacts and the historically constructed relations between these. And not just as linear processes but as dynamic developments of multiple practices. *'As a way in which the related conflicts are played out in practice, legitimate peripheral participation is far more than just a process of learning on the part of the newcomers. It is a reciprocal relation between persons and practice'* (ibid.:116). Learning is viewed to be thoroughly and reciprocally relational and the re-

sult of multiple relations *'through which persons define themselves in practice'* (ibid.:54)

Legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice is characterized by *'growing involvement, legitimacy'* (ibid.:37) and learning in this sense is about moving *'from peripheral to full participation'* (ibid.:36; Wenger, 1999), although this apparently unidirectional movement from peripheral to full participation has been theoretically challenged by Lave herself (Lave, 2008, 2011). Legitimate peripheral participation involves the possibility to participate from different positions at different moments and becomes a qualified choice of the individual person, a choice to participate in ways as to qualify and intensify participation in communities of practice. Lave (1996:148) underlines this position by stating that *'learning [is] a matter of changing participation in ongoing, changing social practice'*.

The 2nd liners (Box 2) are free to jump in and out of the musical practice whenever they feel like it. The music with its rough aesthetics is open for diverse musical contributions: clapping, singing, shouting, beer can tapping, etc. And the music and the 'street party' goes on (almost) regardless of who participates and how. This enables legitimate peripheral participation and thus learning through the development of practice.

The two kids (Box 3) are indeed legitimate peripheral participators to the soon-to-pass parade bands. The kids seemingly imagine themselves being in the marching band, and this could be analyzed as 'growing involvement' towards becoming marching band musicians. In the perspective of social practice theory they *'as peripheral participants, can develop a view of what the whole enterprise is about, and what there is to be learned'* (Lave & Wenger, 1991:93). Concerning participants' incentive of learning Lave states that *'motivation seems to inhere in the movement towards full participation in community practice in which apprentices also had a future and were devel-*

oping identities' (Lave, 2008:287). Growing legitimacy is generated by the motivation to become part of a future practice in order to gain identity within this kind of practice.

The kids' mother calmly enjoys their enthusiasm, seemingly as a natural part of everyday life. She probably bought the plastic horns for them to enjoy the parade more, but she doesn't encourage them to play, to march. She leaves them alone. The mother's mundane reaction leaves the impression that she supports their simulations of 'marching in a band' as one of many situated experiences towards recognizing being part of musical practice as part of everyday life in New Orleans. Her notion of their developing identity through legitimate peripheral participation conquers with social practice theoretical analysis of learning, as '*Legitimate participation comes diffusely through membership in family and community*' (Lave & Wenger, 1991:93).

The two different contexts illustrate opportunities for participating in different ways and from different positions. Positions change during the course of practice as the actual activity offers many ways of participation as legitimate peripheral. New actions opportunities iteratively arise through social practice constituting potentials for development and learning.

Directedness

Box 4

– Who do you hook up with in the band when you jam?

– *'You know, I play off of what the keyboard player is playing or what the guitar player is playing' [sings funky guitar rhythm] 'you know, playing some stuff like that I might jump on that or whatever, you know. I have my options to switch and jump to play with anybody in the band, but still keep the song mode, the groove, you know.'*

Once the groove has been established in the song, then it's up to you to be tasteful on what you choose to, you know, to make stick out on a song, you know what I'm sayin'?

(Interview, Jason, 2000:3)

Box 5

– What do you consider important in building a groove?

– (...) *'My thing is playing with a group of people, playing with a band. So the first thing I listen for is what the music is gonna be like' (...). 'I don't feel like practicing and all that. But what I can do is play music with a group of people. You know, you can put me in front of a group of any kind of people, any kind of music, and I'll make it feel good. You know, I'll try at least, and that's what my drumming thing is: Just trying to make the music feel good'. (...)*

[talking about playing for different audiences in different places]

– *'If you want the people come sit down in their chairs to look at you or if you want them to get up and dance, and you have to play accordingly, you know, to your crowd, to the people that you're playing. You have to play according to the crowd that your playing for.(...) but the main thing is to establish the groove. To keep it going, you know, to keep it moving. To keep it bouncing, to keep it moving or whatever the music calls for.'*

(Interview, Raymond, 2000:1)

Interviewing Raymond and Jason on their strategies for jamming reveals a clear sense of directedness in their participation. Jason's reflection shows that he experiences a participatory flexibility allowing him to participate from different positions depending on what he sees fit. He consciously shifts between 'keeping the song mode' in establishing the groove and 'sticking out' (Box 4). Participation can be analyzed to pendulate between more or less peripheral positions in the band providing a diversity of action possibilities.

In critical psychological research based on Lave & Wenger's pivotal work, Dreier (1999:85) argues that legitimate peripheral participants need taking a stance in order to '*orientate themselves and give direction to their participation*' (auth.transl.). Dreier also describes an '*inner directedness in learning towards expanding the future opportunities for participation*' (auth.transl.). In a similar line of thought Kristensen (2009) argues how subjectification processes when becoming rumba and Santeria musicians in Cuba can be analyzed as directedness towards meaningful life. She states that "*only in (...) e.g. a rumba group, which plays at 'fiestas', can the perceived experience of playing good music give our actions direction and capacity to act in social life*" (2009: 147, auth.transl.).

The 'common third'

At this time it seems appropriate to introduce the notion of the 'common third' as developed within social pedagogical practice by Lihme (1988) and further unfolded in scientific analysis of marginalized youths in Danish immigrant street gang cultures (Mørck, 2006). Through the lense of social practice theory Mørck argues for the fact that the participants' growing participation in practice is directed not towards individual development or increased cognitive or other individual capacity – neither for themselves or any other – but towards a third entity, a 'common third'. In the case of

jamming the musicians' growing participation is analyzed as directed towards 'trying to make the music feel good' (Box 5), towards 'keeping [the groove] moving' (Box 4). Legitimate peripheral participation is directed towards the collective development of a strong groove, through a collective provision of still new action possibilities in developing and qualifying the common musical practice.

Dreier argues that these individual orientations towards new possibilities of action need not be at the expense of other participants but rather seem to '*promote everybody's [action] possibilities*' (Dreier, 1999:80). The two drummers (Box 4,5) clearly do not have their focus on personal gain but rather on what actions are adequate and required for the community of practice in pursuing the 'common third', the common goal of 'making the music feel good'.

The drummers' statements leave the impression that a conscious orientation towards 'making the music feel good' and towards 'making them dance' provides superior direction to their changing participation in a changing practice. Their attention is directed towards the 'common third', seemingly agreeing on fundamental cultural and historical values of the feel and sound of the music and – at the same time – how the groove can perpetually evolve and change.

Difference and self-evaluation

Box 6

– What do you consider important when building a groove?

– *'If I create a part for a groove, I'm gonna think about what I want the bass player to play first, to match what I'm playing. (...) And if we don't connect, well, then I'll turn it around and instead (...) groove on, what the bass player is playing.*

(Interview, Jason, 2000)

As earlier analyzed jam practices *per se* allows different ways of participation and it seems as if changing participation is based on experienced differences. As Lave argues '*we learn from differences also in relation to our own experiences*' (Lave, 2012).

Moments of learning are embedded in practice itself as 'experience of differences': When Jason senses that his beat doesn't 'connect' with the bass player's bass line, he 'turns it around' and changes his beat to fit. Jason evaluates his participation according to the actual context and is prepared to instantly adjust his position. Lave also observes this '*self-correction technique*' with the Liberian tailor apprentices and explains how '*immediate problems caused by mistakes (...) presented themselves immediately and transparently*' (Lave, 2011:78).

Immediate self-correction seems to have exceptionally good conditions in the short term spirality of groove based music, providing many opportunities of 'experienced differences' with relatively high frequency, and for two reasons: First of all the culture of improvisation and spontaneous communication generally comprises experiments and variations informing the jamming musician's participation about what 'works' and what 'doesn't work'. Secondly, funk music – given its short time recurrence of musical structures – provides continuous and multiple opportunities for recognizing needs for correction and subsequently for producing adjustments or new ideas. The importance of these evident opportunities for self-correction are supported by the theoretical notion, that '*As opportunities for understanding how well or how poorly one's efforts contribute are evident in practice, legitimate participation of a peripheral kind provides an immediate ground for self-evaluation*' (Lave & Wenger, 1991:111). The sociocultural connotations of jam practice make room for mistakes and even invites experiments as part of the collective improvisation. Jam practice

thus constitutes a perpetually improvised and changing practice naturally containing the exchange of critique during the development of practice. An important point here is that making 'mistakes' doesn't question legitimacy to one's participation.

How does the individual musician know if what he/she's playing works or not? How can he/she assess the difference between 'a good, strong beat' or 'one that needs improving'. Lave mentions the importance of '*communication of masterful standards*' (Lave, 2011:78) in order for newcomers to know the difference² and explains how in the tailor shops '*feedback to apprentices was available in different relations*' (ibid.:79).³

In the music culture of New Orleans the young musicians are invited to play and practice with the more experienced (note also the description of the open nature of the music and of the social structures around it). This provides for great opportunities for experiencing and communicating 'masterful standards': You can't help knowing what a good groove sounds and feels like if you've ever walked down the streets of New Orleans during Mardi Gras or on a Sunday afternoon parade down Martin Luther King Boulevard.

The point here seems to be that masterful standards are communicated through newcomers' co-participation in practice with more skilled musicians, more experienced jammers. Historically embedded moments of experienced differences lead to changes of ongoing practice producing sentiments of learning for potentially all participants.

2 Lave also mentions the fact that the tailors' customers clearly knew about differences in quality of garments, prices reflecting this. '*Sales provided a general evaluation*' (Lave, 2011:79)

3 Lave mentions how the customer relations played a significant role in the apprentice's learning to know the difference between different qualities of garment. The price that customers were willing to pay was for instance a clear indicator of quality.

Access and transparency

Box 7

The casket of the deceased is carried from the funeral home to the cemetery by the mourning crowd accompanied by a band playing a slow solemn hymn like 'Nearer, My God, to Thee'. When the lid of the stone grave has been closed the band stops the music for a short while.

Then the bass drum rips the silence apart by initiating the most funky, dancy beat you'll ever hear. The whole band breaks into a joyful, funky groove, and the crowd starts dancing and playing along on their tambourines, hand clapping, jamming. And umbrellas brought along for shading off the burning sun are twirled around.

Now it's time to remember and celebrate the good life of the deceased and to focus on the time to come, the future lives of those left behind.

(author's field notes, 2012)

Box 8

Author: – How do you remember participating (...) and playing at funerals?

Wesley: – *We went to funerals every Saturday morning (...) we really just showed up and we play (...) and I've been doing that all my life (...) every Saturday morning. It was kind of sad in the morning but we do.*

(...)

Thomas: – *'Yeah, I used to take my drumsticks with me. You never know when somebody would be missing and I just liked to be around music. (...) They'd just take us out and they'd tell us (...) "get in there and see people play their music". (...) And the musicians in the brass band would say "come on, learn this and learn that" and that's how I guess it's passed on'.*

(Interview with Wesley and Thomas, 2012:463ff)

For legitimate peripheral participation to be diverse and flexible and at the same time directional Lave & Wenger stress '*The importance of access to the learning potential of*

given settings' (Lave & Wenger, 1991:42) i.e. that practice as a whole is evident and appears meaningful to persons wanting to participate. Lave & Wenger elaborate on the unexperienced, the newcomers' access to knowing what practice is about: '*To be able to participate in a legitimately peripheral way entails that newcomers have broad access to arenas of mature practice'* (ibid.:110). The overall context of practice is clear and perceptible through mature engagement of experienced practitioners.

It seems difficult to imagine how the complexity of participation in a social event like a New Orleans funeral could be learned in other ways than by being there with an overall intention to participate, for instance by 'bringing your drumsticks'. The typical funeral event offers many different ways of legitimate peripheral participation and thus the improvised practice itself comprises development of new practices. The continuous development of a New Orleans funeral as social practice constitutes what is to be learned as '*learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice'* (ibid.:93), and even more to the point of jam practice learning Lave states that '*learning curriculum consists of situated opportunities for the improvisational development of new practice'*' (Lave, 1989 In Lave, 1991:97).

Wesley and Thomas (Box 8) are fully aware of this complex of cultural premises, of 'learning curriculum' of funerals; they know deeply what a funeral is and might develop into; they know that they might want to/get the opportunity to participate at the funeral. They even seem to feel obligated to be there and eventually contribute to the social event. Playing at funerals seems to include learning about ethical responsibilities towards the community.

An important issue concerning 'access' to the learning potential of funeral practice (as also 2nd line parades but to a lesser extent Mardi Gras) is the fundamental aesthetic character of the music played. Open arrange-

ments, ‘messy’ sounds and an overall coarse and rough musical style leaves room for a vast diversity of instruments, rhythms and even songs (see also Danielsen, 2006 and Hughes, 2003). The many musical practices of New Orleans are *per se* inclusive, as also the musicians Box 4,5) indicate. Everybody seem to have access – at their own initiative and with their own ‘voice’. Generally music’s inclusive character provides many different participatory paths for engaging in the improvised development of practice, as ‘*practice itself is in motion*’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991:116).

Conclusion

In scientific music literature context is often described as important to the musician’s development, but rarely this contextual perspective is recognized as *essential* to learning to play music. The present study argues for an essentiality of the symbiotic relation between legitimate peripheral participation in jam practice and learning how to jam. Differences and similarities; conflicts and agreements; congruence and dissonance. Actions, persons and artefacts embedded in historically constructed social practices. The different improvised musical practices of New Orleans music culture sketched above seem to represent prototypical samples of the interdependency between the practice of building and developing the music and the processes of learning *how* to. The extreme circularity of groove based music seems to stress this theoretical stance.

Learning to jam is thus argued to be fundamentally relational and contextual and thus inseparable from the social practice of jamming itself. The musicians in the jam band continuously reconcile their participation according to the musical situation and the actual music played, and learning processes are argued to be structured by engaging in jam practice itself. The perpetually changing music is the pragmatic outcome towards a jointly negotiated ‘common third’, and participating in a jam

session as a perpetually changing practice is argued not to be distinguished from the musicians’ diverse learning processes towards becoming better jammers. Musicians learn how to jam by engaging in the perpetually changing jam practice.

Perspectives for learning environments

As presented in the introduction of this paper the curiosity for this coherence had its offspring in somewhat didactical shortcomings concerning developing music students’ spontaneous musical communicational skills. To understand learning as situated in communities of practice exemplified through jam session could potentially lead to a teaching (and learning) practice recognizing the multiple action possibilities that the improvised development of practice offers as opportunities for learning.

In the perspective of social practice theory the teacher’s task consequently changes from optimizing and facilitating individual cognitive processes to participating in and developing flexible and diverse social practices holding possibilities for improvisational development. This could for instance mean more open practice sessions with a diversity of action possibilities, with strong cultural connotations to the values of spontaneous collective productions of music. It could mean a stronger emphasis on clear and distinct jam participation on behalf of the teacher herself to ensure that the music ‘feels good’. It could mean ensuring that the music played is inclusive, open for diverse participation, open for change. It could mean open door class rooms where even hanging around in the doorway or just sitting in the corner absorbing the atmosphere is a legitimate way of participation and a recognized path towards learning how to jam.

Theorizing on musical teaching and learning problematics based on a social understanding of learning (to jam) through a comparison of a strong street culture as New Orleans and a traditional North European schooling con-

text brings new questions to our attention: The above sketches of learning environment designs challenge traditional Western thinking of schooling, of assessment, of the roles of teachers and students and so on, and within the realm of improvised music with strong spontaneous and collective creative connotations it seems necessary to rethink the way we design our settings for developing musicians' (jamming) skills.

This becomes even more obvious in societies and environments where music culture on the streets – outside schools – is less predominant than in places like New Orleans. What role should music schools play in societies with little or no tradition for 'music in the streets' in terms of kids and youths growing up to appreciate music or even become musicians? Are schools for skills and streets for cultural contextualization or should schools play a significant role as cultural environments contextualizing skills? Future research could aptly discuss these and other notions rising from the present study.

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