

## ROAD

by Graham Lock

from *Forces in Motion: Anthony Braxton and the Meta-reality of Creative Music: Interviews and Tour Notes, England 1985* (London: Quartet, 1988)

TUESDAY 12, LONDON

I meet Braxton at his hotel at 10 a.m. He's recently started a teaching job at Mills College in Oakland, California, and wants to buy John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Charles Mingus records for a modern-music course he'll be teaching next semester.

'There's a new Warne Marsh LP out,' I tell him as we head for the shops (I know he's a big fan). 'Volume three of the Copenhagen concerts.'

'Really!' Braxton's face lights up. He lets out an earsplitting 'whee-haw' and dances a little jig on the steps of King's Cross underground, to the alarm of passers-by.

My last vestiges of apprehension vanish. This is not the super-cold, super-brain of media report; this is a *music lover*. Two hours later we're staggering around the West End, each clutching a large box of records. Braxton's blown nearly all his *per diems* for the tour and is looking forward to two weeks of near-starvation. 'Boy, Nickie Braxton's gonna murder me when I get home,' he mutters.

I suggest lunch. 'There's a good vegetarian place up the road.'

'OK, I'll eat,' says Braxton, 'but is there a McDonalds nearby?'

'McDonalds? You want to eat at *McDonalds*?' I put on a brave face, but I'm devastated. My idol has feet of hamburger meat?

'You're a vegetarian? So is Gerry Hemingway,' Braxton consoles. 'You guys must be secret millionaires. I have to eat cheap.'

'But hamburgers,' I remonstrate. 'They're destroying the rain forests because of hamburgers—napalming the local Indians, ruining the soil, poisoning the atmosphere . . .' I stop in mid-zeal; this may not be the most diplomatic way to begin a fortnight on the road.

'I'm sure you're right,' Braxton sighs, 'but remember, jazz musicians have to deal with the problem of *no coins*. On the road you either eat well and go home broke or you eat junk food and go home sick. Sick, but solvent. And if you have a family at home like I have, it's really no choice.'

As he tucks into his Big Mac I recall the note in Hans Wachtmeister's Braxton discography about a concert the Creative Construction Company played in Paris in 1969: 'I guess among the "instruments" should also be mentioned the fried chicken, which Braxton ate on stage during the concert. In fact, this was a regular feature during the late-1969 concerts and caused quite some consternation among the French critics.'\* I can imagine. *Merde! The chicken's really cookin', but is it jazz?*

WEDNESDAY 13, LONDON

I meet Braxton at 1.30 p.m. Stephen Firth, the Contemporary Music Network's Education Co-ordinator, arrives to escort us to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where Braxton is to lecture on his composition methods.

\*Wachtmeister, 1982, p. 56

Stephen suggests a snack first. Luckily, there's no McDonalds nearby, but there is a Wimpy. Damn it, my second fishburger in twenty-four hours! In the cafe, Stephen tilts his trilby at a rakish angle, hitches his thumbs under his braces, and quotes Shakespeare for us.

'What is it he says in the *Merchant*? "The man that hath no music in himself is fit for treasons, strategems and spoils. The motions of his spirit are dull as night. Let no such man be trusted."' I think that's it.'

'Not to like any kind of music, that's an illness,' Braxton concurs.

When we get outside again the sun has vanished and there's a chill in the air. Stephen looks at Braxton, in open-neck shirt and thin cardigan.

'Don't you have a coat?' he asks. 'No. I forgot it.'

'The hotel's only just around the corner,' I say. 'There's time to fetch it.'

'No, I forgot to bring it from California.' Braxton's customary quizzical expression deepens to a puzzled frown. 'It was a nice day when I left, I kinda forgot I was going to be in England in November.'

Braxton's Guildhall lecture is the first of a series: talks at Newcastle, Sheffield and Leeds will follow, plus, the day after the tour ends, a six-hour lecture and workshop at the Royal Academy of Music. I'd imagined Braxton would be either a very redoubtable or a very charismatic speaker; unusually, he's both.

He starts at the speed of light, talking so intensely and rapidly it's almost impossible to keep track. His range is extraordinary: from the composite, spiritual nature of ancient world culture, through 'the suppression of women intellectuals as witches in the Dark Ages', to the Western media's current misdocumentation and misunderstanding of 'trans-African functionalism', that is black culture and particularly jazz. Three thousand years of world history flash by in the first twenty minutes. He pauses. 'Any questions?'

Stunned silence. The students seem shell-shocked by the rate of information and by the unfamiliar terminology. The lecture teeters on the brink of a chasmic culture gap. Then, gradually, Braxton pulls it around. He slows the pace, talks about his own music, plays records, throws in self-deprecatory asides. The students respond; shock gives way to curiosity then engagement. Questions come in a flurry. At the end, a large group stay behind to pursue personal queries or ask for an autograph. Braxton deals with them all graciously and enquires about the Guildhall's music courses. 'Are they teaching you about the master women composers and the importance of the trans-African and trans-Asian continuums?'

Nope, is the unanimous reply. 'But at least now we know they're not,' someone says.

The more specifically methodological points that Braxton raised in his lectures are covered in 'Postscript 3', but I think it will be useful here to note his comments on his initial approaches to composition. He says that in 1965 he made the decision to 'make music my life's purpose'. When he joined the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in Chicago in 1966, his interest was the relation of form to movement, of music to visual formations: many of the musicians in Chicago, he says, began to develop alternative vocabularies and structures.

His own musical language grew out of the solo context. He'd been very influenced by the solo piano music of Fats Waller, Arnold Schoenberg and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and had tried to develop a piano music of his own. But he wasn't a good enough pianist and so he developed instead a language for alto saxophone. His interest in structure dated from the first solo concert he gave, in 1967. This was supposed to be an improvised concert: 'I imagined I was just going to get up there and play for one hour from pure invention, but after ten

minutes I'd run through all my ideas and started to repeat myself. I felt like, "Oh my God, and there's still fifty minutes to go!" I thought, hmm, I better make sure this doesn't happen again. So the question became, How to proceed?"

The first answer was 'to section off various components, formings', and use these as the basis for new vocabularies which could then be fed into 'a modular system'. 'Now I was interested in improvisation only for its ability to generate structural dynamics and vibrational dynamics.' Generating this material became 'the science' of his music.

Braxton hands around a sheet of 'Language Types' with their visual designations. These, he explains, are just ten examples from a pool of over 100 'sound classifications' that he has built up over the years and which comprise the primary components of his musical language (see p. 4).

He says he will take one example from the sheet—4. Staccato line formings—and show the different ways it can be used as a 'generating form'. This he does in detail, playing recorded examples of each category of generating form.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the lecture Braxton refers to his *Composition 25*, explaining that at one point the musicians are required to rub balloons as part of 'a multiple sound/fabric environment'.

'Why balloons?' someone asks.

'Well, I didn't have enough money for the electronic equipment that could make those kinds of sounds,' he replies. 'I'm interested in the expanded reality of sound opened up by the post-Webern continuum, but I'm restricted to using cheap materials. So, you know, I was walking down the street one night and I thought, "Hey! I gotta have balloons!"'

'If you're so limited by poverty,' asks someone else, 'would you consider trying to make a popular record?'

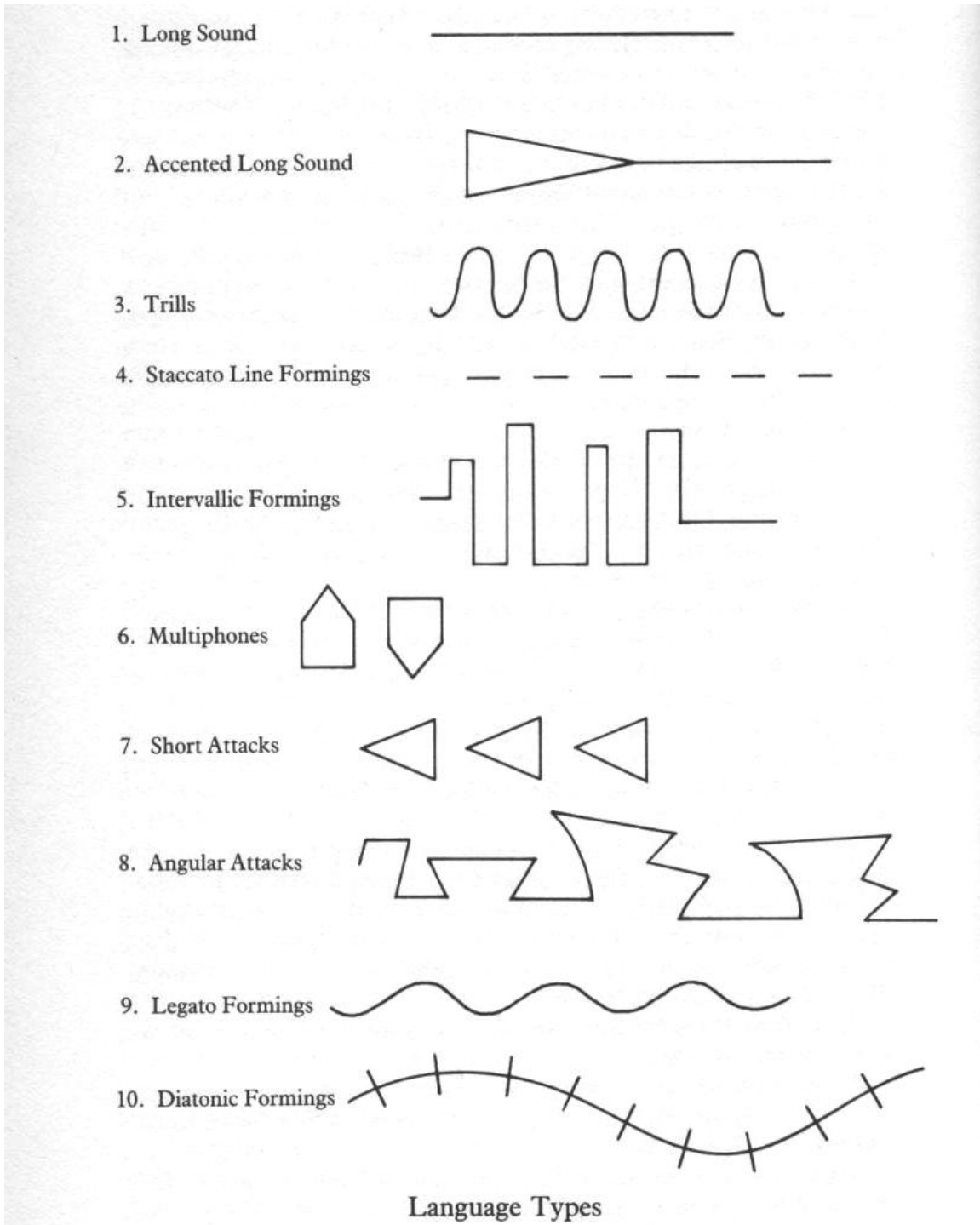
'I don't try to make unpopular records,' Braxton says. 'I'm not against people buying my records or me being rich. I'd love to be a billionaire shipping tycoon! But I have to do what I believe in. *I would rather I like my music and people hate it, than for them to like it and me hate it.* I'm not going to make a boogaloo or a funky record tomorrow, not because I don't respect boogaloo, it's just that I don't know anything about that music. It doesn't excite me as much as, say, opera does right now. So my heart is not into doing that.'

Braxton barely has time to rush back to the hotel for a coffee before he's facing a second set of questions at a pre-concert talk chaired by Charles Fox. He explains again that it was his limitations as a pianist which had led him to develop a solo music on the alto saxophone.

'It's my dream,' he adds, 'that in eighteen, twenty years' time you'll go into a cellar-bar one night and find this dingy, smoke-filled room where a woman is leaning on the piano singing torch songs, and the pianist will be sitting there with his collar turned up, cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, mirror shades—that'll be me.'

He talks about his *Trillium* operas, a planned set of twelve three-act operas, the acts actually being thirty-six interchangeable 'dialogues'. *Trillium*, he says, has to do with 'the third part of the order that I'm trying to establish: 1) my music; 2; the *Tri-axium Writings*, which is a restructural philosophical system; 3) rituals'. *Trillium* is 'a platform to express my worldview' and will be part of a projected twelve-day festival of world culture. As *Tri-axium* had to do with the number three, so *Trillium* has to do with the number twelve. (*Which in numerology also reduces to three: 12 = 1 + 2 = 3—GL.*)

There's a question about the relationship between composition and improvisation in his work. He replies that his work is generally structured in some way, that sometimes areas



\*Anthony Braxton later changed his 10 Language Types (as depicted in 'Forces', page 28) to 12 Language Types, adding Gradient Formings and Sub-identity Formings

of open improvisation are written into the structure while at other times the improvisation may be defined by the language of the composition. ‘For example, in the quartet music we use different languages in different pieces. It’s like we have one conversation in French, say, then one in German or Italian. And there will be scored parts in which I structure what is said and open parts where people can say what they like, except they have to say it in the language of the piece. Or they don’t have to, but that’s like the agreement we make before we start the piece. Then, at other times, it’s like: “OK, I’ll meet you at the end of the piece.”’

Q: ‘What would happen if a person suddenly changed languages in mid-conversation?’

Braxton gives an exaggerated frown. ‘Then they’d better have something very important to say. And it had better be *only* expressible in the language they’ve changed to. I’m really only talking about respect: respect for the family of the music. But this kind of language shift rarely happens. People who want to do that would tend not to stay in my groups.’

He adds that he has used between thirty and forty different kinds of notation to date, and six different systems of titling his compositions. But ‘the real challenge of creativity is to be honest—know thyself. Music involves living, it’s not just the execution of sounds in space. Some of the best musicians I’ve met have had nothing to do with music.’

The final question is about the relationship of chess to music. ‘Well, it’s the movement of forces in space. A good chess game can be translated into a musical composition, so can a physics theory.’

Three hours later, at the end of the concert, I have an inkling of what he’s talking about: I feel as if a falling apple had just zonked me on the head.

## LONDON CONCERT, BLOOMSBURY THEATRE

### First Set (Primary Territories)

*Composition 122 (+108A)*

*Composition 40(O)*

*Composition 52*

Piano solo (from *Composition 30*)

*Composition 115*

### Second Set (Primary Territories)

*Composition 105A*

Percussion solo (from *Composition 96*)

*Composition 40F*

*Composition 121*

*Composition 116*

First reactions—I’m elated, confused. Many beautiful moments, but I can’t see how they fit together or even which are improvised, which notated. It’s like wandering through a dream landscape, in which all the contours are moving at different speeds and in different directions. I get a headache trying to map what’s happening according to my (erroneous) preconceptions: at times everyone seems to be playing notated material, but from different compositions. (I later learn they are: Braxton is exploring ‘collage form structures’ in which

two, three or four people play two, three or four compositions simultaneously. The set lists simply establish the ‘primary territories’ through which the music will flow, without pause, during the set; the movement from territory to territory being negotiated, in the main, via open improvisation.)\*

Bemused as I am by the music’s complexity, there is still plenty to savour, from the surging elation of 52 to the ‘accordion sound space’ of 115 where bass, drums and piano keep accelerating, then retarding, the tempo around the improvising saxophone; an experiment with time that reminds me of Thelomous Monk’s offbeat humour and his delight in complex time formings.<sup>†</sup> Braxton has brought five instruments—clarinet, flute, soprano, alto and C-melody saxophones—and he plays the complete spectrum of each one’s sound range, from guttural honks to high squeaks. The quartet’s level of rapport is incredible, both in the quiet wisps of sound with which they hold together large areas of tensile silence and in the headlong, zig-zag lines that characterize one (bebop-inspired) aspect of Braxton’s composition, so fast and crazy, like four trails of light careering around each other down a spiral staircase and converging—FLASH!—at a single point in a single instant. Wonderful!

Post-gig audience responses vary from euphoria to puzzled dislike. ‘It was so neurotic, all those jerky lines,’ someone complains, ‘I couldn’t hear any feeling in there.’ I groan. No swing, no emotion: the same old brickbats that have been hurled at Braxton’s music for the last two decades. I find it inexplicable, though I guess one of the things I’ll have to try to do during this tour is explicate it. Later, later.

I hurry home to bed, but I’m too excited to sleep. Tomorrow, the road.

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\*For more on ‘primary territories’, see *Forces in Motion* p. 174; for more on ‘collage form structures’, see *Forces in Motion* pp. 203-6

<sup>†</sup>Muhal Richard Abrams, one of Braxton’s early mentors in Chicago, has also investigated the ‘expansion and contraction of rhythm’ and cites Art Tatum as his chief influence in this context. See Litweiler, 1985, p. 181

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## <sup>i</sup> POSTSCRIPT

### LECTURE NOTES

#### I) LANGUAGE MUSIC

Braxton’s lecture at the Guildhall is to do with the ways in which the pool of ‘language types’ that he has built up over the years can be employed in the compositional process. He takes one example of his ‘language types’, staccato line formings, and demonstrates (on record) its various functions as a generating form: these are (a) as a language generating form (in the solo context); (b) as a material generating form (as notated material inserted into the co-ordinate music); (c) as a principle generating form (as a given variable used to determine the nature of the music); (d) as a multiple generating form (inserted into a larger context). Most of the 100+ language types, or various combinations of them, can be used in these same ways.

As an example of (a) he plays *Composition 26B (Solo: Live at Moers Festival, side A track 1)*. There are no notated sequences in this first example; this type of variable is simply the combination of various sound components, primary and secondary formings, as ‘routes for exploration dynamics’. There is, says Braxton, ‘no development here at all, because we are not dealing with development or preconceived objectives’. Think of the music in terms of lights or shapes; or think of it like baking a

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cake—the basic ingredient is the staccato line forming, but there are others, maybe ten to fifteen working ingredients, and the challenge of each interpretation is to integrate all these variables—so it's a very open music.

As an example of (b) he plays *Composition 40B (Six Compositions: Quartet, A-1)*. Basically this is an ABBA structure in which A is notated material and B is improvised. The staccato line formings here are part of the notated material.

As an example of (c) he plays *Composition 23A (New York Fall 1974, B-3)*. This is a cell structure shape which integrates staccato line formings 'as a basis to establish territories for improvisation'. It consists of notated and language music variables, and has different focuses in each of its sections. The staccato line formings can be established in several different ways; the musicians are given this variable (and others) as a principle at different points in the music and are free to actualize it however they think best serves the context and the needs of the moment. Here, the language types 'help define the nature of the space and provide a context for its investigation'. Another example of (c) is *Composition 23P (Four Compositions (1973, A-2))*, where the staccato line formings establish a basis for open-ended collective improvisation. On this track the staccato line is played by the bassist, who can refer to it at any time, even though once it has been established the ensemble move into 'open space'.

As an example of (d) he plays an extract of *Composition 25 (Creative Music Orchestra)*. Here each instrumentalist has a part to be played in his or her own time, a type of 'indeterminate structure which can also be found in John Cage, Duke Ellington and some African musics too'. Each musician has twenty balloons to manipulate, the staccato line formings here being part of 'a multiple sound/fabric environment'.

*Forces in Motion* is based on the Braxton quartet's two-week Contemporary Music Network tour of England in November 1985. The tour party was comprised of Anthony Braxton (reeds), Marilyn Crispell (piano), Mark Dresser (bass), Gerry Hemingway (percussion), Tony Cresswell (tour manager) and Graham Lock (journalist).

Three of the concerts from the tour (at London, Birmingham and Coventry) have been released on CD by Leo Records and the Coventry concert discs also include extracts from Lock's interviews with Braxton.

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**METAROAD**  
by Graham Lock

from *Forces in Motion: Anthony Braxton and the Meta-reality of Creative Music: Interviews and Tour Notes, England 1985* (London: Quartet, 1988)

FOREGROUND MUSIC I

PAUL DESMOND—‘ONLY THE ESSENCE REMAINED’

B: I have eight million heroes.

L: OK, let’s take them one at a time. Paul Desmond was your first major influence?

B: Yes, Paul Desmond would open the door of the saxophone world for me.

L: What was the attraction?

B: What is the attraction, because I have never stopped loving this man’s music. The first thing I recall that struck me about it was his sound. The sound grabbed me. Then, after that, his logic grabbed me - held me in its grip, in fact. I think Paul Desmond’s music is widely misunderstood on many levels. He was fashionable for the wrong reasons and he was hated for the wrong reasons. In retrospect, when I look at his life, his is a kind of . . . what’s the word? Kind of mysterious music, he’s not always there.

L: Enigmatic?

B: Enigmatic, thank you. I understood that better when I met Mr Desmond. I met him in Paris, though actually I said hello to him in the street before. He turned around and looked at me - I said, thank you very much for your music, sir. He said, well - thank you. And suddenly I understood everything, because while I was talking to him I was aware of the fact that he was way over here. I mean, he was not *there*, in the sense that we talk of there. He had already plotted out five seconds ahead of time what he was gonna do, and you could hear it in his music. It looked like he was a very slow player, but in fact he was making very quick decisions, and because he understood his craft so well his music has this air of easiness about it, as if it’s just kind of floating. But, oh, the man is very ahead, a profound thinker. He was far ahead of what you heard: what you heard had been edited completely, only the essence remained. Desmond understood how to get to the point quicker than most players ever learn. This is a lightning-fast improviser, who understood sound logic and how to prepare the event.

THE TIGHTROPE OF ‘IT’—MASTERS

Desmond too was a very good chess player; I hear it in his music. He actually had his personal language within the style of so-called jazz. He was never afraid to walk the tightrope. It didn’t look like he was walking on the tightrope, but he was there—right on the line of invention, the line of *it*. *His solo* flights fired me up as a young boy, then later as a teenager, as a man, and



now as an old cruser. It fires me up because it's all it. I'm surprised that people are not able to hear his influence—no saxophonist has put their stamp on me more than Paul. Well, I'd say Paul, Coltrane and Warne Marsh would put their stamp on me deeper than any other instrumentalists.

L: I know you've dedicated compositions to Coltrane and Marsh; are there any to Desmond?

B: The saxophone piece on *The Complete Braxton*, the overdubbed soprano piece, is dedicated to Paul Desmond. Is that right?—I think it is. I was afraid to tell him that, though, when I met him in the street, I didn't want to bother him. He was a strange man. He became very successful in the monetary sense of the word, but he never got what he wanted. He wanted the respect of the African masters; they denied him that, and they should not have denied him. Duke Ellington didn't deny him, Charles Mingus acknowledged him; but Miles Davis, I think it was, spat on him verbally in public, talked about Desmond's sound insultingly. It was very fashionable not to respect Desmond, but he touched a lot of people's hearts. That's the thing about the masters that's so interesting: you can say what you like, but masters can touch your heart and change your life. In the case of Desmond, I *know* that's true.

L: Do any of your records particularly show Desmond's influence?

B: All of my recordings show the influence of Paul Desmond. But remember, I never wanted to imitate anybody because that would insult the masters. What I liked about them was that they found their own way. You have to do that; and the only way you can do that is, you have to know yourself. You have to know what you believe in and you have to set out on a path and develop it. It's the only way. You can't theorize it, even. You can theorize some of it, but you've got to live it, and experience it, and you have to be tested to make sure that you believe what you say you believe.

Desmond understood that he couldn't deal with Charlie Parker's dynamic, electric brilliance—he knew he couldn't out-Charlie Parker Charlie Parker—but he also knew he could create the same aura by playing slower. So you go to the opposites. You've heard the old saying, listen to everybody so you know what *not* to play. As soon as I hear the pentatonic scale or the Parker licks or the Coltrane licks, I say, OK—bang!—next! It's the ones who've put together their own language, their own syntax, their own way of being—those are the ones I'm interested in. That's why I love Paul. Plus, he understood how not to let even ruffles and flourishes get in the way of singing from the heart.

#### CHARLIE PARKER—TALKING OF THE UPPER PARTIALS

L: It was later, after Desmond, that you began to listen to Charlie Parker?

B: Yes. Charlie Parker's effect on me would not be so apparent in the beginning. When I first heard Charlie Parker—the record was *Bird on 52nd Street*—that record frightened me. It frightened me, and it was the most exciting music I'd ever heard; and it was also talking of partials that I could not, as a young man, understand exactly.

L: Partial's?

B: Spiritual partials, vibrational partials, upper scientific partials—different levels with respect to a given subject. Charlie Parker solidified all of the language dynamics that took place in his time period and, like Louis Armstrong before him, his language would express the—what’s the word? —the *brilliance* of the era and all the people who had worked to solidify bebop. I’ve always disagreed with the concept that Charlie Parker was, like, the only restructuralist, at the expense of Wardell Gray, Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins: all of those people are part of a continuum. But Charlie Parker is one of the masters. His work made it possible for the intellectual and vibrational dynamics of African-American creativity to be carried further. It’s because of Charlie Parker that we have the lineage moving into John Coltrane, to Albert Ayler, later to Roscoe Mitchell and Joseph Jarman. There was more in his music than just the notes: I mean, his notes, his ideas, would set the stage for the projectional possibilities of trans-African and world culture information dynamics. His work personified the next juncture of the post-existential African-American, vibrationally and intellectually, after the Second World War.

L: What do you mean?

B: Well, Charlie Parker’s music and the solidification of bebop would represent many different things. Bebop would represent a serious break between the black middle-class community and the restructuralist revolutionary intellectuals and intellectual thought that was gathering in that period. For instance, bebop would extend separately (in terms of what I call the affinity insight principle)\* from the Baptist Church continuum that had solidified; I’m thinking of the gospel and spiritual musics that developed as a direct affirmation of, and linkage to, the community and in that context men and women would go to the church and participate in shaping that music. It became a profoundly important music that contributed to the information feed of American culture on several levels. But bebop was different. It emphasized the individual, the solo; and it was existential in the sense that musicians would look for God, for meaning, on a personal level, in the music. Also, bebop took place in the back rooms, the smoke-filled rooms . . .

Of course, the gangster community in America has always had its relationship to so-called ‘black exotica’ in every period. You can’t talk about New Orleans, for example, without talking about the political forces that affected, or even caused, the situation where early jazz was associated with the red-light districts, and the separation between the rich blacks and the house blacks. You can’t talk about Kansas City without looking at the Pendergast political machine that ran the town, and its relationship to the music’s formings. There’s a long history to how black

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\* With regard to music, Braxton earlier identifies two principles—affinity insight (1) and affinity insight (2)—from which creative music in all cultures functions. The latter, (2), establishes creativity ‘as a social factor’ that promotes both ‘functional unification’ and ‘social interchange and harmony’; it then becomes ‘the vibrational flow that moves towards “composite knowingness” on the physical plane’. The other principle, affinity insight (1), works as ‘a vibrational factor which moves to solidify the correct spiritual and vibrational alignment of the culture’: this helps to determine ‘how the intellectual and spiritual affinity relationship within the culture is to be “affirmed”’. In fact, (1) can be seen in terms of affirmation, of moving towards transformation; (2) in terms of ‘celebration’, of moving towards stabilization. For instance, says Braxton, Charlie Parker’s activity ‘documented the emergence of the affinity insight (1) principle after the Second World War (which represented a transformation period to black Americans)’ (*T-a WI*, pp. 121-4). In the glossary to *Tri-axium Writings* Braxton gives the two principles a slightly different emphasis: affinity insight (1) is to do with the relationship between self-realization and spiritual understanding; affinity insight (2) is to do with the relationship between self-realization and ‘one’s own “life realness”’.

culture has been reduced to terms of ‘black exotica’, and black people seen only in terms of their sexuality. It’s happening to white women too in the Western media today. The music has always been associated with the red-light district and all of that mentality, as if the music was an affirmation of lower partials, or sin,<sup>†</sup> when in fact in every phase all of the masters had a viewpoint about humanity, and the music that was solidified—the science and vibrational dynamics of that music—held forth the most positive alternatives for the culture.

So Charlie Parker’s music would shape the vibrational . . . *bridges* that were operating in his time period, and set those forces into motion. His language especially would be so dynamic that all the saxophonists would be blinded by him for a period of twenty years, and even now many people have not been able to think in terms of establishing their own vocabularies because of the brilliance of his language. Unlike the people who would take his music, Charlie Parker didn’t repeat himself. His music was always living, always fresh, always trying to be honest.

## THE POST-PARKER CONTINUUM

L: You’ve used the phrase ‘the post-Parker continuum’ in the lectures: presumably you’re referring to those people still playing Charlie Parker’s language?

B: Yes, but let me be clear. When I talk about the post-Parker continuum, I’m talking about a continuum of stylists and I have respect for that continuum. The master stylists who would take Charlie Parker’s music as a point of departure and within that vocabulary try to make something special happen, people like Cannonball Adderley—they can still be original. But the music that is now coming from the universities—the assumption there being that the technical solutions and scientific dynamics of bebop are now understood, which I say is completely untrue—those people are fundamentally misusing the music, as far as I’m concerned. They’re not really playing bebop, they’re playing other people’s solutions and other people’s versions of Charlie Parker. But Charlie Parker was participating with affinity insight dynamics, with respect to his own life, to what he set into motion, to what he was thinking about. There’s a big difference between what Mr Parker was playing and how his music is currently being used.

## ‘BLACK EXOTICA’ - THE CONCEPT OF AFRICAN INFERIORITY

L: You said in a 1984 *Cadence* interview<sup>‡</sup> that you felt the *intellectual* content of Charlie Parker’s music had been completely neglected. Could you explain that a little?

B: Well, what has happened . . . This is part of the misinformation that African-Americans are dealing with, and the position of powerlessness that we are in as regards having the possibility to make our definitions stick. Charlie Parker’s music is separated from his actual thoughts. It’s as if the notion they’re trying to perpetuate—they being the power structure and the collective forces

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<sup>†</sup> See, for example, Scott, 1976, who attributes the appearance of jazz to ‘the Dark Forces’ and blames a variety of modern ills, from ‘a marked decline in sexual morals’ to an increased ‘love of sensationalism’ on the music, which, he claimed, ‘inflamed, intoxicated and brutalized’ and was ‘entirely divorced from any more exalted musical content’ (pp. 142-4). Scott’s book on music is one of the best-known from the Western mystical tradition; and his view of jazz appears to be the standard one in such circles.

<sup>‡</sup> Carey, p. 6

of Western culture—is that this man is sticking all of this dope into his arm and just playing, without making any kind of intelligent decisions about the music.

L: You mean the glamorization of pain? Like a kind of intellectual pornography?

B: Well, it's all a part of what I was just talking about, 'black exotica'; that being the notion of separating the results of the music from what the person was thinking, and portraying the person as a dope addict or as incapable of establishing a thought that's valuable enough to be respected, that comes with its own value systems. What the Europeans have done, I think, is to undercut trans-African, even world culture, value systems; and this is not separate from the moves that have taken place in the last 300 years to justify what has happened in Africa, and to justify the present notion of human beings . . . the idea that a person's IQ is a justification for saying he or she is a better person, or not a better person, and from that point to say that some lives are better than other lives, and then to say let's get rid of those lives which are not as good as the other lives . . . the concept of African inferiority.<sup>§</sup>

I'm sorry, we're getting away from my eight million heroes (*laughs*). But all these matters are connected.

L: OK, I wanted to ask you about Eric Dolphy. A lot of people see you as the heir to his musical explorations, but you haven't mentioned him as an influence at the lectures.

B: Oh, my work has constantly been compared to Mr Dolphy's and, of course, in my late forming period, just before I began to move into my own music, I did listen to Eric's music. But, in fact, his music was very different to mine, in the kind of . . . I don't know, his music was just different! (*Laughs.*) I recall buying the *Out There* record; I thought I was listening to a violin—that's how strange his sound was to me, and how incredible the facility he had. For instance, Ornette Coleman, who we'll probably get to, his music would really open up my world on another level; Eric's reaffirmed what I was already learning.

L: Was his multi-instrumentalism an influence at all? His solo performances?

B: His work with bass clarinet and flute would certainly up the *ante* for multi-instrumentalism, and that he was such a virtuoso on all of his instruments would help me to aim for achieving the broadest range I could possibly achieve; I enjoyed his bass clarinet solos but in fact I see my solo music as being very separate from that. I was always impressed by Eric as a musician, but I was not as influenced by him as people have thought. I look back on it now like Eric was kind of an extension of Charlie Parker: his music makes a lot of sense if you look at Charlie Parker's

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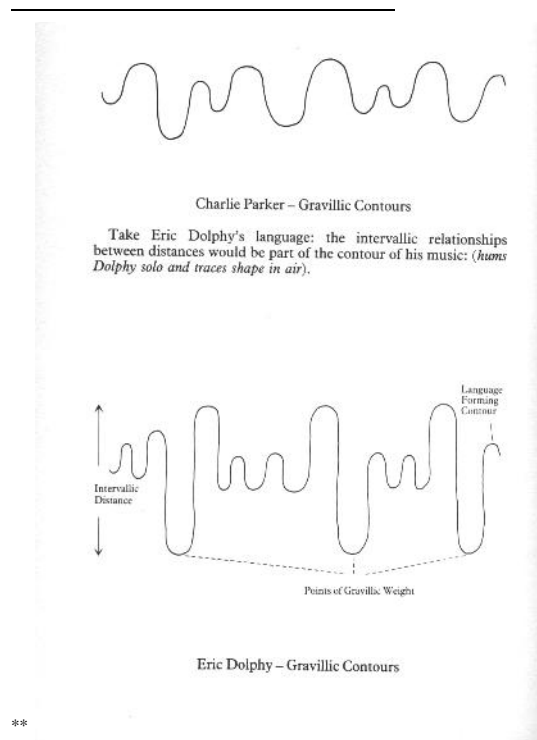
<sup>§</sup> See also 'Postscript 2', pp. 313ff

language and gravillic\*\* formings, but suddenly stretched to extremes. It's like a disjointed, extended bebop vocabulary that would stress extreme intervallic distances but basically used the same language (though his later records, like *Out to Lunch*, show his language evolving too). I was coming from a Lester Young forming affinity continuum: from Lester Young on through Bird to Konitz, to Marsh, then into Jackie McLean. Then, I think I was always more influenced by ametrical formings than by the type of metric formings that we now associate with Charlie Parker. It's funny, because I learned about Lester Young after I'd heard Warne Marsh and the power of his music would clarify a lot for me in terms of progressionalism and vocabulary dynamics, because Lester was the root that Konitz and Marsh would adopt. His solutions to language and to formings would open up that whole continuum. So Eric Dolphy's work was very exciting to me, but I never felt that his way was my way.

JACKIE MCLEAN, ROY HAYNES, JIMMY GIUFFRE

L: You've mentioned Jackie McLean a few times. Was he a big influence?

B: Oh Jackie McLean, yeah! I had thirty, forty records by Mr McLean. I lost them all when I went into the army, and also when I went to Europe; each time I lost probably 1,000 records. I like Jackie McLean, I like the feeling of his music, his sound, and I like the way he can play blues. There's a record I remember called *A Long Drink of the Blues* where the musicians start to play, then they stop and begin to argue—on the record—then they play again. It was a strange record, but, boy, the music goes right to it. It's *real*; frighteningly beautiful. On the second side Jackie plays three ballads, *I Cover the Waterfront*, *Embraceable You*, *These Foolish Things* - it's a very special record. I recall being greatly affected by his music, his sense of timing. I liked *Let Freedom Ring*, when he was changing his music, and later too, as he moved into his modal period, the records with Charles Tolliver and *It's Time* with Roy Haynes, who is a master



percussionist. I played with Mr Haynes as a young man but he would never remember it;<sup>††</sup> since becoming an adult I've never had the opportunity to play with Mr Haynes and I love, *love*, his music.

I tell you who else I'd like to mention—Jimmy Giuffre. I learned a great deal from Mr Giuffre. The work he did in the trio format with Paul Bley (who's another special one) and Steve Swallow is very important to my evolution. Not only that, his arrangements behind Lee Konitz, Sonny Stitt, his work with the Modern Jazz Quartet . . . I think he also has a couple of records with a symphony orchestra playing his chamber music or orchestral music. I've always greatly respected Jimmy Giuffre. I forgot to mention him in my own book! I feel horrible about it, but I'd have never got the book out if I'd mentioned everybody in the world I wanted to mention. I hope I've got him into this book (*laughs*).

#### ORNETTE COLEMAN—REAFFIRMING THE AFRICAN COMPOSER

L: Let's finish today with Ornette Coleman.

B: Mr Coleman ... his work was a landmark for me. In grammar school I had two friends, Pierre and Tommy Evans, they lived about two blocks away, and one day—I had been well into my Desmond records in this period—one day I went with Tommy over to their house and. Mr Evans, he was like one of the guys in the neighbourhood who listened to jazz, not hip but *maybe* hip, a nice man, though, he knew about the music, he told me, look, take this record home, this is where the music's going, you listen to this. The record was *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. I put it on—G-o-o-o-d-d-dd-a-a-a-m-m-m-m! ! ! This saxophonist!!! . . . I mean, he doesn't sound like Desmond, this is not a Desmond sound, this isn't where the music's going! There must be some mistake! I took the record back—Mr Evans, please, that was the strangest shit I ever heard in my life. Then, over the next couple of weeks—Wow! That was a strange record! Let me borrow it again. I put it on—hmm, this is not music, it's just *not* music. I took it back. The next week I'd be listening again—hmm! His compositions *Lonely Woman* and *Peace* were on that record, so it was like—Wow, this is really beautiful, I've never heard compositions like this. And the solos Ornette took on that record were so special.

So I went through a period of about six months saying, you know, I don't like this music. Maybe I like it a little bit. OK, this part is interesting but this part I definitely *don't* like—I mean, what're they *doing* there? Finally, it was—Yeah! There's something happening here I don't know about.

I think Ornette Coleman . . . Oh my God, he's a dynamic master. I think the press has still not been able to convey to people the significance of this man—what he really *did*. Ornette Coleman re-established the affinity dynamic implications of trans-African functionalism. He would solve the problem of complicated vertical harmonic progressions, which were either interesting or not interesting, but his work re-established the fact that the music is not about any one way of functioning. He would also extend the existential implications of trans-African information dynamics; I mean, his work set into motion so many variables that people are still dealing with him and they'll be dealing with him for another 1,000 years.

As a composer, his *Skies of America* is a dynamic piece, as are the quartet musics in all of the various periods. This is a unique composer. His work would open up the world of

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<sup>††</sup> \*On Dave Brubeck's *All the Things We are LP*

composition to me on another level. Before, I was beginning to enjoy Brubeck's composition (Brubeck, I might add, is a very good composer), and the Lennie Tristano school, with their wonderful melodic lines, I was always seduced by them. But Coleman had that in his music, he had a line-forming music, he had a chamber music, his string quartets. He would open up the lid of the genie lamp for the next generation of African-American composers and intellectuals like myself. None of my work would have been possible were it not for Ornette Coleman. Mr Coleman would re-establish the concept, reaffirm the existence, of the African composer; *and* he defined his terms with respect to *his* value systems.

L: Looking back, it seemed in the sixties that Ornette Coleman's music became overshadowed rather by the impact of Coltrane and Cecil Taylor—that emphasis on energy music. Then the AACM reasserted the sense of space and flow which Ornette Coleman had.

B: That's right. We were more attuned to the structuralists, Coleman and Charles Mingus, and what they were doing. We were aware that the spectrum range that many of the New York musicians were dealing with was narrow: everybody was ready to take Coltrane's language and just stay right there, as if evolution stopped at Coltrane. The musicians were not thinking in terms of establishing syntax or structure, they were responding to the emotional dynamics of that music. And, of course, their response was dynamic; their music certainly helped me. But in Chicago, our emphasis on structure and the mechanics of the music would, in terms of what has transpired in the last twenty years, mark the difference between the AACM and the New York school. I have a great deal of respect for that first wave of musicians to begin practising the music of Coltrane and Taylor - people like Marion Brown, Archie Shepp, Giuseppe Logan - but it was the Chicago school who supplied the structural and scientific dynamics of what that revolution implied.

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Interviews and Tour Notes, England 1985* (London: Quartet, 1988). Reprinted here by permission of Graham Lock.

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## ROAD (2)

by Graham Lock

from *Forces in Motion: Anthony Braxton and the Meta-reality of Creative Music: Interviews and Tour Notes, England 1985* (London: Quartet, 1988)

Braxton has another lecture this afternoon. On the way there, he mentions that his *Trillium* operas have word, as well as diagram, titles. Like what?

'*Trillium A* is called "After a Period of Change, Zackko Returns to His Place of Birth", *Trillium M* is called "Joreo's Vision of Forward Motion", *Trillium BK* is "Because of Non-belief, Ojuwain is no Longer with Us", *Trillium R* is "Shala Fears for the Poor".'

(They remind me a little of Harry Partch's 'dance-satire' *The Bewitched*, the scene titles for which include the wonderful 'The Cognoscenti are Plunged into a Demonic Descent while at Cocktails'.)

Braxton's lecture, on repetition as a process generating factor (see 'Postscript 3', ii), covers essentially the same ground as at Sheffield; today though there's an audience of thirty to forty people and, despite Braxton's evident tiredness, it turns out to be a lively afternoon. In his notes to *Composition 98*, Braxton drew up a list of 'reception dynamics' that charted audiences' responses to the work:

1. Where is dee jazz?
2. Boredum
3. Humer
4. Anger
5. What is it?

A similar list of 'reception dynamics' to the lectures might go:

1. Huh?
2. But what about dee jazz?
3. This guy is crazee!
4. Hmmm . . . ?
5. Tell us more!

I guess some people never make it past 2 or 3, but judging by the questions at the end, a lot make it through to 4 and 5. Today is no exception.

Q: 'Can you play painting or paint music? I think Schoenberg and Klee experimented with this?'



B: 'Yes, Kandinsky too. He was very interested in the correspondences between music and painting. He's very special to me, he created his own system of colour and shape dynamics, he was very involved in the spiritual dimensions of art. Scriabin was also very concerned with music, colour, spirituality—composite world culture.\* I certainly think there's an inter-relationship between painting and music, theatre and music, physics and music. It's only in the West in the last 300 years that the knowledge of these relationships has been lost.'

Q: 'How do you choose the people for your quartet?'

B: 'I try to pick people in the same vibrational zone, with the same sensibility, though I'm also interested in music that expresses particular co-ordinates, in a form that sets into motion various forces irrespective of the player. My hope is to move towards people who totally understand the systems I'm building—music, science, philosophy, ritual. What I envisage is different schools of scientists, musicians, spiritual people all working together to help each other.'

Q: 'How long do people stay in the quartet? Presumably, it takes some time to learn your music?'

B: 'Well, I'd say the first six months, I'm teaching a player the music; the next six months they're getting into it; the third six months I'm learning from them. Generally, I'd try to keep a quartet line-up together for two years, at least, to give it time to fulfil its collective identity; but that's not always possible.'

Q: 'Do the people in your groups have to agree with your theories?'

B: 'Not necessarily. But the ensemble is the next degree of family: we have to trust each other, care for each other, look out for each other. If there was someone in the group who didn't respect what I was doing, I would respect *them* by firing them immediately.'

As at the Guildhall, there are a crowd of people who stay at the end for autographs and/or personal queries. Braxton, though drained by his two-hour talk, deals with them all patiently, inviting would-be composers to send him tapes and asking of each one, 'Are you serious about dedicating your life to music?'

At the soundcheck the group play through *23G* several times; last night, Braxton finished transposing it for piano. He seems happy with the run-through, but then leaves *23G* off the set lists.

\*Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) was a pioneer of modern abstract art. He wrote that, 'Just as sounds and rhythms combine in music, so must forms and colours be united in painting by the play of their manifold relationships.' His oeuvre includes several paintings entitled either 'Composition' or 'Improvisation'; his *Black Relationship* was reproduced on the sleeve of Braxton's *Six Compositions: Quartet* LP. Kandinsky's book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, discusses the relationship between music and painting, as well as the metaphysical dimensions of colour, form and movement.

The Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) had chromesthetic perception, that is he literally 'saw' colours in relation to sounds; and he tried to express these correspondences in his work. For *Prometheus: the Poem of Fire* he had a colleague build a 'keyboard of light' which played the colours of the music; for his *Prefatory Action* he wished to include coloured lights, processions, scents and tastes in the score. His work, harmonically complex, intensely symbolic and mystical (he was a student of Theosophy), culminated in his plans for a meta-composition, *Mysterium*, which would incorporate all the arts, re-create the history of the universe from his mystical perspective, and take the form of a seven-day festival in the Himalayas to climax in the actual destruction of our physical plane of existence, as his music dissolved the world in an abyss of flame, and the return of all being to its spiritual state on the 'plane of unity'. (See Bowers, 1974, pp. 43-100, 124-6)

## LEEDS CONCERT, CIVIC THEATRE

### First Set (Primary Territories)

*Composition 122 (+ 108A)*

*Composition 69N*

*Composition 69Q*

Piano solo (from *Piano Piece 1*)

*Composition 69M*

### Second Set (Primary Territories)

*Composition 69H*

Bass solo (from *Composition 96*)

*Composition 69(O)*

*Composition 116*

(The theatre's acoustics are troublesome; the sound seems muffled and erratic. Also, it's an old-fashioned proscenium-arch theatre, golden stars decorating a dark-blue ceiling, and a high stage that emphatically separates the group from the audience. To me it feels uncomfortable, at odds with the spirit of the music, which I've found at its most effective in the more intimate settings at Birmingham, Leicester, Southampton and Bristol - in fact, I'd love to sit right in the middle of the players and bathe in the sounds as they flowed around me. My God, what an egoist! Still, the group are highly energized tonight and, soupy sound apart, it's another excellent concert.)

*122* opens with smooth clarinet phrases that become increasingly choppy, as the quartet simmer through a tangled improvisation and into *69N*, a tense see-saw bass figure beneath a theme that prowls, lopes, then flares into a dreamy sopranino solo before the group hit the jaunty line that signals *69Q*: a quick, ferocious rendition gives way to *Piano Piece 1*, Braxton's debut composition, a work of sudden intervallic leaps, unexpected pauses, abrupt spurts of sound within a slowly turning space; Braxton listens, eyes closed, swaying slightly, as Marilyn brings the notes to life, occasionally glancing towards him. Next, a duet of bows—the bass's subterranean rumbles mesh with whooshing harmonics as Gerry bows the cymbal rim; then the sopranino leads into the joyful dash of *69M*, one of Braxton's most ebullient themes and embellished here by a superbly percussive piano solo and Gerry's inspired flailing, before a typically heart-stopping unison halt.

The second set begins musingly on *69H*, then quickly settles into a long section of frenetic improvisation that I can't get into at all. Mark's solo re-earths the quartet, Gerry follows with a passage of 'little sounds'—twangs, scratches, rattles—and piano/clarinet intertwine for a lovely reading of *69(O)*, its gently rolling theme lapped by a wash of cymbals and humming bass. A new space opens up—cool, fresh, dawnlike—and across the silence float clarinet trills, ghostly yelps, piano ripples; bass lines uncoil like strands of fog. Braxton takes a brief *a cappella* alto solo, slivers and tiny whorls of sound so quiet you can hear the keys click against the metal of his horn. A slight swing of the alto and everyone leaps into *116*, an extensive version fired first by Braxton's squealing sopranino then a Crispell solo that starts like light dancing on water and ends with clusters of notes coursing through the pulse track as if shooting rapids. The final

sprint along the synchronized pulse tracks is like four champion hurdlers racing neck-and-neck for the line - and freeze-frame on a perfect dead-heat!

Back in the dressing-room, Marilyn suddenly cocks her head towards the PA speaker on the wall. 'What record is that?' We listen, mystified, to this weird, dissonant torch song on solo piano.

'It's not a record,' says Gerry, coming in. 'It's Anthony upstairs'

We dash back up to the stage. Braxton, the scraggly collar of Evan Parker's overcoat upturned, is hunched over the piano picking a slow, perverse blues out of *What's New*. He looks up with an abashed grin. 'I love those torchy songs—Jerome Kern, George Gershwin . . .'

He plays on in his quirky style (edgy, like his alto can be, but less deft, more crabbed). It's like a film scene: the empty auditorium, a stage strewn with cables and wires, and, half-hidden in the shadows, Braxton doodling a lonesome blues.

I smile. 'They should make a movie of this tour.'

'Hey, yeah!' Braxton's face lights up. 'Who'll be me? Can we get Sammy Davis Jr?'

Later, driving back to the hotel, we make our usual stop-over at McDonalds for Braxton to get his late-night burger. Waiting in the van, I feel a sudden pang of hunger. Oh no! I know there'll be nothing to eat back at the hotel. My conscience wrestles with my stomach for a full twenty seconds; but it's no contest.

As I join him in the queue, Braxton chortles with glee. 'He's cracked! Lock has cracked! A Big Mac for Graham Lock!'

'Just a fishburger,' I snap testily. 'I still have *some* integrity.' But a few moments later Braxton is irrepressible: Marilyn and Mark sheepishly join us in the queue. 'Yay, they're all cracking now!' he whoops. 'We better rename this group the Braxburger Four.'

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## **METAROAD (2)**

**by Graham Lock**

**from *Forces in Motion: Anthony Braxton and the Meta-reality of Creative Music: Interviews and Tour Notes, England 1985* (London: Quartet, 1988)**

**SOUND LOGIC, SOUND MAGIC 4: THE  
METAPHYSICS OF STRUCTURE**

*(This interview was, to a large degree, an attempt to clarify and amplify some of the statements on structure that Braxton had made during our meeting in 1984. The first three sections below are the relevant extracts from that earlier conversation. )*

**AFFINITY INSIGHT- WHAT  
STRUCTURE IS**

L: Your liner notes talk about the formal and structural aspects of the music, but never its emotional dimension. Why is that?

B: Hmm ... I don't know how to deal with that ... It seems to me that the significance of improvisation, as it's been practised through the trans-African continuum, has to do with its relation to affinity dynamics and affinity insight, and every period of the music has established the same relationships between process and the dynamics of 'doing'. So I haven't talked about feeling, or tried to discuss the emotional aspects of the music, because it seemed to me that the significance of improvisation is for each person to find his or her own relationship with 'doing'; to be as true as you can be to yourself, the concept to self-realization.

L: You've talked before of the three degrees of affinity postulation and insight - could you explain what these are?

B: Well, the underlying basis of music has to do with affinity insight: on the third degree, for the individual with respect to self-realization; on the second degree, for the individual with respect to the ensemble and the larger community group; on the first degree, for the individual with respect to establishing a relationship with God or whatever the higher forces would be for the person reading this. In this context, affinity postulation is the term I use for the thoughts and information that go out with the sound, while affinity insight refers to the same information as it comes back to the player in the playing, a process of self-realization.\*

To return to your original question, my fascination, up until 1981, '82, had been with the concept of structure, the concept of form: not as a dry, theoretical exercise but rather to look into the reality of structure and what it poses to the dynamics of the music - the understanding being that given structures will make certain things happen. That's what structure is; it doesn't have anything to do with me telling somebody what to feel, but with creating a structural situation or a language situation that has particular variables which will allow certain things to happen, and each individual will be able to establish their own relationship with it.

\*The three degrees of affinity insight should not be confused with the affinity insight principles (1) and (2), which represent a completely separate concept; see pp. 312-13fn

Structure on that level can be seen as an extension of the concept of chord changes; writing down a path of harmonic progressions and creating a language inside of that, which is what we're dealing with in the concept of vertical harmony. I was looking for a horizontal continuity; the reality of structural ingredients as a basis for setting up given vibrational properties - and each individual participating in that act will discover their own dynamics in terms of feeling or the emotional weight of the music.

## BOPBE

I've always respected the science in the music, though I haven't respected some of the related value systems: for instance, the concept of notation—I don't think notation is the problem, it's the concepts that surround notation. Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, all of the master Europeans who solidified Western art music were instrumentalists and improvisers as well as composers. Notation wasn't used then as a choking device to stop the blood, the dynamic, of the culture; it was later, when the technocrats made the process more important than the results, that we got the so-called crisis of Western art music, which is still with us. In fact, we can see the same mind-set entering the bebop continuum: now they're making bebop so 'correct', it will be bopbe or something - it won't be the same music that Charlie Parker and John Coltrane played.

## INVENTING THE WHEEL 500 TIMES

L: The link between Bach and Charlie Parker being that each evolved a new musical language using improvisation as a major resource?

B: Yes. What it is, I'm interested in individuals who develop a *body* of music. In the sixties and seventies there was so much disrespect for composition: I felt that could not be correct, as everything that has been demonstrated in the last 1,000 years seems to have a relationship to preconceived variables as well as to spontaneity. I thought it a mistake to put down notation simply because of its misuse by the technocrats.

If you look at Bach, Mozart, Harry Partch, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington - all of those people, though on the surface they seem very different, there's an awful lot in common there. I see similarities on every level. Bach . . . the first thing I have to deal with is the actual music, that's powerful music, it's . . . I don't want to say it's beautiful because that's one-dimensional and doesn't capture what I really feel about it. All I can say is, it's *real*; and that kind of music attracts me. There was a law, an order, about the music, and improvisation was used to establish the nature of that law system. It's the same for Duke Ellington's music, or any restructuringist who's trying to establish a body of work.

I'm interested in structure because the concept of structure can be transmitted on several different levels; the understanding being that there *are* things to be transmitted, to be forwarded. Without the concept of structure each generation would have to rediscover the same things, learn the same lessons: like, we'd have to invent the wheel 500 times. The significance of form is that information can be carried forward; a given form can make given variables come into play.

The concept of music science has to do with establishing the restructuring dynamics of the time zone, establishing devices so people will later be able to participate - the concept of ritual. Of course, we're riddled with entertainment in the West, which is not my idea of the highest use of creativity: but form as ritual could serve as the basis to involve participation with meaning, to establish a context to be able to deal with what we call God or the higher forces. I think that is

the proper role of creativity, and it's certainly in accordance with the dictates of African dynamics and with those of early Europe, before the technocrats came.

## GOING TO SEE THE CHICKEN FIGHT

L: Today I'd like to try and talk about structure on the abstract level; maybe uncover a little more of its significance for you.

B: Oh, I'm not that interested in structure (*laughs*).

L: When we talked last year you told me one of your fascinations with structure was that given structures make certain things happen.

B: That's right.

L: Exactly what kind of things do you mean?

B: I'm saying that the reality of a given set of variables in the space sets into motion many different variables—*vibrational* variables. The problem with the nature of present-day Western expansionism has been that, in many cases, we've tapped into various areas of fundamentals but we've forgotten the primary information that made a given area what it is. We're working with a lot of areas of information whose spiritual function we don't really understand, so we're dealing only with the empirical function or with what happens when a given set of empirical operatives are put into the space. I'm saying that there's no real function without its meta-function and significance.

In *Tri-axium Writings I* I talk about Indian music, the fact that they designed a music where, if a given scale is played, they'll tell you what that scale is for. When people die, there's a music for dying; when people are born, there's a music: different musics for different ceremonies. That's why I say the concept of ritual is the highest possible function, because the ritual is an affirmation of our existence. We've lost that since the onslaught of the European technocrat and instead we have whatever empirical logics are set into motion based on empirical criteria. OK, that's . . . interesting. I'm as grateful as everyone for the wonderful discoveries we have, whether it's frozen TV dinners or going to see the chicken fight (*laughs*). I mean, I'm constantly amazed at the wonder of Western culture (*laughs*).

*But*, in the process, I believe there are other variables which have been sacrificed in this time period, variables based on value systems; and, you know, the lack of some of these fundamentals has certainly made life in black America complex. Has made life for the creative woman (and the non-creative woman) complex. Has made life for the European mystic complex. Not to mention the so-called Third World.

I'd like to be part of some new realignment, although I have no illusions that my music or my thoughts are going to change anything, as far as the reality of present-day 'influences'. But I can still think about these matters and function in my music with respect to my beliefs.

## THE THEORY OF THE ISOLATED PAWN - SAVED BY UNLOGIC!

L: You're saying that each of the language types you've compiled, for example, has a particular function separate from its musical function?

B: I'm saying that every force sets something into motion. If you say, what? I'd say that's part of what I'm learning.

L: The question would be more how do you find out which forces you set in motion?

B: I'll let you know by your book ten (*laughs*).

L: After twenty years of study, you must have *some* idea!

B: I can only talk about aspects of this. In terms of what I'm really dealing with in this time period, I can't talk about that because I would be disrespecting you and disrespecting me.

L: Well, tell me what you can tell me (*laughs*).

B: But I've just told you! (*Laughs.*) OK, I don't want to play with you in this area . . . play is not the right way of saying it, but I don't want to disrespect you by talking about something that I have not thought out, or that I have thought out but am not ready to talk about. Remember the isolated pawn theory!

L: The *what*?

B: The isolated pawn theory. Is it justified to kill an innocent pawn just because your opponent has made a mistake and left that pawn unprotected? I was very concerned about this question as a young man and later in Paris I met Bruce Carrington, who is a very special friend of mine, and he talked to me about a woman who had told him that she had just destroyed a man, destroyed him vibrationally, and this man was hurt. He asked her, why did you do it? And she said, well, he came into my path. That's what she said; so we had to deal with that—she destroyed him because he was there. OK, I can relate to that. Now, on the chess board, if a person puts out a pawn that is not protected, you have to destroy that pawn—like, how dare they do that! It's just to kill a pawn that is not protected, as long as it doesn't disturb your position on the board and it further enhances your objectives. To destroy that pawn would be part of the lesson that has to be learned: destruction in that context becomes even respectable. That was the isolated pawn theory.

L: This is a justice without mercy . . .

B: No, wait, that's not the end of the story. I suddenly discovered something - you don't *want* to destroy anybody! If you can help it. Don't kill the pawn. Why? Because of *utilogic*. OK, back to the question: I can't answer it because of the isolated pawn theory.

## DEVELOP INTO A ROCK

L: Anthony, that's as clear as mud (*laughs*). But I don't want to be destroyed, so let's move on. You also said that structure is coded information: can we talk about this?

B: We could maybe deal a little bit with that question (*laughs*). Structure is coded information: the American Indian certainly understood that, the early Europeans understood, before and after the Dark Ages; Africans have always known it. So what's the question?

L: Er . . .

B: You're talking about calibrations, is that it?

L: I've no idea *what* I'm talking about (*laughs*). How is structure coded information?

B: What about African rhythms? Each rhythm activates something, each rhythm is played for a function, a purpose. I'm saying there's a relationship between that rhythm and what is.

L: These facets of structure, are they the chief reason why you're not interested in total improvisation *per se*?

B: Yes and no. Let me explore that. I'm not interested in only total improvisation because I don't believe existential anarchy is the highest context. Of course, this wasn't apparent in the early sixties, but what became apparent was that no evolution was taking place (in terms of what my interests were) in collective improvisation, except for affinity insight on the third degree. In other words, as an individual participating in collective improvisation, I would have the opportunity to understand myself better; as I've said, the significance of improvisation resides in the fact that it

helps you to develop your nature. *But* the concept of development is very existential. You can *develop* into a mass murderer. You can *develop* into a rock! (*Laughs.*) And without structural criteria, there can be no unity for the ensemble: or, at least, evolution for the individual is one reality, evolution for the group involves another reality. Structure is part of how evolution is arrived at; but I don't mean any disrespect for collective improvisation. I am an improviser.

## WHERE THINKING IS A DIRTY WORD

L: Last year we also talked about the relationship between structure and emotion, and the reasons why you don't discuss the emotional dimensions of the music in your notes. Your position is that emotion is brought to the music by the player, it's a subjective element that can't be composed—is that right?

B: Let me clarify that. Every member of the quartet, of course, has the possibility to take solos, extended improvisation; I try to get out of their way and make sure everybody has a chance to express themselves. That's part of what the family is; and inside that, each person brings their own emotions to the moment.

I didn't talk about emotion so much as a young man because of what I was dealing with then as a young African-American: everywhere I looked I was seeing a profound disrespect in how the music was written about. I reacted against that; I didn't want my music to be perceived as having no thought. I mean, only in jazz is thinking a dirty word! It's incredible, the value systems and political forces that surround and manipulate the music every day.

In this time period my work is perceived as being very cold and Braxton doesn't swing—that's only because those same forces are dictating and defining what feeling is. I don't think I'm the only one who suffers from this mind-set: the reality implications of the white improviser are not separate from the notion that white people can think great but they can't feel, while black people have all this feeling but no real thoughts. You know, the real experts on black people are white people. The experts on *elbows* are white people, the experts on *ankles* are white people. The experts on Charlie Parker are white people. Well, that's fine, but it doesn't really express all of what's happening. (Let me also add this: if African-American and trans-African intellectuals are content to let the Europeans do all the defining, then it serves them right for us to be in the mess that we're in now.)

## EMOTIONAL ZONES—'I NEVER MEANT BECOME AN ANDROID'

L: I'd like to talk more about this, but can we leave it for tomorrow? Just now, let's carry on with structure and emotion.

B: What more can I say about emotion? I mean, there's no one kind of emotion. If a given piece of music is written with particular dynamics, in terms of interpretation, I want it executed like it's written; but when we get into the actual improvisation, there are other laws at work. What I've tried to do is design a music whose *science* would establish certain variables, and the improvisation will take care of itself. I don't *worry* so much about emotion, but that doesn't mean I have no respect for it. I'm interested in establishing contexts where we can fulfil ourselves and approach creativity on whatever level of emotion we can bring to it. So, the people in the quartet, I don't talk to them about what to play, I just establish a structural framework which will set into motion its own operatives. Improvisation in that context is improvisation in a



controlled space or an understood space, a *perceived* space. And the structure will help define the nature of the thoughts which will take place in the music. As far as the emotion is concerned, we never know exactly what the emotions are going to be: our intentions are positive; though, just as my structural intentions are positive.

L: You've talked about music for different functions—music to heal, etc: presumably there is also a music for sadness, a music for anger?

B: Yes, and my hope is, as I learn more about my work and as I'm able to work harder and evolve the music, that I might be able to create a music that would establish precise emotional zones - even further than that, let's say precise vibrational zones. But we'll come back to that in book ten (*laughs*).

L: Does the blues not already do this? I know blues is a versatile music, but on one level there are archetypal blues structures and there are specific emotional zones associated with the blues. I mean, I always seem to end up drowning my sorrows with Bobby Bland and Smokey Robinson records (*laughs*).

B: Well then, you have very good taste, sir! (*Laughs.*)

L: Have you found that particular structures fit particular emotional states?

B: Yes, but I can't really go into it any further, it's a current area of research.

L.: Can you say if you think such a relationship is an inherent potential of the musical form or is it also to do with cultural influences, a learned response?

B: I think that information dynamics have a lot to do with the time period, with the part of the planet that a given group of people have migrated to—and also with what cosmic decisions have been made. I think that for every primary information strain there is a meta-reality dynamic that is manifested in different ways, but which establishes the same forces in motion in every time period.

L: So structure can be a manifestation of cosmic forces and/or a form of personal expression?

B: Structure is a thought process. As human beings evolve we will have to develop forms that are relevant to whatever planes people are thinking on. But the concept of sound logic is not that separate from the concept of just waking up and getting through the day. It's all part of the same phenomenon as far as I'm concerned.

L: Yes, without music, just waking up would be too much to deal with! (*Laughs.*) I also wanted to ask you about something referred to in your *Cadence* interview,\* that at one time you had tried to exclude personality from your music. I assume you were really talking about ego.

B: There's more to it than that. I was actually trying to approach something else and that's been greatly misunderstood. I wanted, as a young man, for myself and for the people I played with not to think only about the dynamics that had been opened up by John Coltrane, the whole world of extended solos. Everybody was playing for five hours! I was looking for alternatives and I thought then in terms of not putting so much emphasis on your emotion at the expense of potential event-forming possibilities in the music. I kind of wanted to approach it from a Zen-like attitude—I was very influenced by John Cage in that period—but I found that that would not work for me.

I haven't changed my emotional relationship to the music in any real way. Even when I was trying to approach it from the other side, I never meant become an android, I just meant, you know, let's also look at the other responsibilities that take place in the space.

\*Carey 1984 p. 9

## FREEDOM—'NOW I CAN KILL YOU'

It's like, everybody wanted to use freedom as a context to *freak* out, and that was not what I was talking about. One of the problems with collective improvisation, as far as I'm concerned, is that people who use anarchy or collective improvisation will interpret that to mean 'Now I can kill you'; and I'm saying, wait a minute! OK, it's true that in a free-thought zone, you can think of anything you want to think, but that was not the optimum state of what I had in mind when I said, let's have freedom. I thought any transformational understanding of so-called freedom would imply that you would be free to find those disciplines that suited you, free to understand your own value systems; but not that you would just freak out because 'the teacher's not there'. *The teacher is still there!*

It's one thing to talk about the post-Ayler cycle with respect to the events which took place in the first year, the second year . . . but if you look back at the last twenty years, what has freedom meant? For a great many people, so-called freedom music is more limiting than bebop, because in bebop you can play a ballad or change the tempo or the key. So-called freedom has not helped us as a family, as a collective, to understand responsibility better. Only the master musicians, the ones who really understood what they were doing and who did their homework, have been able to generate forward motion. So the notion of freedom that was being perpetrated in the sixties might not have been the healthiest notion. I say 'healthiest notion' because I'm not opposed to the *state* of freedom; I believe that with correct information and an understanding of respect for humanity, human beings can rise to their potential. But fixed and open variables, with the fixed variables functioning from fundamental value systems - that's what freedom means to me.\*

## TRANSFORMATION AND RITUAL

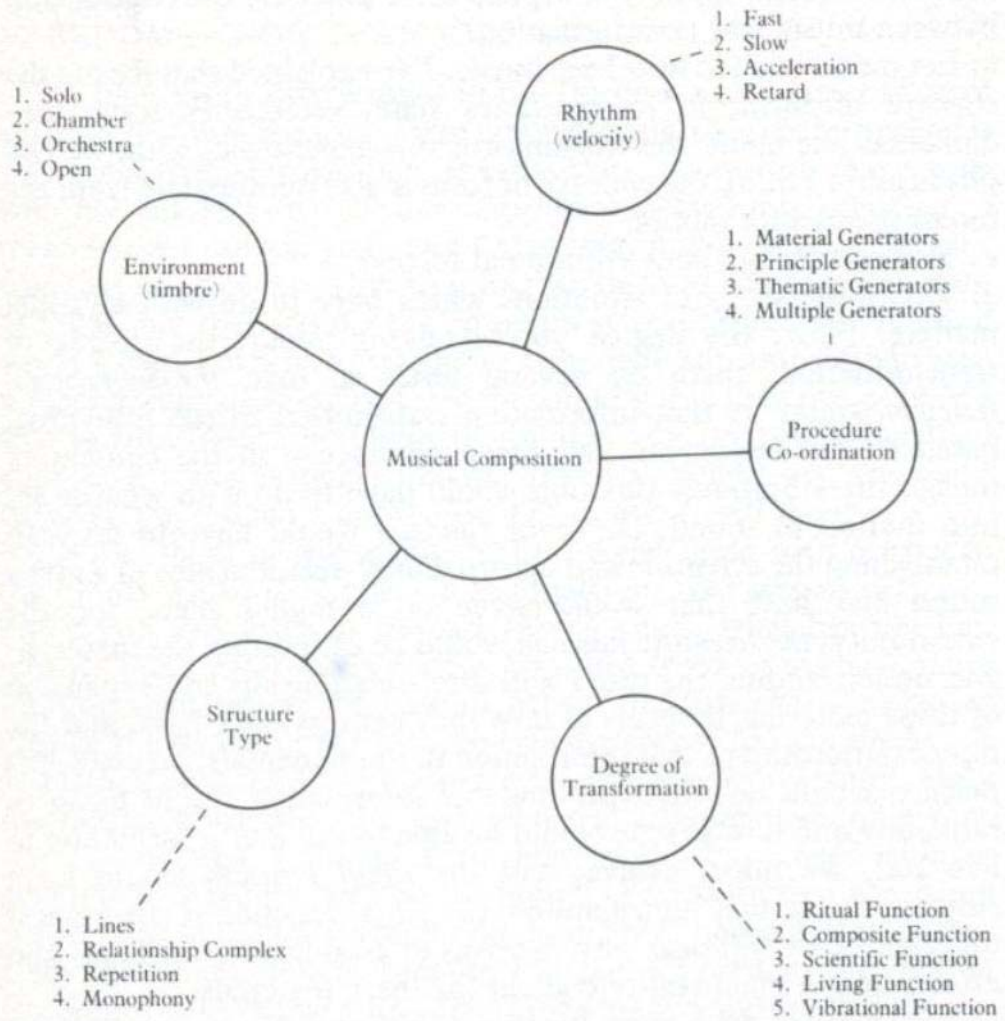
L: You've talked about transformational understanding, transformational culture. Could you explain more precisely the relationship between music and transformation?

B: Let me go back to how I see music. I've explained that for me the concept of form, in its optimum state, establishes some fundamental line about the workings of this experience, what we call physicality. I think the concept of form is also not separate from the forces it sets into motion.

L: You're talking about vibrational forces?

B: Yes, a hierarchy of vibrations which have to do with spiritual matters. Now, the degree you're talking about, the degree of transformation, there are several levels to that: *the vibrational function* would be that information transmitted to the individual based on self-realization and life experience—in the context of music, the vibrational function would have to do with what is set into motion in sound; *the living function* would have to do with establishing the scientific and spiritual inter-relationships of a given sound and how that would serve on a higher plane for the community; *the scientific function* would be calibrating the materials and understanding the order and inter-relationship and expansion of those materials in terms of how they express their laws, and the inter-relationship of that information to fundamentals; *the composite function* would be

\*(C.f. Stockhausen's comments on a free jazz concert he attended in 1971: 'Everyone played as loud and as fast as possible, and everyone at once . . . But that's what always happens when people say "Let's be free": it produces chaos and destruction, because they have never learnt to use freedom as a means of restricting oneself, so that others can also be free.' Quoted in Maconie, 1981, p. 244)



**Elements of Musical Composition**

what that body of information would mean to humanity and how people would be able to use that information to live and, we hope, evolve; and the *ritual function* would be a ritualization of that information—the ritual function is the highest function that I will deal with in terms of establishing materials and establishing a meta-reality context for these materials.

L: Why is ritual the highest function? I'm sorry, I'm not clear about this.

B: Ah . . . rather than disrespect myself by thinking I could understand more than I could understand, I go to the significance of ritual as a way of establishing a platform for my spiritual beliefs, and to portray a methodological and fantasy projection of my worldview and spiritual view as a platform to state my beliefs.

L: Is it like an enactment of the vibrational function?

B: No, no. It would be an affirmation of all the degrees, coupled with the consideration of ethics, spirituality—all that ritual really means: to erect an *experience* that reflects my beliefs about the cosmos, about physicality, about life, intention, purpose, motivation, etc. I want every aspect of my music, every function, at some point to be able to be viewed from all of these contexts.

L: And the degrees of transformation can be seen as aspects of musical form in the way that, say, structural criteria can?

B: Well, for instance, if we draw, on the abstract level, the ingredients of musical composition, using the same format that we did before: (*draws, see p. 242*).

## ENDGAME

L: One last point: you mentioned last year that sometimes when you get stuck with a musical problem, you go and read Plato or Aristotle. Could you expand on that?

B: All I can say is that I'll be reading much more of their work in the future too. I'm interested in the ancient literature; Plato and Aristotle are not that long ago, but I include them as part of the early information. I'm interested in the world of thought, hopefully better to understand—or not understand—this experience.

L: I thought there might be a more specific purpose. B: Well, there is, but I can't talk about it (*laughs*).

L: Aaaarrggghhhh! ! !

B: Graham, I can't talk about what has not been demonstrated. But I think we've got a lot done today. Or have we? (*Laughs*.)

L: The fact that you refuse to talk about so much kind of speeds it along.

B: You're a hard man, sir. *Hard!* You must be from the old school (*laughs*). Do you play chess, Graham?

L: No. I haven't played since I left school.

B: Is that so? I bet you're really a grandmaster (*laughs*).

L: (*laughs*) Well, I thought I was winning today, but you still managed a stalemate.

*Forces in Motion* is based on the Braxton quartet's two-week Contemporary Music Network tour of England in November 1985. The tour party was comprised of Anthony Braxton (reeds), Marilyn Crispell (piano), Mark Dresser (bass), Gerry Hemingway (percussion), Tony Cresswell (tour manager) and Graham Lock (journalist).

Three of the concerts from the tour (at London, Birmingham and Coventry) have been released on CD by Leo Records and the Coventry concert discs also include extracts from Lock's interviews with Braxton.

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