

EPISTROPHY



Call for papers
Epistrophy, the jazz journal - #3

Conflicts

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The next issue of Epistrophy will invite readers to examine jazz through the prism of the conflicts that have punctuated its history and contributed to its identity. Whether as regards the playful jousting and symbolic confrontations that arise from performance or the differing aesthetic viewpoints, theoretical disagreements, ideological clashes and social, political or identity struggles that jazz has sparked or espoused, the ways it is expressed fall into the conflictual dynamics, the scope of whose issues provide so many starting points for the multidisciplinary discussions the magazine intends to conduct. These countless debates may be grouped into three main categories :

Conflicts between listeners and critics

This category covers conflicts dealing with the very identity of jazz and the musical and presentation practices that the word covers. Over and above arguments by commentators about the origins of the word jazz, we may wonder why such virulent disputes have gone on between artists and critics about what is jazz and what is not, what confirms its authenticity, its "purity", or what, on the other hand, may appear as a sign of corruption and decadence.

The virulence of these conflicts is at least as closely connected with the complexity of the phenomenon as with the violence of the political and social history during which it emerged. Far from being qualifiable as mere petty squabbling, these disagreements often bear witness to ideological stands in which can be perceived such fundamental debates of contemporary thought as going beyond the dichotomies of modern aesthetics, working out a post-colonial theory and the post-modern criticism of the Enlightenment. So through the example of theoretical confrontations about jazz, it is the dialectical value of the conflict that is actually being questioned.

What are the real issues at stake in the major controversies over the criticism and theory of jazz ? What is happening with these conflicts at present ? Have they been resolved ? Have they made way for new forms of antagonism ? What conflicts has analysis of the phenomenon given rise to today ? Has the specificity of jazz as a subject helped to supply new tools for analysis ?

So this first point raises a historiographical debate about the various trends in criticism, and the subject of analysing the connections between the current state of knowledge and the conflictual dynamics at play in the theoretical sphere.

Historical, social and identity conflicts

This second set of issues covers the conflicts that jazz artists have faced or referred to in their compositions. Here we may raise the question of the influence and visibility of internal power struggles in the artistic sphere. Conflictual relations among artists, or between artists and organisations or production companies, have had, and still have, a decisive impact on artistic production. From the famous strike started in 1942 by the American Federation of Musicians, which contributed to the decline of big bands, to the organisation in 1960 of the alternative « Newport Rebels » festival in response to the commercialization of the original, and to the dispute which has divided the community of casual entertainment workers in France for the past 20 years or so, the history of jazz has been punctuated by protests whose repercussions have been as significant as they are poorly understood. By definition, a conflict implies a disagreement or a clash of interests, and a real or symbolic confrontation in the social sphere.

What does this say about the conflicts in the jazz world ? What are the tensions behind them ? What forms do they take and where are they happening ? What instruments do artists bring into play in support of their struggles ? And how is that affecting musical production ?

In addition to these clashes in the internal artistic sphere, jazz is involved in historical and political conflicts that are no less decisive. Although the relationship between the development of jazz and the political struggle of African Americans and its role in the two world wars has been the subject of a great deal of research, many grey areas remain and some episodes have acquired a legendary dimension that makes them difficult to grasp. For instance, the be-bop and free jazz revolutions, whose political nature is still disputed. In this respect, research that aims to document and reinterpret crucial moments in the history of jazz, and communications dealing with compositions, which, like « Fables of Faubus » by Charles Mingus, deliberately evoke political conflicts, will be welcomed. Less well-known issues like the black feminists' struggle, exemplified by artist-activists such as Abbey Lincoln and Jeanne Lee, may also be discussed.

Conflicts over performance

This third category examines the dynamics of the clashes that come into play in musical performance.

The practice of jazz has sometimes been based on what may be called a « peaceful conflict », because the musicians seem to be competing, at least symbolically, using a variety of procedures (question/answer, interaction and so on) which have sometimes taken the form of explicit musical jousts like « cutting contests » during jam sessions.

But what is the meaning of this kind of joust ? What is at stake during such a confrontation ? How is the competitive dimension of jazz playing displayed in contemporary performance ? Does the imagery of musical jousts so dear to critics' hearts correspond to the artists' actual experience, depending on the period or style ? Is the clash always symbolic and playful, or does it convey genuine animosity ?

If we are to believe Paul Berliner¹, there are many musical procedures for displaying hostility to a musician, but it is probably a good idea to evaluate to what extent such practices are now used and in what ways they are useful to the music or not. The way jazz bands operate has often been held up as a model for harmonious social organisation. It's an appealing analogy, but if it is to be convincing, it needs to be enhanced by a discussion on how much weight the model places on the notion of conflict.

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There are many examples of « jazz conflicts », which is why the lines of inquiry mentioned here do not claim to be exhaustive. They are only intended to encourage us to think about the relationship between jazz and the conflicts that drive it forward, and they assume that the following question lies in the background : is it jazz itself which is intrinsically conflictual, or are the conflicts created by the theoretical sphere that is asking about them ? In other words, should we consider that there is a real rift between different types of jazz, or are such controversies merely the result of an attempt to take over the debate by those trying to understand them ? In other words, should we consider that there is a real chiasm between different jazz, or are these controversies the result of an attempt at appropriation by those who seek to understand it ? The challenge is to find out whether a calm, multidisciplinary approach to jazz research, such as Epistrophe would like to see, is truly possible...

The viewpoints outlined here are aimed at all disciplinary fields. The ideas put forward in the article may take various forms but the priority themes are as follows :

The history and latest news of conflicts over how jazz is regarded and analysed

Jazz as an expression of social, political and aesthetic conflicts

Conflicts between actors in the jazz sphere

Confrontations (peaceful or not) at the core of jazz performance practices : playing « against » and/or "with one's adversary / rival / partners

Submission Process

The deadline for proposal submission is 01 September 2017. Proposals should be sent to the following address : epistrophe@epistrophe.fr

Proposals must include :

A title

A proposal for an article of about 3000 signs

A brief bibliography

A short bio-bibliography of the author

The editorial committee of the review will select the proposals and inform their authors by October 01, 2017.

If the proposal is accepted, authors undertake to send their complete article no later than January 1, 2018 for publication in June 2018. The articles will be double-blind peer reviewed by the reading committee.

Expected articles are 30,000 signs maximum (spaces, notes and bibliography not included) and may include photos, music and / or videos in separate files according to the standards set out in the guideline.

¹ Berliner, Paul, *Thinking in Jazz : The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 463.