

Keynote Address at the
Guelph Jazz Festival, 2007


Braxton

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Notes and Opinions

Anthony Braxton Keynote Address at the Guelph Jazz Festival, 2007¹ ***Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario, Canada***

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Anthony Braxton: Thank you very much. I am very grateful to have an opportunity to come to Guelph. I've been hearing about the city of Guelph and the University of Guelph now for something like 10 years and I have found myself on many occasions reading about particular festivals, and so it has real meaning for me to have this opportunity. I'll be here for the next three days, and I have a real love for Canada anyway. And so it's great to have an opportunity to get out of America. I love my country, but it is clear that we find ourselves in a very complex time/space. A complex time/space that, in many ways, harkens back to the time/space of the '60s when I would, as a young guy, embrace the discipline of music as my life's work.

Today I'd like to talk to you about the evolution of what I now refer to as a tri-centric thought unit, offering as a way to focus on the dynamics of model building and what trans-idiomatic model building has meant to me in the last 40 years, going back to the '60s and '50s. I feel fortunate to have had the possibility to have come up in a time/space where it was possible to look at the evolution of Mr. Coltrane's music or Dave Brubeck. For myself, I was very connected to the great music of Arnold Schoenberg and Sun Ra.

In the time/space of the '60s, I had the good fortune of working [with] and becoming part of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), which meant everything to me because in that time/space [there were] many arguments about what constituted the correct path for the music. When for some of us it was becoming clear that whatever the dimensions of the next time cycle that, in fact, it would be [a] trans-idiomatic as opposed to an ethnic-centric way of thinking of activities. And it would be as part of the challenge in the time/space of the '60s that the AACM would come together to start the discussion about what constituted explorative assumptions, and how could we work together to support one another. Talking with Kyle Brenders [of the Association of Improvising Musicians Toronto] in the last week, and having the opportunity to rehearse for three days in Toronto, suddenly, again I became aware that there are new communities emerging that are related to the challenge of this time period. Where in Toronto there are now groups coming together with a membership that consists of from 85 to 160 musicians. Immediately, I found myself thinking of my experiences in the AACM, but where as a young guy I used to think of cycles, I now think in terms of vibrational continuums. The challenge of human vibrational dynamics is not an ethnic-centric subject that is directed to isolated particulars, but rather this subject extends to include the greater human family. A group that contains up to 160 people is an evolution of the idea of community activism and dynamic involvement. This is something that can give the composite world community hope for real and meaningful change.

The word "cycles" would pop up in the '60s a great deal. What goes around comes around. More and more I would come to see that [I was] looking at progressionalism rather than using the construct of cycle as a one-dimensional revolution. I came to understand that spiral might be a better way of thinking about progressionalism, because things come around; but it never comes quite to the same place, because the planet is changing, cosmic forces are changing. There is always a fresh "it" and so, to learn about this new organization coming together, I found myself feeling, well this is a part of the challenge and challenges of this new time cycle. Where even with the complexity of war and American foreign policy blunders, we continue to see global interconnection in a way that is hopeful and exciting.

About my own work? Well, my so-called music experience would come together ironically, at the end of a music experience rather than at the beginning of a music experience. What am I referring to? I am referring to a decision I took in the middle 1960s to embrace solo musics. At the time I was very influenced by the solo music of Arnold Schoenberg, especially Opus 11.² I was very connected to the great solo musics of Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage, and the great solo musics of Cecil Taylor. And so I would make the decision to have a solo concert to move into this new medium, as part of what I thought would be a

creative experience that would set up genesis propositions for the next time cycle for my music work. Unfortunately, I would also bring to the experience a concept of a psychology and the concept of freedom that was consistent with the '60s synergies as well. And, back in that time period: "Oh freedom, we want freedom, we want freedom." And so I gave a solo concert with freedom. At the end of that concert, I came to understand that I wasn't looking for freedom, or un-freedom for that matter, and that this solo improvisatory performance experience had made it very clear that existential freedom was not exactly what I was looking for. It would be at that point where my so-called musics would begin: that is to say the genesis foundation, the genesis poetics that would serve as a platform for the model that I would construct would be a foundation that says it's not about freedom. It's not about idiomatic certainty. Rather, I was looking for a way to negotiate in between the primary spaces. Later on, the mystical signature of the model that I've been working on would become navigation through form. And so it would be the second solo concert that would begin the actual modeling elements that would constitute the model that I have been working on for the last 40 years.

Okay, what did I discover from that solo concert? I discovered that among the things that I was looking for was the freedom to understand what constituted an identity. What is identity from a trans-idiomatic perspective, as opposed to "anything that happens is great"? Although, I should also say that I never separated myself from total improvisation. In fact, I continue to be interested in improvisation as part of a construct that says known, unknown, and intuitive emanations all have equal meaning for the model that I'm building. The development of the language/music syntax elements of my material construct would, at some point, become the DNA of the new modeling system that I would start to work with.

Today I would like to (as opposed to playing one composition for 40 minutes or having an extended focus—analysis—into one composition or one group of compositions), today I would like to have a correspondence lecture of my music modeling system that gives an opportunity to explore different bits of different compositions (i.e. structural examples) in the hope that an approach of this nature can give some insight into those things that have fascinated me over the last 40 years.

Okay, the idea of a tri-centric thought unit offering transposed into the creation of actual music making. Tri-centric music as a way of talking of the house of the circle, mutable logic emanations. So-called manifestation: house of the circle, so-called real-time experiences. House of the circle as a symbol for improvisation language music and syntactical improvisation. A house of the circle with the house of the rectangle inside of the circle. For me, after that first solo concert, where in this extended improvisation I'm bumping into this same idea over and over, the challenge in that time period became how to find parameters that could help me to not fall into the same conceptual problem pockets. And in looking in this direction, I would find myself looking at the wonder of syntax as the first degree of the friendly experienter in terms of expression output. Syntax—as related to vocabulary and language.

At that point, I would begin to examine what I would later come to refer to as sonic geometric constructs. That is to say, sonic geometry as the principal modeling tools that would give me the possibility to move out of the vertical space, move out of this serial organizing space, move away from indeterminacy. I wanted the possibility as a friendly experienter to have real-time experiences on the instrument, I wanted the possibility to posit a stable logic intentionality in the domain of composition, and I wanted the possibility to have information that could be translated into other domains. The concept of language music is a concept of vocabularies. In a way, this way of working can be viewed as a kind of talking in tongues in the sense of adopting various syntactical elements that have architectural and poetic proclivities. As a voice inside of the real-time experience, it was very clear to me that on the first plane (of affinity, insight, recognition) I was looking for myself: that being, the concept of self-realization. Creativity for me was a component of a spiritual position. The importance of originality and honesty were emphasized in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians as the first degree of affirmation. I was also looking to better understand the community and the synergies of the community and how that information could be used to have an involvement that was just not about the individual, but something that could be shared. Later, I became interested in an experience that was not an ethnic-centric or idiomatic-centric experience, but something that related to composite reality. And so the ground floor, what I now call the DNA of the tri-centric musics, would be sonic geometric logic improvisations whose characteristics would seek to demonstrate a state of sonic experience, a state of identity or structural identity. What am I describing? I am describing something that's really very similar to the decisions of Johann Sebastian Bach or Beethoven or Jelly Roll Morton. We tend to forget that Mr. Bach kicked it about on the organ; he wrote some of it down. And as a theorist, he continued to develop his system. I would come to see that I wanted to have the same reflection of balances in my experience. And that, then, would become the basis for language musics.

Now, I brought today a model of the system as it relates to tri-centric modeling, and I'll play a couple examples so that you can understand what I'm saying.³ Okay, for the first example we'll just have them put on the first piece and will listen to maybe 10 seconds or something and I'll talk about it.

[Audio clip]

So thank you, you can turn that . . . [motions to sound technician] So what we have here is a long sound with multiphonics . . . a velocity point. If one to 10 would be—one is slow, slow, slow and say 10 is fast, fast, fast—then in terms of pulse velocity, I'd say about a four. This composition, I don't know the opus number, would be an example of taking language number one, which in my system . . . well . . . language number . . . language number one, the house of Shala.⁴ Language number one, as a tri-centric component, is a long sound (continuous state emanations). We could say drones in the house of the rectangle, long sounds in the house of the circle; in the house of the triangle, ghost trance musics as trance musics. I have tried to look at targets based on the number three. In fact, the generating number of the Tri-Centric model is the number three. Like Pythagoras, who also looked at the poetics of number and number correspondences. When we think of Pythagoras, we tend to think of existential number, but actually that whole movement was looking for the three-dimensional poetics of number. And what I have discovered in my work is that the more I think I'm moving forward, the more it feels like the Medieval period or 2000 years ago. Again, it's not the cycle, circle; it's the spiral, but it's amazing how as we plow forwards we discover that what appeared to be new in the beginning was actually something that was worked on before. In some ways we're only recovering that information and re-energizing it with the tools of the modern era. And so the number one. The character Shala. The number one. Long sound. This particular example: language music, long sound meets sound, mass logics in a pulse velocity, number four . . . movement, four movement types.

Okay, let's go to study number three. And I should also say I'm talking about the music today as “the other.” But I don't mean to imply that in the experience of playing the music that it's a one-dimensional possibility. I mean, when I think of the language musics, I think of primary parameters in terms of materials, secondary parameters in terms of explorative assumptions, and I always make sure that one third of every performance is totally the unknown. This way I can kick it about and maybe find something fresh for a change. That is to say, it's very rare that something pops up that has the surprise component that I'm looking for; rather, I've developed a model that can help me in between those moment spaces when there's no real surprise.

That, in my opinion, is the significance of intentionality, the significance of composition, the significance of establishing target logics: wherein between the surprises, there is an input spectra that allows for interesting activities to take place. What that means, then, is that if an improvisation is 10 minutes, I'm lucky if I can get 30 seconds of real creativity, real surprise. If I can get five seconds I am grateful. I am grateful because, for me, music and the wonder of creativity is just like being alive. It's an incredible opportunity. It's an opportunity to be in a body, to wake up with memory and move in physical space. I try with my work to do the best I can do, kick it about, knowing I am going to make a mistake. So get over it Braxton! Get the mistake out of the way, because it wouldn't be a performance by me if I didn't make a mistake. By the same token, I'd rather make a mistake looking for surprise than have an exact un-surprise. It's one way to find myself in a position where the how becomes more important than the “it.”

And so there are three psychologies in language music: the psychology of structural parameters, the rectangle inside the circle; the psychology of looking for secondary initiatives and surprise/surprises; and finally “x to the unknown,” where maybe this might be a good day and maybe something might come up out of this. But if it doesn't come up, then I have a set of components that I can use to have the best experience possible. Okay, next example.

[Audio clip]

Combination of number three trills with legato formings. Depending on the improvisation, sometimes target pitch materials as part of the central logic. Okay, could you go back now to number two [spoken to the sound technician]?

[Audio clip]

Phrase grouping structures. Imbalanced contours. Fast velocity. Secondary intervallics. Okay. So now I'd like to change the axis and take the logic from this improvisation/composition. And by the way, I think of the language music concepts as improvisation/composition, all welded together into one entity. I'd like to play another part of how the system has evolved, hopefully evolved, and that would be taking the logics from real-time experience and transposing that information into the house of the rectangle into declarative intentionalities or structures. [To the sound technician,] Would you play the first composition?

[Audio clip]

This is *Composition 6C* or something, I'm not sure of the opus number. But it would be an example of a phrase-grouping based composition: high velocity, with secondary inputs of staccato line logic, formings, put together as a material structure, a material generating structure for improvisation. It would be an example of a line forming logic structure that takes similar information from the improvisation that we experienced in the solo musics, but translating it into a notated space. That would be one example.

We're looking at going from the house of the circle to the house of the rectangle—going now to the house of the triangle and looking at phrase-grouping based musics. The house of the triangle in this context, and transposition in this context, would involve a composition created for an area space the size of a football field for 100 tubas [*Composition 19*]. The composition is designed in four different sections. The material is written out, but there are also target inputs for improvisational decisions as well. Let's play a little bit of that. We are extending now from the circle, to the rectangle, to the triangle. We are looking at area space transpositions.

[Audio clip]

Four groups of 25 tubas each, moving with pre-fixed trajectories throughout an area space. There are four sets of notated materials, each set detailing a different, sonic geometry. That would be an example of a sustained logic (that particular part of *Composition 19*) in the house of the triangle, looking at the idea of transpositional area space, taking that transposition into holistic space on the plane of the individual.

Composition 113 would be a composition, the first of the holistic structures that would include poetics for the friendly experiencer, as well as extended notated material, and improvisation is used in the flex space depending upon the psychology. What am I saying? The improviser is telling a story: there's a story that's being thought about and enacted inside of the music. There are scales related to poetics: surprise, fast, slow, anger, curiosity, non-belief, belief. There is another set of notated materials, more extended notated materials, depending on which area of the story the improviser/experiencer is taking. Let me play a little bit of *Composition 113* as second house triangle transposition.

[Audio clip]

There is a giant photograph of a train station behind the improviser. The improviser has something like six or eight microphones. He or she moves in different directions. There are poses. There is a lighting script. And the improviser is telling the story of Oduwain, one of the 12 characters of the system, and Oduwain's encounter on a train.⁵ That would be one example of modeling and one trajectory of modeling. Let me back up. *Composition 19* demonstrated phrase-grouping structures in this expanded space. Let's take a look at phrase grouping structures with a repetitive logic. Let's listen to *Composition 134*.

[Audio clip]

The phrase-grouping structure for *Composition 134* involves six different pitches, which are stretched in different ways to create a multiple repetitive logic state. *Composition 134* is designed for the creative orchestra and establishes four areas for extended improvisation. There are three extended structural areas that demonstrate multiple repetitive logic design, and this would be an example again of a phrase-grouping based construction music divided by multiple repetitive logic strategies.

Okay, I'm just planning a little kick about so that you can see how things have evolved. *Composition 117*, or I think it's *117*—I'm not even sure [it's actually *Composition 115*], would be an example of a phrase-grouping based composition that demonstrates gradient logic decisions and also whose secondary construction design involves the use of intervallic internal decisions as part of the contour. This example would then demonstrate another aspect of modeling involving, in this case, Number 11 postulates

[referring to the Musical Paradigms Schema⁶].

[Audio clip]

I used the graph chart idea of Karlheinz Stockhausen in his *Piano Piece No. 6*, which has a graph to demonstrate going faster or slowing down. I thought this was a wonderful idea, and I took that idea and redesigned it for this kind of structure. (Okay, how am I doing with time? Because I'm playing a lot of music and I want to be sure I have time for questions and answers.)

I have played examples of the house of the circle: language music syntax. I have played examples of the house of the rectangle: target ideas into target structures into target compositions and target intentionalities. I have played a couple of examples, at least two examples, of the house of the triangle: transpositional logics as it relates to area space experiences, as it relates to holistic experiences including poetics.

I would now like to play examples of the ghost trance musics, but before playing examples of the ghost trance musics, I would like to say that somewhere around 1990 I would find for myself that intellectually interesting was not as interesting as it needed to be for me and that I needed something more than intellectually interesting. At that point I would go back, and I began to study and take classes on Native American musics and the wonder of trance musics. Later, after taking three classes studying the music of the Native American Indian, I began to collect that music and from that point I would begin to study the great trance musics of the world. I would go back and study African trance musics, European trance musics. We never think of the Gregorian Chant as a trance music, but it is a trance music. And from that point, I would come to see that this aesthetics had real meaning for me because I was at a point in my life where I was looking for something that was spiritual, something that was cosmic and trans-idiomatic. That is to say spiritual, but not monotheistic, theistic, or not the big zero. I wanted something that reflected my set of balances as a friendly experiencer, who recognizes that the greater forces, the cosmics, have given us an incredible opportunity to be alive, to have consciousness where we can have an array of alignments.

The ghost trance musics would give me the possibility to set up a different construct in the house of the triangle, where *Composition 13* and *Composition 19* would have declarative components to establish an area space—declarative components establishing specific narrative logic information. The ghost trance musics would give me transport possibilities. And by transport possibilities in this context, I am referring to how the model has evolved in the last forty years.

That is to say, more and more I came to think in terms of individual area space models like *Composition 113*. Neighborhood area space, city-state area space, continental area space, solar system area space, universe and expanding universe area space. And with the ghost trance musics, well one way of looking at the ghost trance musics would be: "You're in New York City, there are three kinds of subway experiences you can have: local stops, express trains, and cross-town trains." The development of the ghost trance musics would give me the possibility to create an imaginary space that would have "trajectory" possibilities.

The ghost trance musics would give me the possibility to apply, in an imaginary space, the possibility to go from station to station and have internal connections. There are three primary species of ghost trance musics, with two secondary species. The secondary species are accelerator class ghost trance musics and accelerator whip ghost trance musics. I am going to play an example of a ghost trance composition. The concept of ghost trance musics, for this lecture, could be talked of as a melody that doesn't start and doesn't end. This would serve many different purposes for me. One, now that the ghost trance musics, the body of the ghost trance musics, is completed, I will now be able to draw on that material and override serial organization. That is to say, pitch organization in the ghost trance musics would come from hearing it in the moment of creation. I would hear it like an improviser in real time and write it out. I would hear it like an improviser and with the evolution of this material (process) would begin to put inputs inside of it: inputs, in terms of target phrase statements that are reinserted into the forward thrust of the music. With the ghost trance musics, I wanted something that I could put into the space and it will go, be, and fulfill a trans-temporal function that has nothing to do with time in the isolated sense of parameters. Let's hear one of the ghost trance structures. I think this is *Composition 188*. This is first species.

[Audio clip]

The ghost trance compositions have host architecture material ingredients. The ghost trance musics have

secondary materials, where the instrumentalists can switch out of host material/landscape (design) into the secondary materials. And finally, the ghost trance musics have tertiary material from the rest of the system (i.e. tertiary materials in this context include all of the compositions of the music system—everything I have composed). I should also say, before going back to the ghost trance musics, talking about the nature of structural dynamics in this model, by 1980 I would come to understand that what I'm trying to construct would call for another alignment in my understanding of structural materials. And that alignment is this: every composition has an origin identity in the traditional sense of, "I'm going to write a composition for a string quartet, it has those properties, it starts here, and it ends there." Every composition has a secondary identity, which says you can take the flute part from *Composition 83* and you can play that flute part on twenty seven trombones. It makes no difference to me. And the third component would be every composition has a genetic identity, and by genetic identity in this context I'm saying, "You can take one measure out of *Composition 96* and put it into *Composition 103*." Structural material used in this manner is akin to an erector set that can be put together in different orders, depending on the needs of the moment, depending upon the proclivities of the friendly experiencers using that material. More and more I began to think of structural materials as fixed and elastic and combinational. With the ghost trance musics as representing the house of Shala, as opposed to the first nine extensions of the music system—[for example:] language generation, schematic musics, hieroglyphic structures, the coordinate musics—there is something like 9 propositions leading to the house of Shala. And the house of Shala is the ground floor of the tri-centric musics. And the qualities of the ghost trance musics representing the ground floor would be forward-pulse materials, secondary materials, tertiary materials: materials from the system put in to suit the needs of the improviser.

We've heard an example of species number one; let's hear an example of species number two ghost trance musics. Species number one: consistent pulses with different articulations. There's something like 60 species of ghost trance musics. Species number two: forward pulses with oppositions [sings example]. Let's have an example of the second species ghost trance musics.

[Audio clip]

The last example I'll play today will be an example of an accelerator class ghost trance composition that is a syntactical ghost trance structure (logic).⁷ And by syntactical ghost trance structure in this context I am referring to ghost trance vocal melody/speech. There are twelve ghost trance structures with syntax, vocal syntax. That material is designed . . . well, it can be like the traffic policeman giving out direction signals. It could also be like in the bingo. You come to a bingo game and when your numbers come up there is a prize. Well, if your configuration material comes up in the system it activates something else. And so then, this would be an example of a syntactical ghost trance musics, accelerator class.

[Audio clip]

Now third species ghost trance musics demonstrate imbalance contour strategies. So we go from metric contours (species one), metric contours with opposition (species two), and imbalance contours (species number three).

What a wonderful opportunity to have an opportunity to talk about work that I have been involved with for the last forty years. I have played a lot of music very quickly. It's not possible to really hear any of this when it's coming at you so quick and with such short examples. I decided today to talk to you about correspondence materials from the Tri-Centric music model just so that you could have some sense of how the system has evolved. If there were time, I would try to focus on other examples of the model schema—orchestral musics, or show the internal extended logic constructions of particular compositions. But we don't have that kind of time. And, even if we did, in the beginning I think it makes more sense to present the kind of materials that will give you a sense of a house of music that has different kinds of musics/forms and target purposes: musics which adhere to the early philosophies, musics that have functional components that make particular things happen, musics that attempt to celebrate "isness," musics for the improviser. For myself, I've been very fortunate to discover the musics of the world, and as such, I think of myself as a professional student of music. I don't want to be anything more than that. Music is the kind of thing that I like, and there is always something new to discover and learn. And so today I've tried to give you some sense of how I have tried to advance these propositions. And maybe there might be some questions at this point. Any questions?

Question Period

[Editor's note: Question one was lost due to changing videotapes. The questioner asked Prof. Braxton to explain his terms "house of the circle," "house of the rectangle," and "house of the triangle."]

Braxton: . . . House of the circle: experience, space for activities. Going now to the next circle, house of the circle: mutable logics, groups moving. The idea of a tri-centric thought unit is not designed only with respect for a music system. There is what I call a "Re philosophic system." That is the tri-axium writings, which are designed not to tell the friendly reader anything as far as you should believe this or that, but rather to set up constructs where the friendly reader can have his or her own experience and come through it with his or her own conclusions. That is the tri-axium writings and the philosophical system. House of the circle, third plane, improvisation: improvisation, trans-idiomatic improvisation, as opposed to jazz idiomatic improvisation. I remember Ursula Oppens telling me that her mother took improvisation classes with Anton Webern, and when I heard that, boy was I surprised! Because we tend to think of the second Viennese school as very separate from improvisation, especially Webern. And so house of the circle as trans-idiomatic improvisation, unless I put the rectangle inside of that circle, and then suddenly in my system I am referring to language musics: the beginning of the new DNA for tri-centric musics.

House of the rectangle: thoughts. When I talk of the system that I'm trying to build, I sometimes use the analogy, you're walking through a field of clouds. Everything is a cloud, and suddenly you hear a sound or melody or something and you're moving towards that and this is what happens to the friendly experiencer as he or she is being guided in this dream state, signal/attraction state of sound. And sound in this context becomes part of the alignment targets to help the friendly experiencer move into the forward space. And so first-degree: a thought; second degree: an idea; third degree: structural dynamics or summation logic identity.

Triangle, transpositional logics: something can be transformed into something else, ritual and ceremonial experiences or symbolic experiences, or transpositional schemas in the way of [going] from solo music to taking that same logic and expressing it in a different instrumentation or with respect to a different set of secondary components.

My hope with this model is to demonstrate a series of activities, plays (interaction experiences). I would like to have a music that has nothing to do with the traditional idea of the musicians being on stage and the audience being in the audience. But rather the musician and the audience are all together in the space moving into different types of virtual possibilities, where interaction and inner exchange possibilities are there (in the composite fantasy space/world). And in fact, virtual logics would also be in the house of the triangle. I would say to the composers of today, who are exploring and examining fresh lanes of explorative propositions: be sure to stay with the videogame people, because the videogames are . . . they're moving all over the place. They are developing the kind of technology that can be useful on a lot of different levels. For instance, [in] the "Echo Echo Mirror House Musics," I'm starting to use iPods to redistribute information (i.e. compositions/writings) from the music/holistic system. What an incredible time this is for breakthroughs in technologies. And so that would be my response to your question. [Points to audience] Yes sir.

Question 2: I have more questions than I can manage to ask; I've tried to cut it down to two. One is very practical, the other is perhaps more theoretical, maybe social in terms of your approaches to music. First of all, where do you find 100 tuba players?

[Laughter]

Braxton: Very good question. I had a performance of *Composition 19*, I guess it was last year at 61 years old. And the piece was written in 1971, and so it's been very difficult to find . . . [laughter] but my decision as a young guy was, you can't complain if you don't first write the composition, and some people will do anything to be able to complain.

[Laughter]

Question 2 cont.: . . . the second question: you used the phrase friendly experiencer, friendly reader, which obviously connotes, maybe, an unfriendly experiencer, unfriendly reader. I'd just like to hear you say more about that.

Braxton: Thank you for your question, very good question. Why the term friendly experiencer, friendly reader? I use the term friendly experiencer because of the model I'm trying to construct, and I'm thinking of large area spaces of people coming together. I want everybody to be nice, be nice to one another [laughter] . . . come in with a respectful vibration and celebrate music and be nice. And so . . . [applause]. When we approach things with a positive perspective, all kinds of things can open up. I think of the wonder of the orchestra. The orchestra is really a family and if the orchestra functions as a family you can hear the difference in the sound and music becomes healing again. And so a friendly experiencer is a term I evolved in the early '70s as a way of saying, "Be nice, be respectful of one another. It's not just about you. It's not just about me. It's about, here we are in this incredible opportunity and we need to have some fun, kick it about, have some fun, be nice." That's why I use that expression. [Points to audience] Yes sir.

Question 3: [First part of question inaudible] . . . a disparate range of influences, I was surprised to hear Sun Ra placed in there. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about living with Sun Ra in Chicago and any anecdotes you might have.

Braxton: Well . . . the great Sun Ra is from Chicago, originally. And when I was coming up, I recall going to high school passing a club called the Wonder Inn: Sun Ra and his Intergalactic Orchestra. The next week I'd be passing: Sun Ra and his Myth Science Orchestra, Sun Ra and his Solar Galactic Laboratory Orchestra. So who is this guy? In the '60s, the coming together of the AACM (the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) was a direct response to re-structural visionary masters like Sun Ra. I would also add the name of Philip, Phil Cohran. Mr. Cohran is and was a great re-structural visionary as well. But we don't talk about his work in the same way as Sun Ra. And of course it's a different music. But it was also very important to those of us who had opportunities to experience his music.

Sun Ra helped me on many different levels as a young African-American guy growing up. He would help me to understand that I could dream and think about what ever I want to think about. That . . . there were no parameters on what I could do. Sun Ra is from that re-structuralist tradition that has powered the music forward. His work would be a pointed definition for ritual and ceremonial emanations. His work would be a pointed definition for fresh concepts of instrumental integration. His work would redefine timbral dynamics and language. His work was trans-idiomatic long before people started thinking in terms of fusion. Sun Ra was putting out his music in paper bags like newspapers. He understood the importance of documentation. And at the same time, it was never about the golden point where we get to this point and that point is it. In fact, his work would show that it's not about arriving, it's about going. And Sun Ra would have a tremendous impact on me even more when I reached the 20s and 30s, since it was not always possible to hear the music. I remember the great master pianist, Christopher Gaddy who would die in his middle-20s. He would encourage me to check out the music of Sun Ra, but it was very difficult to find the music of Sun Ra when I was coming up. And so what little we could find meant a lot to us. But, yes Sun Ra . . . Next semester I have a class: Karlheinz Stockhausen and Sun Ra. And this semester I have a class: Max Roach, Lenny Tristano and Miles Davis. I am trying to combine masters. I am working on my Hildegard von Bingen, Wagner class.

[Laughter]

[Editor's note: The following question was difficult to interpret due to a lack of microphones on the audience.]

Question 4: . . . With some trepidation . . . saying what I will be saying, because I figure after the lecture, I won't be able to rush up to you and get a chance to say what I'm about to say. I've run into you before, and you didn't have time to hang back and speak to me. But as we spoke briefly when you came in, about 15 years ago about forces in motion. And I spent about two weeks trying to get in touch with you. Because . . . I'm not a musician . . . and when I read that book I said to myself, "I must get in touch with you," you were very important. Because at the time . . . you were talking about your . . . [not clear] . . . What I would do . . . reading that book, it just hit me that . . . just so easy to give. In order again of what I think, I think it's beautiful . . . In listening to you speak today, it's just so refreshing to see . . . a musician, a politician . . . that just wants to give and understands people from their whole life. So the feeling I have to speak to you afterward, I just want to say from the bottom of my heart, "thank you."

Braxton: Well, I would say this [applause] . . . I would say this: I'm an old Paul Desmond guy, I'm a lucky guy. And I have a feeling that those of you who are here who are musicians, you know what I'm talking

about. To have discovered something that you love, whether it's music, whether it's art, whether it's riding horses, whether it's cooking: you are lucky to be alive and to find something that really gives you something. And if that something is music, you're really lucky. And so I've had an incredible life with real highs and real lows, and I would not change it for anything. I find in my 60s that there is always something new to experience. I remember in the early period when I was a young guy, if you had met me I would say, "Oh, well you know, I know this and I know this, and I can tell you this much: I hate opera." And so I'm like 40 years old and I've always loved the music of Alban Berg. So I went and saw a performance of *Wozzeck*. It was out of it, out! Finally, the door of opera opened to me. And if there was one guy whose work had no meaning to me it was Richard Wagner. And so now when you come over to my house I've got all my Wagner records out and scores. And I'm trying to get my students to check out *The Ring*. What a life. But I have been very fortunate to discover the world of music. And it doesn't get any better than that, if you are a musician or musically inclined in terms of either practicing (or producing) the music or hearing the music, it's all the same as far as I'm concerned. And, so yes, I am a lucky guy and I'm fortunate that suddenly I turned around in my 50s thinking, "Oh, nobody was listening to this work at all." And I discovered that yes, there are people, there are small pockets of people all around the planet, who are just like me, and it was only my arrogance that I thought maybe no one was listening. Because, in fact, music makes the world go round.

Question 5: You talked about Native American music and European music . . . Just as a Latin American, I would like to know which is your relationship with, if you have it, of improvised musics from Latin America, and basically composers of Latin American music.

Braxton: Very good question. I'm a Chávez guy, the composer Chávez and Villa-Lobos. That music is very important to me. Modern-day percussion logics. When I think of Darius Milhaud, when I think of the World War I/II composers who began to move and define contemporary percussion music logics, I think that the composers in South America and the great work of Chávez and Villa-Lobos have been overlooked.⁸ And I'm very interested in the musics of this part of the planet. When I think about the next 20 years, understanding that at this point the African-American community in America is no longer the majority minority community, there will be a fresh set of vibrational balances that will help to forge dynamic new possibilities for all humanity. That in fact, in terms of composite demographics, the world is changing. Not just in North America, I see the change in Europe as well. This is a very important period of time, and the trans-Hispanic musics have a very important role to play as we begin to re-examine rhythmic logic integration and expansion, harmonic logic expansion, instrumental expansion, the emergence of the steel drum ensemble. Oh yeah!

Notes

¹ The editors of CSI/ECI wish to express our deep gratitude to Prof. Braxton for allowing us to stream the video documentation of his keynote address, which was one of the undisputed highlights of the 2007 Guelph Jazz Festival. A capacity audience at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre included musicians, fans, and community members who were all captivated by Prof. Braxton's warm and articulate presentation. The video was transcribed by Martin Eckart, and we have edited it slightly to flow as a written document. See the streaming video online [here](#).

² Arnold Schoenberg, *Drei Klavierstücke* [Three Piano Pieces], Op 11, 1909.

³ See Appendix B. Prof. Braxton used this handout during his talk, and we later observed that many audience members brought it to his performance with the Association of Improvising Musicians Toronto, held later that night at the Guelph Jazz Festival.

⁴ See Appendix A, "System Notes (E)." We thank Prof. Braxton for supplying this material.

⁵ See Appendix A.

⁶ See Appendix B.

⁷ See Appendix C, "Spatial Mapping Musics." We thank Prof. Braxton for supplying this material.

⁸ Prof. Braxton is referring to Mexican composer Carlos Chávez (1899-1978) and Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959).

Appendices

Appendix A

SYSTEM NOTES (E)

1. long sounds SHALA
2. long sounds (active- sequential) ASHMENTON
3. trills HELENA
4. staccato sounds ZAKKO
5. intervallic logics NTZOCKIE
6. multiphonics (sound mass) JOREO
7. short sounds SUNDANCE
8. angular (irregular) sounds BUBBA JOHN JACK
9. legato sounds ODUWAIN
10. diatonic sounds DAVIDs
11. gradient sounds ALVA
12. sub-identity sounds KIM

AESTHETIC DISPOSITION (INTENT)

1. THE WAY OF THE INDIVIDUAL
11. THE WAY OF THE GROUP
111. THE WAY OF THE LESSON

CATEGORIES OF STORY-TYPES

1. THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH
2. PERSEVERANCE
3. SACRIFICE
4. ACCEPTANCE
5. CORRECT RESPONSE
6. INCORRECT RESPONSE
7. ENTRAPMENT
8. SELFLESSNESS

9. EVIL PLANS BACKFIRE

10. COSMIC PROTECTION

11. MIRACLE REALIZATION

12. SYMBOLIC TRUTH (through intention)

CHARACTER EXPERIENCE
(NARRATIVE STRUCTURES)

1. PURIFICATION

2. CENTERING

3. ORIENTATION

4. CONSTRUCTION

5. ABSORPTION

6. DESTRUCTION

7. REINTEGRATION

8. ACTUALIZATION

9. CREATION (RE CREATION)

SYNTHESIS LOGICS - TRANSPOSITION - TRANSFORMATION

A. (image logics)

1. father time

2. the 'grim reaper'

3. the concept of Angels

4. the concept of 'fairies'

5. the concept of 'magical people'

6. good and evil symbolic representation

COMPARATIVE NARRATIVE LOGICS

STORY-MYTHOLOGY IN ASIA

1. HINDUISM

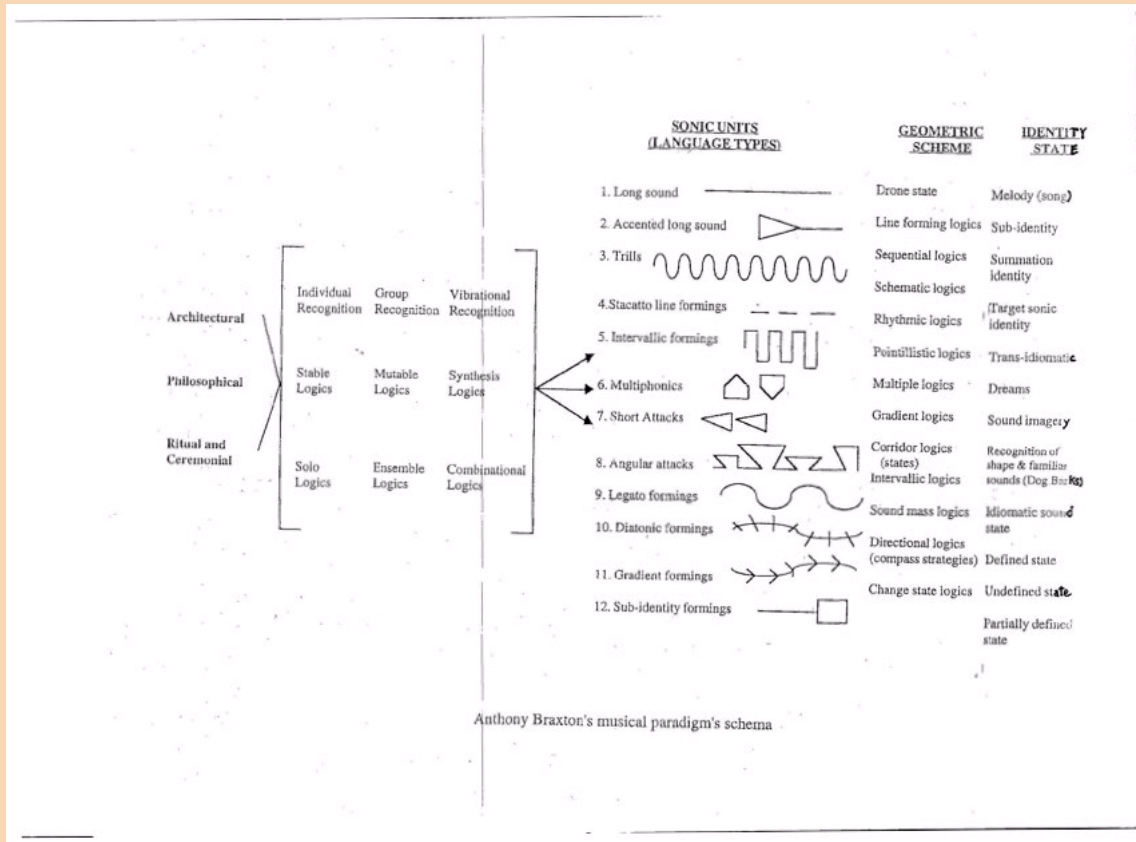
2. THERAVADA BUDDHISM

3. TIBETAN BUDDHISM

4. THAILAND

5. CHINESE BUDDHISM

Appendix B



Appendix C

SPATIAL MAPPING MUSICS

IMAGINARY STATES

1. COMP. NO. 113 (individual circle experiences)

2. COMP. NO. 173 (gradient logic mapping)

1. GHOST TRANCE MUSICS

INFINITY (i.e. the universe) = SHALA

1. spatial mapping music prototypes

2. sustain space logics

(a) something that doesn't end (or start for that matter)

(b) continuous domain strategies

(c) continuous processes

11. GHOST TRANCE MUSICS

1. TRANS-TEMPORAL (doesn't start doesn't end)

2. TRANS-TEMPORAL (slow/med/fast) at any given point in time

3. TRANS-TEMPORAL (use of multiple tempos)
(use of combination tempos)
(use of changing tempos)

111. GHOST TRANCE MUSICS

1. trans-idiomatic (trans-spiritual, male/female/children)

2. no theme