

are focal points for the inscrutable interaction-dynamics diagnostician.

Interaction dynamics are presupposed in many other kinds of music. This is true in large part because the various instruments tend to have prescribed roles. The drummer keeps time and pushes things along. The bassist helps with timekeeping and lays down a basic harmonic framework, elaborated upon by piano or guitar. Linear instruments like saxophones and trumpets and vocals and sitars tend to deal with melodies, most often played in the keys laid down by the harmony instruments. The relationships are like those between the carburetor and drive shaft and sparkplug—all organized in a known way so that the motor can move the chassis and the driver can count on the car doing its thing.

Not the Car

In improvised music, all those presuppositions go out the window.

When jazz drummers introduced the option of playing without pulsed time, for instance, they

didn't just do so to be contrary or unorthodox or to make music that was difficult to listen to. They called their prescribed instrumental role into question. The drummers—specifically, it was Milford Graves, Sunny Murray, and Rashied Ali—wanted to open the music up in order to let some new things develop, and they realized that the conventional instrumental roles were an impediment to possible new directions. Pretty soon all the instruments were asking that same question: What is my supposed role, and what if I don't want to live by it?

If you want to hear one of the most radical moments in this alternative way of thinking, listen to the Albert Ayler Trio's *Spiritual Unity*, which was recorded over fifty years ago. The saxophone and bass and drums are doing something quite different from what they normally do—the bassist (Gary Peacock) is melodic, skittish, and virtuosic; the drummer (Sunny Murray) gathers pools and eddies of sound, mounting and dissipating volume, his cymbals awash in nervous energy; the saxophonist (Ayler) only plays a smidge of