

## Contrafacts in jazz: language, myth and homage

<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>Contrafactum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a common medieval process of <i>troping</i></li> <li>• possibly produced by wandering scholars (Goliards)</li> <li>• replacing old (religious) text with the new (secular)</li> <li>• new text not bound in meaning with the old: the new songs are sequences</li> </ul>	<p>The practice of the sequence has some roots in the Byzantine period (Seay, p49; Wellesz, p131-139). Although the trope and the sequence both come from the practice of troping, only the trope retains the meaning or sentiment of the original text (Seay, p52).</p>

<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>Contrafacts in jazz</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new titles bound in meaning with old titles: the new songs are tropes</li> <li>• alter the melodic or harmonic content, never the form (usually)</li> <li>• used to express changes or innovations in vernacular (lexis)/structure (grammar): <i>anti-lexicogrammar</i></li> <li>• handy for earning royalties on already popular material</li> </ul>	<p>The best known and earliest contrafacts in jazz are the many versions of the blues.</p> <p>There are similarities to anti-languages in be-bop (Halliday, 1976; Vaughn, 2008); but for music it may be safer to focus less on the semiotic functions and more on the systematic, hence the use of <i>anti-lexicogrammar</i>.</p>

<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>How High The Moon</b></p> <p><small>Doc Bryan Quartet, feat. Benny Harris (1945)</small></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fine-grained binary form:</li> </ul> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <td colspan="4">A</td> <td colspan="4">A'</td> </tr> <tr> <td>a</td><td>a'</td><td>b</td><td>c</td> <td>a</td><td>a'</td><td>b'</td><td>d</td> </tr> <tr> <td>a1</td><td>a2</td><td>a1'</td><td>a2'</td> <td>a3</td><td>b1</td><td>b1'</td><td>a4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>a1</td><td>a2</td><td>a1'</td><td>a2'</td> <td>a3</td><td>a1'</td><td>a2'</td><td>a3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>a3</td><td>b1</td><td>b1'</td><td>a4</td> <td>a1</td><td>a2'</td><td>a3</td><td>b1'</td> </tr> <tr> <td>a4</td><td>c</td><td></td><td></td> <td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td> </tr> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• very popular: performed by Ella Fitzgerald, Nat "King" Cole, Lionel Hampton <i>et al.</i></li> </ul>	A				A'				a	a'	b	c	a	a'	b'	d	a1	a2	a1'	a2'	a3	b1	b1'	a4	a1	a2	a1'	a2'	a3	a1'	a2'	a3	a3	b1	b1'	a4	a1	a2'	a3	b1'	a4	c							<p><i>Score 1, top line; and Score 2</i></p> <p>The top line is the melody of the original song. <i>Score 2</i> is a transcription of Benny Harris' trumpet solo, which will be relevant for the next slide as well.</p>
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a	a'	b	c	a	a'	b'	d																																										
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<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>Ornithology</b></p> <p>Charlie Parker Quintet (1946)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• written by Parker; Harris; or both?</li><li>• Importance of rhythm in bebop language</li><li>• Vague relation to the original song but more concerned with internal language</li><li>• Many myths to unpick about transition from swing to bebop</li></ul>	<p><i>Second line, Score 1; and bottom line, Score 2.</i></p> <p>The first studio version of <i>Ornithology</i> was recorded after Byas' recording and hence Harris' solo of <i>How High The Moon</i>. You can read more about this at <a href="http://www.coreymwamba.co.uk/status/day/2013-11-12">http://www.coreymwamba.co.uk/status/day/2013-11-12</a>.</p> <p>Parker's compositional and improvisational approach are strongly linked; he has any number of phrases which he would use in various combinations, which is similar to the books of ornamentations (<i>passagi</i>) used in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe.</p>
<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>Lennie Bird</b></p> <p>Lennie Tristano Quintet (1955)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contrafact as homage: what's the derivation?</li><li>• Effective counter-melody to <i>Ornithology</i></li><li>• Still bebop, but different: an anti-language within an anti-language</li></ul>	<p><i>Third line, Score 1.</i></p> <p>The mutual admiration between Parker and Tristano is well-documented (<a href="http://www.nepr.net/blog/lennie-bird-lennie-tristano-and-charlie-parker">http://www.nepr.net/blog/lennie-bird-lennie-tristano-and-charlie-parker</a> gives an overview), so it should be no surprise that Tristano would create a contrafact of <i>Ornithology</i>.</p>
<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>Satellite</b></p> <p>John Coltrane (1946)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drastic changes in harmony and melody but the root is still recognisable - bound to the original song</li><li>• Coltrane's post-Miles period; explorations of harmonic super-impositions</li><li>• Study piece rather than marker; similar to many of his pieces of the period</li><li>• At the time, a totally new and divisive language</li></ul>	<p><i>Fourth line, Score 1</i></p> <p>Coltrane uses the original melody to underpin the links to <i>How High The Moon</i>, and adds a four-bar tag to the end of the theme. I think that Coltrane's super-impositions are not based on major-third movements, but on alterations of seconds and fourths, which explains the use of the whole tone scale in the bass.</p> <p>Melodically, <i>Satellite</i>, <i>Countdown</i> and <i>Giant Steps</i> are very similar.</p>

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<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>How High The Bird</b></p> <p><small>Steve Williamson (1996)</small></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contrafact of original, yet...</li><li>• Homage to <i>Ornithology</i>: phrases in composition suggest Parker's idiomatic language, but with modern rhythmic/harmonic inflections</li><li>• Exceptional playing but not unique composition: idioms similar to several composers at the time</li></ul>	<p><i>Fifth line, Score 1</i></p> <p>This track is almost completely at odds with the rest of the album, which is made up of songs with complex time signatures, advanced harmony, and influenced by funk and contemporary music. But it sits on an album made at a time when neo-classicism in jazz had won – and that may reveal a reason why it was recorded.</p>

<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>Contrafact #1</b></p> <p><small>Corey Mwamba   Dave Kase   Joshua Blackmore (2013)</small></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "partially totally improvised"</li><li>• Melodic contrafact: theme follows melodic contour of the original</li><li>• Form made malleable to fit working language of the group</li></ul>	<p><i>Score 3.</i></p> <p>Dave and Joshua did not have the score when we played it: I was working on an “associative” process, where I play a phrase that alludes to something and they pick up – accurately – what I mean. This has roots in <i>ars nova</i>, and developing an unwritten idiomatic practice.</p>

<p>&lt; &gt;</p> <p><b>Where now?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contrafacts are rarely written now - in jazz</li><li>• No one <i>real</i> dominant lexis/grammar in the music - diverse approaches</li><li>• is individual voice being lost?</li><li>• the act of <i>contrafactum</i> more prevalent in rap and pop - mainly as sequences</li></ul>	<p>Sampling older music and adding new words is exactly the process of rap in hip-hop; the samples selected are a form of homage. Robin Thicke's <i>Blurred Lines</i> is a trope, with references to having a party (from Marvin Gaye's <i>Got To Give It Up</i>). Bearing in mind there's legal proceedings over this now, the contrafact in popular music could be threatened.</p>

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## Selected Bibliography

- Monelle, Raymond: *Linguistics and semiotics in music*. Chur: Harwood Academic 1992.  
Owens, Thomas : *Bebop: the music and its players*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.  
Seay, Albert: *Music in the medieval world*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1965.  
Shipton, Alyn: *A New History of Jazz*. Continuum, 2002.  
Wellesz, Egon: *A history of Byzantine music and hymnography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.

## Electronic versions of the scores

How High The Moon + contrafacts:

<http://musescore.com/coreymwamba/scores/149578>

Benny Harris' solo with *Ornithology* comparison:

<http://musescore.com/coreymwamba/scores/142256>

*Contrafact #1* (JPEG image):

[http://www.coreymwamba.co.uk/mres/contrafacts/contrafact1\\_small.jpg](http://www.coreymwamba.co.uk/mres/contrafacts/contrafact1_small.jpg)