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Author(s): Laurent Cugny

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Electric – Miles Davis 1968-1975¹

Laurent Cugny

Unlike my first book, *Las Vegas Tango- The Life of Gil Evans*, which was published in 1989 and still available today, *Electric- Miles Davis 1968-1975* soon found itself out of print. Nevertheless, in the years that have followed, the book has come up here and there: brought to my attention by those who've read it, or those searching for a copy. Beyond the fate of the publication itself, its regular resurfacing was a good indicator that this so called 'period' remained of interest. The possibility of a new edition was first discussed with Christian Tarding (editor of the original edition and also of *Las Vegas Tango*) but never eventuated. I'm delighted that Philippe Gonin and the Éditions Universitaires de Dijon have decided to take on the project, allowing me to present this new edition and in doing so, affording me the opportunity to revisit this 'period' more than 25 years later.

It all started for me on the 11th of July, 1973. I had just graduated from high school when a friend invited me to go with him to a Miles Davis concert.² Though unfamiliar with his music, I knew the name and can only assume that at this time it brought to mind a sound world close to that of *Kind of Blue*. Seated on the righthand side of the second balcony, I looked down to see a trumpeter in big black glasses, his foot poised on a wha-wha pedal (the same as that of Jimi Hendrix), the bell of his trumpet pointing straight towards the floor. A dense wall of sound ensued, played by a band whose members included a rod-still figure playing a Fender bass guitar, and a Buddha-like character, who was also wearing sunglasses and seated behind a small table with a guitar on his knee. Leaving the venue my friend, who prided himself on his love of Stockhausen and 20th century art music, extolled the virtues of what we had just heard. I had to confess that I felt completely indifferent towards it. Indifferent, but not opposed. I didn't have the contextual background that true jazz aficionados of the time had, many of whom were having trouble accepting the music of Miles Davis as it was in 1973. My musical culture was based (through no real choice of my own and without my knowing it at the time) on the classical music that my father would religiously listen to every Saturday- Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Brucker, and the weekly piano lessons, which I took for many years. I knew nothing about jazz; however, it was through the Beatles (and to a lesser extent the Rolling Stones) that a passion for music had been sparked, a few years earlier. After this followed some of the seminal hard rock acts- Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, MC5 and others, to which a mishmash of pop-folk-soul music was added: Creedence Clearwater Revival; Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young; Canned Heat; Leonard Cohen; Otis Redding; Booker T. & the MG's; etc. But as for jazz ... nothing.

On November 15th, 1973, Miles Davis returned to Paris to play a concert at the Palais des sports.³ I went along and this time by the concert's end I was hooked! Between the two dates, I

¹ This text is a new foreword written for a new publication of the original book by Laurent Cugny about Miles Davis' first electric period: CUGNY, Laurent, *Électrique – Miles Davis 1968-1975*, Dijon, Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 2019 (1/ Marseille, André Dimanche, 1993).

² This concert is available on compact disc: *Olympia 1973*, Trema 710460.

³ A large part of this concert (over one hour) can be viewed on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoeHrUIWPbE>. It opens with an introductory commentary by Pierre Bouteiller which is interesting to cite in extenso: "The most unusual, the most baffling, for some the most trying evening of the Newport festival in Paris has been without contest the Miles Davis concert. We find him here dabbling on the organ in the middle of his ensemble where the percussion instruments for the most part overwhelm the melodic ones. This is more than a passing observation. It should be noted that the Miles 74 [sic] band seems deliberately oriented

had discovered John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, *Porgy & Bess* and *In a Silent Way*. My pop-rock-folk-soul complex had taken a back seat (though this music would remain influential throughout my life), and jazz had taken prime position definitively. And Miles Davis's music of the 1970s, far from being a quirky side-note along the way, would become my entry point into the world of jazz (along with the two other musicians mentioned) and continue to occupy a privileged place in my personal pantheon.

Next came the time for learning. I quickly became acquainted with Davis's complete discography, which over time I came to know quite well. It was then the era of the regular publication of double albums: *Big Fun*, *Get up/With It*, and *Agharta*. I added the final opus of this period, *Pangaea* – something reserved for the fanatics – to my collection at the exorbitant price of a 'Japanese import', as we used to call them back then (I must not have discovered *Dark Magus* and its magnificent stop chorus by the tenor saxophone of David Liebman on 'Moja' until much later).

Then, without anyone knowing exactly why, the creative flow faltered. To be sure, discs continued to appear. However, although still 'doubles' and certainly not rereleases, these were odd compilations of tracks from prior periods (The most recent *Guinnevere* dated from 1970; it should have made more of an impression on me, since I had been a fan of the album of the same name by Crosby, Stills & Nash that had inspired it): *Circle in the Round* and *Directions*.

Finally, the source dried-up completely; it was rumoured that Miles Davis was sick. In 1978 or 1979, the French magazine *Jazz Hot* published a photo showing an emaciated Miles⁴ surrounded by, among others, Larry Coryell and Masabumi Kikuchi, with whom he'd been recording. But still no music.

In July 1981 a new disc was announced. And not just another compilation, this time it was to be all new material. It arrived on our turntables (always on 'vinyl' though this was before we were using that term): *The Man with the Horn*. I can still see myself, there among friends (phonography has a strong social element in jazz, a phenomenon that has since been thoroughly discussed), dropping the needle at the start of the record with what was, I have to say, a certain apprehension. Then, from the speakers, came the effortless rhythmic interplay of Marcus Miller and Al Foster on 'Fat Time' (this kind of application of the half-time shuffle was still relatively new at the time). Miles Davis played the trumpet, muted. His phrases of old, perhaps now a little less majestic, did not fail to charm. But something was different.. Then it became clear: the violence had been subdued – the prince of darkness had come into the light. In a word, he had been calmed. The needle reached the centre of side two; we were happy to have found Miles Davis alive, but we craved for more.

In the Spring of 1982, the news broke that Miles Davis was going to play two consecutive nights at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. I tried to get tickets the first day they went on sale, but

towards research and experience: technical research and experience. Miles questions everything, destroys the equilibrium. In his concerts, he takes us to witness his work of destruction and reconstruction where he goes beyond the realm of music to enter into that of sounds. It's for this reason that he has electrified his trumpet using a wha-wha mute system, operated by a pedalboard. A system that he seems to have imposed on his saxophonist, as you will see and hear in a moment. Miles never changed. He is the same as he was ten, fifteen or twenty years ago. His desire to dig deeper, his systematic questioning and his explorative work see him appear this year, still as solitary, as tortured, and as fascinating as ever.⁷

In addition to its accuracy this commentary gives a good insight into how specialists of the time may have reacted. This video, along with many others from the period, also reminds us how valuable the image can be for performance analysis. Here it not only tells us about how Miles Davis conducts his group and music, but also about the intensity of his listening, which is literally visible.

⁴ I myself give way here to an established practice that consists of calling this particular musician by his first name: a practice which is often ridiculous when used referring to any other musician, but of which the prevalence in this particular case is such, it may be the case that one day we examine its significance (i.e. Why we address Miles Davis by his first name, as if he were a member of our family or a close friend?) in the way that it seems to communicate a feeling that is universally shared, not only of familiarity, but of a bond that is almost carnal.

I was too late with the first show being sold out in two hours. Not to be deterred, I returned the next day and waited by the ticket sales window before it opened. This time, I didn't go home empty handed.

On the night of the concert on the 3rd of May, I was seated five rows back, a little to the right. The band started, Al Foster in the centre with Marcus Miller next to him, Mike Stern, Bill Evans and Mino Cinelu. Then, Miles Davis entered, walking until he reached a spot...directly in line with me! He rose the bell of his trumpet until it was as if he were aiming it directly at me. I was then struck by the live sound of something that had, in my case, existed in its recorded form for the previous nine years. I knew at that moment that I would remember this 'first encounter' for the rest of my life. Even for a devoted follower of a phonography that embodies the very essence of audiotactility and of jazz, hearing the music live, even when amplified, was a different experience altogether.

Then something altogether unexpected happened. Right in the middle of a heavy groove, Al Foster and Mino Cinelu found themselves playing an 'obligato' duet; a power failure had reduced the rest of the band to silence. In the ensuing confusion the drummer stopped, at which point, Marcus Miller grabbed a bass clarinet (or was it a tenor saxophone?) and began playing a bass line. Al Foster started up again, this time on brushes and then Miles joined them. For a brief moment this unlikely trio (I cannot remember if Mino Cinelu was playing), revisited the type of 'acoustic' jazz that their leader had abandoned many years before. The audience were in their seventh heaven, Miles much less so, if the look he shot at the backstage crew at the end of the concert was anything to go by.

That evening, we heard the Miles Davis and the band of *We Want Miles*. The music was no longer the dark and brooding kind of what would from this point be known as the 'first electric period'; however, there remained a certain raw visceral quality, which would be progressively tamed in the proceeding years of the 'second electric period'. To this day I still love to listen to 'My Man's Gone Now'. The way the intensity builds to its climax at the start of Bill Evans's solo is one of the great moments of improvisation, of groove, and of jazz itself.

At that time, Miles Davis was coming to Paris on more or less of an annual basis, with new albums being released on roughly the same schedule. I went to nearly all these Paris concerts. John Scofield joined the group in 1983 but then it was the keyboards that progressively retook power in the ensemble. However, these were no longer the saturated Fender Rhodes pianos of Keith Jarrett or Chick Corea, but something quite to the contrary: synthesisers, usually with Robert Irving III at the helm, dialling in clean tones which, although totally acceptable at the time would nowadays be classified as 'eighties' in style.⁵ *Star People* continued in the same vein as *We Want Miles* but with the addition of John Scofield, who shines here on guitar. *Decoy* was more subdued with a few worrying signs of things to come, but nevertheless with some great moments. With the release of *You're Under Arrest*, earlier fears materialised. Al Foster (the last remaining member of the first period) was out to make way for Vince Wilburn (a square drummer if ever there were one); keyboards were now the dominant force- always 'smooth' sounding and without groove. (Where was the vitriolic Farfisa organ of *Agharta*?) The guitars of Stern and Scofield had also quietly disappeared.

Tutu was an anomaly. Here we revisit the concept of a separation between the studio and the stage, something so defining of his previous period. This music could not have really been played on the stage (much like *Bitches Brew* or *On the Corner*). We are all familiar with the story: Marcus Miller had made a draft version at his home, playing all the instruments himself.⁶ Miles decided that a disc could be created by simply recording his part over the top of this, thus skipping the next logical step of playing the music with a real band. And it must be said that the result was (and

⁵ Miles, who later gave an Oberheim Ob-x to Gil Evans, told him that, as for its imitations of the trumpet: 'they'd modelled it on the white guys'.

⁶ See: Gonin Philippe, *Entretien avec Marcus Miller*, online https://www.academia.edu/34207457/Entretien_avec_Marcus_Miller.

remains to this day) convincing. The dated sounds of the synthesiser, which affect the recordings of so many artists from the 1980's (Weather Report and Joe Zawinul excepted, but Miles Davis included) are not an issue here, a testimony to the taste of the work's creator who undeniably succeeded in instilling a sort of grace (through the compositions, his sense of arrangement, and his playing of the electric bass) into a cohesive artistic statement. He managed to more or less repeat the feat, with *Siesta* and to a lesser extent with *Amandla*, a middling success, despite a lovely 'Mr Pastorius'.

Aura is also an interesting example. In the way that *Tutu* is the work of Marcus Miller, so *Aura* is that of Palle Mikkelborg, who was trying to create something similar (completely conceive a musical project for a particular musician, in that musician's absence), but in a completely European way. Where his predecessor was working within an African American musical framework (the black music tradition, if we can call it that), the Danish trumpeter was focused elsewhere- on colour, dissonance, and textures, more than on groove and a certain sensual flow. The disc, intriguing at the time, can now be judged a success, due in large part to the talent of its creator.

Because one has to face the fact that for the final part of his career, Miles Davis did not, strictly speaking, 'create' music anymore, rather, he was content to put his trumpet playing on the works of others. In doing so, he was in a way returning to that which he had always done (see more on this subject in the present volume). Now, however, it really was just to give the final touch, even if this was nevertheless something of undeniable beauty, as is the case with his collaborations on the songs of Shirley Horn ('You Won't Forget Me') or John Lee Hooker (*Hot Spot*). A final album, *Tutu* and the posthumous hip-hop release (*doo-bop*), confirmed this ultimate reality.

From 1987, on-stage appearances were occasions to hear something else, the remnants from his groups from the start of that decade. But whether it be the derisory signs which had his band member's names written on them ('Erin', 'Kenny', 'Foley' ...) or the syrupy versions of 'Time After Time' (which were not without charm) that he was always restarting, Miles was like a ship losing steam- encouraging us to look back with nostalgia on 'Fat Time' without even daring to dream of 'Calypso Frelimo' or 'Ife'. I must confess, however, that I always enjoyed these concerts. Perhaps because of the physical presence, of the sound, of Miles in flesh and blood (even from a distance). In any case, I don't feel the same thing now when I listen to the disc (*Live Around the World*).⁷

In June 1991, we learnt that Miles Davis was going to perform at Montreux. This concert was to be a retrospective on his career; Quincy Jones would be the director. I even received a telephone call from Gil Goldstein who had been given the job of hiring the European musicians that would supplement the orchestra (in the end it was George Gruntz who acted in this capacity). On hearing this news, I felt irritated. I had never been very enthusiastic with respect to recreating the historic albums of Miles Davis with Gil Evans, because I thought (and continue to think) that it was music of an essentially phonographic nature and thus not intended for the stage. However, when I learnt that Quincy Jones was wanting to enlarge the orchestra, even double it in size, I thought that this was a quantitative indication of a showman more than a musician. For this reason, I didn't want to attend the concert at Montreux, nor the one held at la Villette two weeks later, even though that was only a stone's throw from where I was living. The video recordings from the concert that I've since been able to watch have sadly confirmed my rationale at the time. The Miles Davis we see here can no longer really play on 'Boplicity', not so much due to a lesser technical level, but quite simply because his musical brain has long since deserted this music and cannot just recreate it as if by a miracle. Seeing him 'supported' by Wallace Roney who is, on the contrary, at the top of his art in this music (and even physically resembling the Miles of that period) is something that I find unbearable. The same goes for the procession of old sidemen on the stage of la Villette (Herbie Hancock's ridiculous musical mimicry of Miles on the keytar; mind you don't watch any videos of the second quintet afterwards...). The hardest thing was to think that Miles

⁷ It is even sometimes a certain annoyance that I feel.

had given way, in extremis, to the notion of being a crowd pleaser: someone whose entire career was based on demanding a certain respect from the public that was completely at odds with flattering them.

In September 1991, the world learnt that Miles Davis had died. The failed final concert release did nothing but increase the deep sadness that was felt and an intolerable article by Serge Loupien in *Libération* (who always made a point of going against the grain) made it all the more of a bitter pill to swallow. We were truly orphans. But nostalgia is not of great use to musicology. It was also the start of an entry into history, or the teleology, that is to say the collective understanding, no longer of a career in progress, but of a body of work. This final electric period, with all its misgivings and its disappointments (the only one that I personally lived through, day to day), heralded a re-evaluation of all that had preceded it, implying de facto that the first electric period was indeed a high point, a thesis which still seems defensible to me today, some twenty-five years later.

1983 and 1985 respectively saw the publication of the two volumes of the monumental Miles Davis biography by Jack Chambers. Before the publication of this magnum opus, the only real biography to speak of was Bill Cole's book,⁸ which was published in 1974. Here he describes *On the Corner* as 'an insult to the intellect of the people'. Such a comment is consistent with a barakian⁹ inspired ideology that was establishing itself at the time. It would be long-lived and never fully abandoned in certain circles. It can be summarised in the following way: together, Miles Davis and John Coltrane wrote some of the most brilliant chapters of African American music. Then their ways parted, one towards formalism with the second quintet while the other followed a spiritual quest, culminating in *A Love Supreme* and *Ascension*, and interrupted only by his death in 1967. It was at precisely this time, that Miles turned towards electrified music. This was a change in direction that was viewed, not as a legitimate means of musical expression, but rather as a sign of his succumbing to the temptation of commercialism, as a quest for success in the eyes of a white audience; at the end of it all, as a betrayal of the African American ideal. Miles Davis with his Italian suits and his Ferraris had become the antithesis of the African American destiny, that which was most wholly and purely embodied by John Coltrane (and in its more politicised form by Charles Mingus and Max Roach).

Chambers' two-part book was therefore the first major work to be published which pushed moral posturing aside to analyse Miles Davis's artistic legacy in painstaking detail, at a time when it was still in the process of its creation.¹⁰ This did not deter him from raising questions pertaining to politics, race and identity along the way, in tandem with giving a meticulous analysis of the musical developments. Already knowing the recorded works well, I was able to fully profit from these books, which I proceeded to devour, acquiring a more complete picture of the music and thus further enhancing my love of it in the process.

The other key text that I had read at the time of writing *Électrique* was of course the autobiography compiled by Quincy Troupe: in my opinion one of the finest books ever written about jazz.¹¹ Here Miles speaks a great deal about his music and the musicians who made it. He doesn't give us formulas of how it was put together, nor speak about it in an analytical way (as an André Hodeir may have done), but like a modern-day Zarathustra, communicates an idea and teaches us about the states of the soul, the states of the spirit, intuitions and sensations. Such

⁸ Cole, Bill: *Miles Davis – A Musical Biography*, New York, William Morrow, 1974, p. 165. To my knowledge the only biography before this one was Michael James's book, published in 1961 (James, Michael: *Miles Davis*, New York, A.S. Barnes, 1961).

⁹ In reference to Amiri Baraka (a.k.a LeRoi Jones).

¹⁰ It was only later, at the time of the publication of its French translation, that I would discover Eric Nisenson's *Round About Midnight* (Nisenson, Eric : *Round About Midnight - Un portrait de Miles Davis*, Denoël, 1983) as well as the biography by Ian Carr (Carr, Ian: *Miles Davis – A Critical biography*, London, Quartet, 1982).

¹¹ Davis, Miles & Troupe, Quincy: *Miles – The Autobiography*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1989.

qualities distinguish this book, in my opinion, as the most valuable document on this music and its evolution (including in an analytical sense).

Innumerable books came to be published after the death of Miles Davis (and for that matter, after the publication of *Électrique*). I must confess that I have not read them all, having felt at the time the need to change my focus. It is worth noting that Miles Davis is, along with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and John Coltrane, one of the extremely rare cases of a jazz musician who has been the subject of a diverse range of publications – that is to say, not just of those that are biographical in nature. New biographies have of course been published (for instance those by John Szwed or Ken Vail, not to mention the revised edition of Ian Carr's book); however, many other works have also appeared, from anthologies and personal testimonies to musicological texts of a highly technical nature. As for the electric periods, two complete discographies and many other books have also been published. Most remarkable, however, is the fact that of the many texts concerning Miles Davis, at least five of them pertain to one album, *Kind of Blue*.¹²

In 1985, I decided to write a biography on the life of Gil Evans. It was a project born with the pretext of finding a way to meet him. My strategy was to be more successful than I could have ever imagined. I did get to meet him in February 1986 (on the occasion of his coming to France as the special guest for the first concert of the recently created Orchestre National de Jazz, which was then under the direction of François Jeanneau). This meeting led to several other meetings at his New York abode in March of that same year for a series of interviews that he gave to provide me the material for what was to become two years later, *Las Vegas Tango - Une vie de Gil Evans*. During the course of these interviews, he commented here and there on Miles Davis, but I cannot say that I learnt anything I didn't already know or that my idea of the trumpeter was greatly changed. Following the publication of the Gil Evans book in 1989, I felt the need to take stock of the famous 'electric period' which had figured so heavily in my musical development. As always, there was the factor of time. Some fifteen years had passed since the last remaining embers of this Miles Davis period had gone out and in the intervening time, jazz had changed a great deal. Jazz-rock, which had taken its inspiration from Miles Davis, had developed right through the 1970's before finally fading away over the course of the subsequent decade. The eighties also saw the emergence of a neoclassicism, driven notably by Wynton Marsalis, but no one movement was able to impose itself as being definitive of the decade.

May 1996 saw the second Miles Davis Conference, held at the university of Saint Louis (Missouri) and chaired by Gerald Early, professor of English and of African and African American Studies. Two Europeans, the research of both of whom concerned the electric period, were invited: Enrico Merlin and myself. I have not been able to find the complete list of speakers and topics, but I remember that one of Miles Davis's wives was present, along with his brother and perhaps his sister also, as well as saxophonist and former sideman Gary Bartz. For the part of proceedings that concerned analysis of the music, I was surprised to find that only one of the speakers was African American. And it was clear that, unlike the others presenting, he was only very moderately interested in music per se, to support a more contextual type of research. Above all, he was scathing of the 'drift' of Miles Davis in the final period – yet another example of the barakian ideology, mentioned earlier.

The day before the colloquium, I stumbled upon Teo Macero who, evidently feeling a little lonely, invited me to have dinner with him. It was the dawn of the publication of the integral box sets, which in providing access to almost all of the recordings that existed for a given session, would go on to transform the notion of what it was that constituted a work of Miles Davis. At that time, only one such set, *Complete Live at Plugged Nickel*, had been published. Sony Japan, who released it,

¹² See the included bibliography and also that which is provided on the definitive website on Miles Davis, *Miles Ahead*, created and maintained by Peter Losin: <http://www.plosin.com/milesahead/mdBibliography.aspx>.

had not consulted Teo Macero prior to producing it. I had barely sat down when he asked me: 'Have you heard the *Plugged Nickel* box set?' His tone was nothing short of vindictive... another question quickly followed: 'What do you think of it?'

I could well sense that the tone of the dinner to come would be set entirely by my response. So, I tentatively volunteered, 'yes, I had listened to it a little, but not really.' to which he jumped in, saying, 'I totally agree with you, it sucks!'

What was it that he found to be so bad about this production? It was not so much the fact that Miles was not at the height of his powers,¹³ but that the overall concept, embodied in an absence of editing and post production, privileged the idea of a work 'raw and unaltered,' something at odds with his concept, founded on the principle that the original material was created with the intention that it be reworked into something altogether new, thus becoming that which was to be published.¹⁴

As we were parting, he handed me a DAT player (it was during the brief period where this digital format was the professional standard) containing a cassette: 'Listen to that, you can give it back to me tomorrow', he said. I returned to my room where I promptly listened to the tape. I couldn't believe my ears! What I heard was a sumptuous suite, around twelve minutes long, of a jazz orchestra arranged by Gil Evans with Miles Davis as soloist. At that time, nothing had been published of this famous pairing since the recordings of 1962 and *Quiet Nights*. The next day, I returned the device and the cassette, but I no longer remember what Teo Macero told me as to whether it was indeed Miles and Gil. The following year the first box of the Columbia series (displaying the number 2), the integral studio sessions of Miles Davis and Gil Evans was released. It was comprised solely of post 1962 tracks: four takes of a piece entitled 'Falling Water', recorded on the 16th of February 1968 (this 'composition' is in reality an assembly of various fragments, of which some parts had appeared in various forms in earlier recordings of Gil). I'm fairly sure that what Teo Macero had me listen to was an edited form of these recordings. On hearing these sessions disappointment replaced the delight that I'd experienced on hearing the tapes in Saint Louis. The material, given in its raw form, is not terribly exciting, even though, as always, it contains transcendent moments due to the writing of Gil or to the playing of Miles. This was precisely the art of Macero: to transform this raw material into a gem. Something that would be further confirmed (in my opinion) by the publication of later box sets, *Complete Bitches Brew* and *Complete Jack Johnson* for example, which lack, for the most part, the punch of the original edited albums (even if there are magnificent passages contained in the material that was not initially released). Finally, in 1997, *Panthalassa* was published. The tapes from *In a Silent Way* had been put at the disposal of Bill Laswell, who had proceeded to create his own 'reinterpretation' using the already edited sections, together with his own personal additions to post-production elements. Here again, it was a disappointment when compared to the original and a further confirmation that Teo Macero was not only a major contributor to the albums of 'his' time, but an ingenious craftsman as well. It wasn't enough to integrate the editing and the sound treatment in principle; it had to be done in a certain way: his way (or was it that the intervening years had had an effect on what one might call the 'authenticity' of the work; that it was also necessary for the post-production to have been done *at a certain moment in time*... something which was obviously not possible for Bill Laswell).

¹³ 1965 WAS MARRIED BY SEVERE HEALTH PROBLEMS FOR MILES DAVIS: NOTABLY TWO HIP OPERATIONS. (SZWED, JOHN: *SO WHAT: THE LIFE OF MILES DAVIS*, LONDON, RANDOM HOUSE, 2003 (1/ NEW YORK, SIMON & SCHUSTER, 2002, p. 248-254).

¹⁴ IN HIS TIME, MACERO HAD PUBLISHED EXTRACTS FROM THIS SERIES AT THE PLUGGED NICKEL IN THE FORM OF A SINGLE ALBUM ENTITLED *COOKIN' AT THE PLUGGED NICKEL*. THE SOUND-SPACE IS TREATED IN A RADICALLY DIFFERENT WAY, WITH THE ADDITION IN PARTICULAR OF A VERY LARGE REVERB.

What lessons can be learned a posteriori from the five box sets¹⁵ that have been released, which include the studio sessions from the first electric period? Firstly, as Philip Freeman¹⁶ has noted, these box sets do not really contain all the material from the sessions, as is widely believed to be the case. Nevertheless, they have made a great amount of previously unreleased material available to the public for the first time. The collection is comprised in part, of the takes, which even if incomplete, are still longer than the versions that were originally released. The remaining tracks are compositions that were not selected for the original albums. Important research remains to be done on the takes which are included in these box sets – research of the type that Enrico Merlin carried out on the live recordings of the period to determine the way in which the Miles Davis band was operating at that time. Merlin meticulously set about understanding how a system of signals permitted the musicians to move from one motif to the next and thus develop the music in a live context.¹⁷ For a similar type of work to be done here, it would require that the original raw takes be compared to final album releases in order to determine how the editing and post production of Teo Macero was achieved.

Without knowing the results of such a study (which to the best of my knowledge does not exist at the time of writing), I would like to venture a few considerations. In short, I would say that listening to the material in chronological order leads more to the confirmation of existing beliefs than it does to new revelations. For instance, that this music is the result of a particular process that starts with the choice of musicians and the instrumentation. From the moment when Miles Davis started to distance himself from the format of the quintet (through the addition of the guitar at the end of 1967, but especially from the start of 1969 with the addition of multiple keyboards and the general increase in the size of the band) the sound of each different ensemble was envisaged beforehand through the choices that were made. These choices included:

Whether it was to be one, two or three keyboardists as well as the way in which the various roles of Fender Rhodes, organ, synthesiser, and other keyboards were distributed amongst them.

Whether one chose the double or the electric bass (eventually they were paired together). Whether it was to be one or two drummers, flanked by one, two or three auxiliary percussionists.

If tabla and sitar players were to be called upon.

All these choices largely determine the sound of the ensemble before a single note has been played. It has already been noted that one of the determining factors with regards to the Miles Davis ensembles of this period was the keyboard-guitar pairing. The keyboards occupied the stage at the start of the process with the trio of Hancock, Corea and Zawinul for *In a Silent Way*. Then it was the time of John McLaughlin, but at first he was still playing with a ‘civilised’ jazz sound (which he had demonstrated on his own album *Extrapolation*): that which was not dissimilar from the guitar sounds of George Benson and Joe Beck in the first attempts to add the instrument to the ensemble. The concept would further evolve when the keyboards were done away with altogether, starting from 1973, but above all it would be the heavier, more distorted guitar tones Miles Davis would demand from McLaughlin (or was it that McLaughlin already had these sounds in his bag of tricks?) that would define the musical identity of the group at that time. Another contrasting point is that between 1968 and 1974 no less than eight different keyboardists (not to mention Davis himself) can be heard on the recordings, whereas from its first appearance the guitar is played solely by John McLaughlin until a unique occasion on the 6th of June, 1972, where he is joined by David Creamer¹⁸. This foreshadows what one could consider to be the denouement of the concept with the pairing of Reggie Lucas and Pete Cosey¹⁹ and the establishment of ideas imported from soul

¹⁵ See included bibliography.

¹⁶ Freeman, Philip: *Running the Voodoo Down: The Electric Music of Miles Davis*, San Francisco, Backbeat Books, 2005, p. 216.

¹⁷ Merlin, Enrico & Rizzardi, Veniero: *Bitches brew: genesi del capolavoro di Miles Davis*, Milano, Il saggiatore, 2009.

¹⁸ Which would also be McLaughlin’s final session with Davis before 1985.

¹⁹ Reggie Lucas appears in studio sessions from the 23rd of August 1972, while we have to wait until the 5th of June 1973 for the arrival of Pete Cosey.

music, which define the roles of rhythm and solo guitar. This time also marks the definitive disappearance of keyboards in the hands of those other than Davis himself.

The second phase of the process is that of pre-composition, which we know to be very much reduced (but above all different), with regards to traditional use of the term in jazz: at the very most, a melodic line with a few chords, but generally either one or the other or even just a simple bass riff. The third phase concerns a type of visual navigation (by way of the ear, if such a statement is not a contradiction in terms), that of listening to the material as it is being created, which in turn is influenced by the choice of the artist to add something else to it or to let it be. It's during this phase that intuition is master; a perfect illustration of Luigi Pareyson's idea of formativity, 'form forming' and 'form formed'.²⁰ The fourth and final phase concerns the post-production: the choice of material, the way in which the sound is treated and the editing.

The publication of these box sets not only raises important questions about the nature of the 'recorded work', it has also greatly expanded the corpus available to researchers. We must therefore consider each phase of the process I have outlined, as it pertains to this previously unpublished material. In the first place, the expanded corpus confirms the indispensable nature of each of the four phases of the process, particularly the final phase. It is of little surprise that the (more or less) complete takes are often somewhat frustrating to listen to. The first three phases require that the fourth and final phase effectuate a type of sorting of the material. The frustration that is at times felt, is due to the fact that the listener is presented with a process that has been halted at its third phase, in other words, a process that is incomplete. Or is it rather a case of a retroactive effect of the product on the process? The listener is used to the pieces such as they were published and then repeatedly listened to. Have these works been conditioned by our listening, according to the way in which they were initially presented to us? This would be a fifth phase (after the choice of the instruments and the musicians, the pre-composition, the production of the recording in real time, and the post production) that could also be considered as the third moment (after the 'form forming' and the 'form formed'). Indeed, it is a well-known concept in musicology today: the form constructed by the receptor. To return a material to its anterior, generating state, makes the conception of that material as a work of art (regardless of whether it is original, or just an alternative) difficult if not impossible, because its place has already been defined. 'On the Corner' and 'Go Ahead John' are works that were respectively published in 1972 on *On the Corner* and 1974 on *Big Fun*. It is very difficult to substitute them with longer takes or other different fragments that have been edited together. And if it can be said that any fragment in a phonographic regime acquires the status of a work from the moment it is published, the fact remains that the history of the publication *informs* this status.²¹

At this point, I must say a few words concerning the question of 'process-product'. There are two opposing viewpoints on this issue. One of these considers that the 'process' is more

²⁰ 'Art can only result from the intentional accentuation of a present activity in the total human experience, which accompanies or, better still, forms each manifestation of human "operational ability". This is a specific operation of the artist. This activity, which is generally inherent in the whole experience and which, so opportunely specified, constitutes that which we call art in proper sense, is the "formativity". This is to say, a certain "doing" whereby the very act of "doing" invents the way in which it is done. A production that is at the same time, inextricably, invention. Every aspect of human "operational ability", from the simplest to the most complex, has an essential and irreducible character of "formativity". Human activities can only express themselves through their self-realisation in operation. In other words, through movements destined to culminate in works. However, it is only through giving itself form that the work becomes such, in its individual and unique reality, detached from its author and in possession of its own life-force – contained within the indivisible unity of its coherence, open to the recognition of its own value, and capable of demanding, and obtaining this recognition. No activity is artistic which is not also formative, and there is no accomplished work that does not also have form' Pareyson, Luigi: *Aesthetic theory of formativity*, translation by Leo McFadden of a passage from *Esthétique – Théorie de la formativité*, trad. Gilles Tiberghien, Paris, Editions Rue d'Ulm, 2007 (1/1954, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*, Torino, Edizioni di Filosofia), p. 32).

²¹ Which in turn brings us back to the ontological debate regarding the definition of the work of jazz, a topic which is discussed in Cugny, Laurent: *Analysis of Jazz: A Comprehensive Approach*, Revised edition, translation Bérengère Mauduit, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2019.

important that the ‘product’ and is notably endorsed by certain exponents of ‘free improvisation’. The other, for which I argued in *Analysis of Jazz: A Comprehensive Approach* states that, in the first part, in an oral or audiotactile regime it is impossible to access the ‘process’ without passing by the ‘product’ and thus it is essential to look at the latter in order to know the former, and in the second part, the setting aside of the ‘product,’ considered ultimately as more or less of an accessory, makes no sense, neither musically nor from the point of view of reception. From these two viewpoints, certain positions with regards to analysis emerge. The approach that I defend values analysis as a means of knowing the ‘product’ by passing through the ‘process’ and vice-versa. The other may for example, favour a processual analysis, as in the case of Clément Canonne,²² or at times deny any relevance to the analytical exercise itself (Derek Bailey). What then do these expanded re-editions of the works of Miles Davis’s electric period offer us in relation to this? Depending on your point of view, either a confirmation that it is only the process which counts or on the other hand, a new look at the articulation between process and product, by way of a different (or differently presented) product.

The previously unreleased material published in these five box sets, must not, however, be discounted. Another question begs to be answered in light of their release: what was the selection criteria used by the producers of this music? It is difficult to say (here again, a more exhaustive study would certainly offer some pertinent responses). And then there is one’s own personal appreciation- that intuitive aesthetic that remains, despite everything, at the heart of the receptive process. Just as we sometimes have the impression that certain pieces ‘don’t work’, for reasons that we cannot further explain but which are indeed well-founded, it is indeed likely that there will be pieces, initially excluded, which we judge to have been very much worthy of inclusion. In my own case, I would have kept ‘Early Minor’, ‘Feio’, ‘Recollections’, ‘Big Fun/Holly-wuud’ and ‘Mr Foster’.

Which leads me to one final observation in relation to these previously unreleased tracks- the confirmation that an evolution took place over the course of the period. It is sometimes said that the pair of albums *In a Silent Way – Bitches Brew*, were a response to the pair of *Kind of Blue* and *Sketches of Spain*, ten years before, whereby a largely impressionist period was succeeded by a subsequent ‘brighter’ period. Such an observation is not without pertinence; however, viewed teleologically, this pairing of *In a Silent Way - Bitches Brew* could be called the beginnings of the electric period. They seem almost acoustic in comparison to the electrified ferocity that we hear starting from *On the Corner*, and reaching its culmination in the molten infusion evident in *Agharta* and *Pangaea*. It is truly a sort of descent into acoustic hell, an unrelenting march toward the darkness and the savage electricity associated with the period, where any impressionist notion ceases to have currency when considered in relation to the ethereal climes of ‘In a Silent Way’, ‘Ascent’ or ‘Recollections’ and maybe even ‘Sanctuary’ in *Bitches Brew*. Even when listening to the understated masterpiece ‘He Loved Him Madly’, although the dynamic nuance evolves from pianissississimo

²² “To analyse improvisation is therefore to analyse a relationship between a certain sound structure and the heuristics adopted by one or more musicians to come to this sound structure. Such a processual analysis of improvisation would probably be founded on two principles: firstly, since we are examining a sequence of sounds actually produced, there should be no hesitation in making systematic use of linear analysis, which might seem far too descriptive in other contexts. [...] next, it is necessary to consider the “intentional” layer that exists in improvisation. This is true in the case of solo improvisation, where the discrepancy between intention and realisation affords the notion of accident all its fecundity. This is obviously all the more crucial in the case of collective improvisation, where one cannot limit one’s scope to only the acoustical and musical content of the signal’ passage from Canonne, Clément: ‘Sur l’ontologie de l’improvisation’, in Arbo, Alessandro & Ruta, Marcello, *Ontologie musicale – Perspectives et débats*, Paris, Herman, 2014, p. 319. It should be made clear, however, that this proposition forms part of a searching introspective into the ontology of improvisation and must therefore be understood in this context.

to mezzo piano over the course of more than 32 minutes, there is no longer a place for light in the music. It is rather an acoustic acidity that is at odds with every impressionist yearning.²³

There remains the perennial question as to the difference between Miles Davis's music of the studio and that which he created on the stage. To each of these spaces, the trumpeter associated different dynamics both in terms of the group itself and the way in which it played. In 1956 Davis recorded three albums in one day, doing only one take of each piece and playing exclusively standards, in order to fulfil his contractual obligations with Prestige and subsequently enter into a record deal with Columbia. Playing in the studio as if on stage, if you will. But at the heart of the matter there is something else, which has nothing to do with the absence of an exchange between the public and the artists, as known in a studio situation. Foremost, in my opinion, are questions concerning the temporal dynamics. Certain pieces lend themselves to the musician over the course of his or her musical life, through their recurrence during gigs or in concerts. The music evolves from one of these gigs to the next, all the more so when the frequency at which these pieces are repeated is high. It's in this way that, over the course of a musical life, repertoires are created: as if by themselves. Certain pieces are revisited every night, or nearly every night. For Miles Davis, depending on the period, these would be 'Round About Midnight', 'So What', 'Seven Steps to Heaven', 'Footprints', and 'Turnaroundphrase'. On the other hand, others are restricted to the stuffy air of the recording studio: 'Flamenco Sketches', 'Iris', and 'Water Babies' for example (A tendency that intensified with the increasing reduction in pre-composed thematic material, seen in the music from the start of first electric period.). The post 'Lost Quintet' groups played increasingly fewer compositions. In their place were grooves. It is not surprising that we see titles appearing such as 'Untitled Original' or 'Call it Anythin', which says it all, in response to what we can imagine to have been a producer's anguished question as to what to put on the label of the tape of the concert just recorded (in this case on the Isle of Wight on August 29, 1970). And yet, a similar evolution had also started to take place in the studio (one would be hard-pressed to sing the themes of *Big Fun*). In any case, it was always a question of different spaces for different types of work. It is, as has been said, a question of temporality, but also one of sound. The sound production work done in the studio is specific. The studio sound of *Big Fun* never translates exactly to the stage. In the same way, the sound of the band heard on *Agharta* or *Pangaea* is not found on any of the albums. It is the sound of the stage, and it's not just the extensive post-production work of Teo Macero²⁴ that distinguishes it. If indeed it seems that the published concerts (*At Fillmore*, *In Concert*, *Dark Magus*, *Agharta*, and *Pangaea*) are only slightly edited, or not edited at all, it is because there is a quality to the sound which is undeniably rawer – a texture very different from the acidity of *On the Corner*, the fluidity of the rapid passage of 'Calypso Frelimo', or the metaphysics of 'He Loved Him Madly'.

What then do the years that have passed since the music was released have to teach in relation to all of this? As has been mentioned, a large amount of previously unpublished recordings, both from the studio and the stage, has been added to the corpus. For all this, I'm not sure that any light has been shed on the relative mystery of this duality, the equivalent of which certainly doesn't exist among Miles Davis's contemporaries. But perhaps different approaches or new studies will reveal aspects that have to this point gone unnoticed.

Two more things. How can this music pass as rock? The usual reply is to point to the sound of the guitars and the rhythms used. As for the former, it cannot be denied that the sound of John McLaughlin (not only on 1969's *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew* but also on *Jack Johnson* and *Live-*

²³ Compare the heart-rending trumpet entrance at (17'32"), with Miles's delayed arrival, on 'Ascent' (9'44").

²⁴ Bringing about that which Vincenzo Caporaletti terms the secondary NAE (neo-auratic encoding).

Evil of 1970), is radically new in this context: drawing heavily from the rock guitar paradigm – Jimi Hendrix of course, but also Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton.²⁵ It is certainly true of the sound, but far less so of the phrases, which are more deconstructed, borrowing less from the blues. With the arrival of Pete Cosey, things become even less clear- his melodic approach is sufficiently abstract to send any lover of rock running for the door. As for Reggie Lucas, he could best be described as a guitarist coming out of the rhythm'n'blues and soul music traditions. Concerning the drum kit, indeed the volume of sound (present from 1970 but not yet integrated at the time of the two 1969 albums) and the almost complete abandon of the use of swing rhythms (exacerbated by the frequent use of a heavy snare drum playing the backbeat, in the place of the hi-hat pedal or the muffled cymbals of swung jazz) both point strongly to rock. However, the counterarguments are equally strong. Just as for the guitars, Miles looked for (and found) drummers that came from the black music tradition (rhythm'n'blues, soul etc.). But above all, the rock paradigm almost inevitably implies singing and – with the exception of progressive rock (bands such as Genesis and Yes, who for a period, privileged extended forms) – the song form, which one would have a very hard time finding in the Miles Davis music of this period.

Supporting the thesis of rock being the governing paradigm of this music, there is a consistent and often cited supporting argument that goes along these lines: Miles did it to win over a new younger and predominantly white audience. Proponents of this theory thus accuse Miles of having 'sold out' artistically for the most despicable of reasons: to earn more money. It is certainly undeniable that the trumpeter's relationship to money was different from that of the majority of other jazz musicians. Miles needed money for its own sake, for the lifestyle it afforded him, but also to support his drug addiction (which his 'cold turkey' efforts of 1953 to get clean had far from put an end to²⁶), as well as for symbolic reasons- perhaps the most compelling of all. It was after all, a most pertinent way to demonstrate to whites that blacks could be every bit as equal as them. That which one might call the 'Jack Johnson syndrome'. The complex relationship between money and music for Miles Davis is neatly summarised in two declarations, made a page apart in his autobiography.

Nineteen sixty-nine was the year rock and funk were selling like hotcakes and all this was put on display at Woodstock. There were over 400,000 people at the concert. That many people at a concert makes everybody go crazy, and especially people who make records. The only thing on their minds is, how can we sell records to that many people all the time? If we haven't been doing that, then how can we do it? That was the atmosphere all around the record companies. At the same time, people were packing stadiums to hear and see stars in person. And jazz music seemed to be withering on the vine, in record sales and live performances. It was the first time in a long time that I didn't sell out crowds everywhere I played. In Europe I always had sellouts, but in the United States, we played to a lot of half-empty clubs in 1969. That told me something. Compared to what my records used to sell, when you put them beside what Bob Dylan or Sly Stone sold, it was no contest.²⁷

To which he adds:

So this was the climate with Columbia and me just before I went into the studio to record *Bitches Brew*. What they didn't understand was that I wasn't prepared to be a memory yet, wasn't prepared to be listed only on Columbia's so-called classical list. I had seen the way to the future with my music, and I was going for it like I had always done. Not for Columbia and their record sales, and not for trying to get to some young white record buyers. I was going

²⁵ We could also include here its antecedents in the blues, in guitarists such as John Lee Hooker or B.B. King.

²⁶ See the eye-opening descriptions given in Szwed, *op. cit.* and Davis & Troupe, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Davis & Troupe, *op. cit.*, p. 297

for it for myself, for what I wanted and needed in my own music. I wanted to change course, had to change course for me to continue to believe in and love what I was playing.²⁸

Therefore, to advance the theory that money was the driving factor behind the stylistic shift of 1969-1970 would be an error. In the first place, it must be noted that, from a financial standpoint, the venture was a failure. The success of *Bitches Brew*, which rapidly sold over half a million copies, is exceptional, in every sense of the word. It was a flash in the pan. The biographies are fairly explicit on this point. From 1970, the trumpeter was continually complaining to Columbia that his music was not being promoted as it should have been; he was irritated, to say the least, by the success which met the musical projects of artists whose careers he'd helped create: Herbie Hancock with *Headhunters*, Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter with *Weather Report*, John McLaughlin with *Mahavishnu Orchestra*, and Chick Corea with *Return to Forever*.

But if this theory of one who sold-out to commercialism does not hold water, it is ultimately because it reduces a relentless evolution (from *Filles de Kilimandjaro* to *Pangaea*) to purely financial reasons. This evolution was not written in advance; however, it does follow a logic which is entirely musical. Miles Davis is the perfect incarnation of the 'formativity' of Luigi Pareyson and its associated terms of 'form forming' and 'form formed'.²⁹ He does not know (exactly) where he is going but invents the way in which it is done in doing it. How many times have we heard accounts from Miles's sidemen of the era that the recording sessions were erratic (to say the least)? No one, Miles included, really knew what was happening: neither what had to be done, nor the order in which it should be done.³⁰ And yet at the same time, they seem to have been led by an almost supernatural force – a guiding star showing the way, giving a sense of logic; a force embodied in the one and only Miles Davis, always guided by a kind of voice within himself, this Prince of Darkness of formativity in music. Finally, we must come back to the reception of the material in order to join together these two terms of condemnation: rock and commercialism. It has been established that the commercial venture was relatively unsuccessful in spite of the hype and instant success surrounding *Bitches Brew*. The issue is even more apparent if we consider the question of taste. Looking one final time to my own personal experience, mine was a progression that moved, to put it simply, from *Communication Breakdown* and *Led Zeppelin II* to *Bitches Brew* and *Jack Johnson*. Little more than an adolescent at the time, I really had the feeling that this progression represented more of a farewell to rock (or at least a 'goodbye for now') in the sense that I was not coming back, rather than the discovery of a haven of rock at the very heart of jazz. But most telling, I believe, is the absolute indifference that was shown by my rock mates (not to speak of the extreme boredom on their part) whenever I would try to get them to listen to the smallest extract of a Miles Davis recording – this Miles Davis who they say sold out to white commercialism. As for African Americans, it is also uncertain that young blacks living in the projects of the United States, would

²⁸ Ibid. p. 298

²⁹ 'If such is the nature of the artistic process, it must be said that the form exists not only as "formed" at the term of the production, but that it is already "forming" during this production. The form is active before even existing; it is present and propulsive before even being conclusive or satisfactory; totally in movement before resting upon its own foundations, gathered around its own centre. Thus, during the process of its production, the form exists, and it does not exist. It does not exist because, in terms of being formed, it will only exist once the process has been finished. It does exist because in terms of "forming" the form is present as soon as this process has begun. However, the "form forming" is also no different from the "form formed", because its presence in the process is not like the presence of finality in an action that seeks to achieve its goal. If the value of such an action resides in a congruence with a pre-established finality, the value of the form consists, to the contrary, in a congruence with itself. Indeed, the formation succeeds, when it succeeds. There are no criteria by which to evaluate the result other than that of success. It is only once the work is accomplished that one can see how the process was oriented by its own result that would follow.' (Pareyson, op. cit., p. 90-91). See also Caporaletti, Cugny & Givan, op. cit., p. 35-37.

³⁰ 'Sometimes when Miles was doing things we would say, "Miles is messing up." He wasn't messing up. He was trying to destroy something, a learned thing or something that he had done before or repeated. It was like he was stumbling through something. And then the stumbling became beautiful, but he wasn't actually stumbling. He was and he wasn't. It was seamless. It was a seamless process going on.' (Szwed, op. cit., p. 406).

have unanimously turned toward this relative newcomer in the field and immediately welcomed him into *their* family (a family which included the likes of James Brown and Sly & the Family Stone), and not preferred, in terms of something new, ‘Little Stevie’ (Wonder).

The cold hard fact is that, although suits were well and truly back in the closet, although Dave Holland had long hair and Chick Corea was sporting a bandana, and although the Miles Davis group was playing at the Filmore and The Isle of Wight, the rock public never really took to this music, which was clearly a bridge too far from their usual listening preferences. And while some would like to make a significant detail of Miles Davis’s performances at the Filmore (east and west): the temples of pop, the success of *Bitches Brew* was more an accident of history in a psychedelic period initiated in a ‘Summer of Love’ and marked by increasing opposition to the United States’ ongoing involvement in the Vietnam War. Here again, the benefit of hindsight serves only to accentuate the feeling that the public’s reception of musical works, was, like everything, defined by a certain incongruity, characteristic of the era.

Perhaps most telling in this matter are the words of Miles himself: ‘I don’t play rock, I play black.’³¹ There are two ways that one could interpret this statement, the first of which is evident. Miles Davis was, among many other jazz musicians, a tireless denouncer of racism, the spokesman par excellence of the brownian (James) ‘I’m black and I’m proud’. And indeed, more than any other period of Miles Davis, the first electric period sounds ‘black’ (something which, as we have discussed, would be difficult to say of the second electric period of the 1990’s).

But there is another meaning here. The litany of horrors in the private life of Miles Davis: drugs and addictions of every kind; violence, in particular towards women (starting with violence toward his own partners); illness; his body baring the self-inflicted scars of his lifestyle; and chronic disorder, as it is outlined in the various biographies,³² is nothing short of astounding. One cannot help but wonder: Why all this darkness? What is behind it? Here it is tempting to surrender to a theory of reflection that is no longer socio-political (Miles Davis plays black music, African American music), but psycho-existential (Miles Davis plays the music of the darkness of life). And yet, as it happens, little credence is given (at least by myself) to theories of reflection. Having listened to this music over and over again, I hear a musician, who is torn, tormented, obsessed, in the pursuit of a darkness, whether it be political, racial, anthropological, psychological, existential or something else. But when listening to Miles Davis, above all I hear an exceptional musician (to put it lightly), tortured first and foremost by the future of his own music.

Just listen to it. It’s so breathtaking. You can’t know how terrifying it is to be in the middle of all that. It’s endless sound. Music is a curse. I’m so into it that I have to have other things to get away from it.³³

If one were to make predictions of this period, something which for that matter, is not a very postmodern thing to do, one could say that history will remember ‘Ascent’, ‘Shhh/Peaceful’, ‘Early Minor’, ‘Bitches Brew’, ‘Feio’, ‘Guinnevere’, ‘Konda’, ‘Nem Um Talvez’, ‘Black Satin’, ‘Mr. Foster’, ‘Calypso Frelimo’, ‘He Loved Him Madly’, ‘Mtume’, and ‘Prelude’, as masterpieces. Authentic masterpieces.

Laurent Cugny
Sorbonne Université
Institut de recherche en musicologie ([IReMus](#))

³¹ Szwed, op. cit., p. 287.

³² That of John Szwed, is particularly edifying in this respect (Szwed, op. cit.), while at the same time not seeking to hide this side of Miles Davis.

³³ Szwed, op. cit., p. 339.

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