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PERFORMING JAZZ, DEFYING ESSENCE: JAZZ AS A METAPHOR OF BEING IN JACKIE KAY'S *TRUMPET*

LARS ECKSTEIN

Jackie Kay's love of jazz and blues permeates her writing. In her own account, there was a formative moment of this love at the age of twelve when her father, "a Scottish communist who loved the blues" (Kay 1997, 9), bought her a Bessie Smith album. For an adopted black girl of mixed Nigerian/Scottish parentage growing up in Glasgow in a white family, Bessie Smith was a revealing experience. Much later, Kay remembers in a prose homage to the life of the classic blues singer: "I am the same colour as she is, I thought to myself, electrified. I am the same as Bessie Smith […] the shock of my own reflection came with the blues" (Kay 1997, 13). She made Bessie Smith a firm part of what she calls her "imaginary black family" (also featuring, among others, "Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis, The Soledad Brothers, Cassius Clay, Count Basie, Duke Ellington" *ibid*., 15), which, as an adopted child, she felt the privilege to constantly reinvent, and by doing so, in the process reinvent herself. All the while, Kay has remained firmly dedicated to the Scottish cultural background of her upbringing (Severin 2002), and her poetry and prose draw on black writers and musicians from Bessie Smith to Audre Lorde to Miles Davis as well as on the rich tradition of Scottish poetry and song.

In the following I wish to put forth that jazz, however, provides Kay with more than just a practical source of aesthetic inspiration and cultural identification. On a philosophical level, jazz assumes its cultural validity in Kay's writing as a metaphor of being and identity formation, as a form of art that radically values performance and self-creation over essence and determinism. I wish to illustrate this by reading Kay's much acclaimed debut novel *Trumpet* (1998)[1] which, as most first novels do, takes up many aspects of its author's biography such as the riddles of a black Scottish identity, lesbianism, or the experience of adoption. Its imaginative scope, however, reaches far beyond the personal: Telling us the story of the jazz trumpeter Joss Moody, *Trumpet* is, above all, a jazz novel which is as much about the force of music as it is about conceptions of family, race and gender. Before addressing its aesthetic complexities and its anti-essentialist politics, however, I wish to set out by briefly discussing philosophies of what jazz actually means, represents, or does in our contemporary cultural contexts.

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[1] All references in the text are to the 1998 Picador edition.

1. Between Camps: Contemporary Politics of Jazz

What is jazz? The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that it commonly denotes “a type of music originating among American Negroes, characterized by its use of improvisation, syncopated phrasing, a regular or forceful rhythm, often in common time, and a ‘swinging’ quality” (*OED* 1989). It is immediately obvious that this definition is far from comprehensive and at best tentative. It combines a minimum of socio-historical information (African American origins) with rather indefinite notes on form (phrasing, rhythm, time) and performance (improvisation), and ends with a category bordering on the elusive: *It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing*, but what has it got when it ‘swings’? Already in 1939, Duke Ellington noted that ‘swing’ cannot be pinned down to any singular meaning,[2] and there is a persisting topos that ‘swinging’ defies objective description anyway, as it can only be ‘felt’ in the moment of musical performance (cf. Schuller 1986, 6). Not all varieties of post-war jazz, moreover, strive for a ‘swinging’ feel any longer; syncopation and common time will not do to describe the temporal complexities of much bebop, hardbop and free jazz; and while its socio-historical origins are certainly American, there are thriving jazz scenes all over the globe. On these grounds, it make little sense to refer to jazz as denoting any fixed corpus of music or musicians. Instead, it seems necessary to conceive of jazz first of all as a discourse to which a number of different qualities, values and social functions are attributed by different critical camps.

There is little controversy about the fact that Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington or Charlie Parker represent jazz; yet shall we also include Benny Goodman’s main-streamlined version of ‘swing’? What about the post-*Bitches Brew* Miles Davis, who exchanged his black tie and suit for leather outfits, and his acoustic instrument for amplifiers and synthesisers? And where do we place an artist like Rabih Abu Khalil, who fuses traditional jazz elements with classical Arabic music and instruments? While some critics emphasise the generic openness and transcultural inclusiveness of the term jazz, others prefer to draw rather rigid boundaries around what jazz should properly look and sound like. As a matter of fact, it is the latter school of neo-conservative critics forming around their pivotal figure, the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, who have come to dominate the US-based jazz market over the last 20 years, pushing more progressively oriented voices and musicians to the fringes. Together with his mentor Stanley Crouch, Marsalis effectively essentialises jazz by rejecting any musical innovations starting with the 1960's free jazz movement, and by propagating respectablitiy and 'dignity.' This both extends to the musicians' dress - a black suit and tie is expected - and their musical style, which should apply to norms of acoustic, walking-bass and blues-oriented performance. Referred to as "Great American Music," jazz is thus made a distinctly national phenomenon, and playing jazz is to respectfully pay tribute to a fixed canon of American musical giants, most of whom are black, and - with the exception of few singers - male.[3]

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[2] “Much has been written about swing, it has been defined 1,999 times and it has been the subject of much controversy” (Ellington 1939, 2). Ellington felt compelled to defend his music against allegations that he move away from the “folk” roots of jazz towards a watered down, commercial kind of “swing” played for and often directed by white men such as Paul Whiteman or Benny Goodman. For the larger contexts of this controversy, see Ekkehard Jost’s excellent *Sozialgeschichte des Jazz in den USA* (Jost 2003, esp. 85-101).

The fact that jazz is torn between anti-essentialist and essentialising forces thus certainly has to do with the more general political orientation of individual protagonists in the jazz business. However, it also relates to the more fundamental question of how we are to interpret music and art in general. The kind of answer we get to the question of what jazz is and should do very much depends on the angle from which it is theoretically addressed. On the one hand, the history of jazz may be investigated by scrutinising the music's structural organisation and the role and development of its major influences. The major source to turn to here would be the work of Gunther Schuller, whose seminal study of *Early Jazz* (Schuller 1986) makes it quite clear that jazz is, above all things, paradigmatically 'hybrid' in nature. He is able to meticulously demonstrate that jazz developed in a transcultural negotiation of European, Caribbean, African and American musical elements. Drawing on hollers, the blues, Afro-Christian musical traditions, African drumming, European art and folk song, and a blending of European diatonic and African pentatonic scales and harmonic patterns, the music evolving as jazz cannot claim to have any unified, singular origin.[4] Moreover, during its coming of age in New Orleans, Chicago, Kansas City, New York, - but also in Paris, Berlin or Tokyo, one should add - jazz characteristically appropriates and reappropriates foreign influences and themes which are constantly made new by being adapted to personal styles and tastes. One can argue, therefore, that on the basis of its diverse influences and the resulting hybrid structure, jazz inherently resists any essentialising claims.

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[3] The canon favoured by Crouch and Marsalis is perhaps best documented in Geoffrey G. Ward's *Jazz: A History of America's Music* (based on a popular documentary film by Ken Burns), featuring contributions by Crouch, Marsalis and Albert Murray and clearly representing their ideas of "Great American Music" (Ward 2000). For an excellent compilation of responses to Marsalis' influence on the jazz scene among musicians, see Broecking 1995.

[4] Cf. Christoph Reinfandt's reading of elements of early jazz and blues in Partick Neate's *Twelve Bar Blues* in this issue.

On the other hand jazz may be addressed less by an exclusive focus on its formal compositions, but rather with regard to its performative contexts and typical situations. What is amiss in approaches such as Schuller's, John Gennari for instance argues, may be found in Albert Murray's *Stomping the Blues* (1976). As opposed to de-contextualising interpretations, Gennari holds, Murray offers an

> ethnographic focus on the lived experience of the blues culture, his emphasis on the codes of communication cultivated and shared between performers and audiences, his assumption that the truest meaning of African American music is that which African American's have communicated among themselves in their distinctive verbal and kinetic expressiveness. (Gennari 1991, 456)

The focus in this approach, then, is less on what jazz *is*, but on what it *does* in particular social settings. What is at stake here is an emphasis on the patterns of communication involved in jazz performances, which are rooted in the notion of call-and-response, group interaction, and communal experience. The question remains, however, how the community involved in the antiphonic interactions of jazz should be conceived of in a specific cultural context.

As Gennari's comment on Murray's *Stomping the Blues* points out, the cultural validity of jazz has often been located in a counter-discourse which played a major role in the communal survival and identity formation of African Americans. In order to be functional, it is implied, jazz relies on a specific social milieu which, for a specifically *black* music, is clearly defined by parameters of ethnicity. The most prominent spokesman of this notion of jazz in literature is perhaps Toni Morrison, who explicitly addresses her novels to the African American communities before anyone else. Also referring to her "tribe," she argues that "[t]here has to be a mode to do what the music did for blacks, what we used to be able to do with each other in private and in that civilization that existed underneath the white civilization" (Morrison in LeClair 1994, 121). Thus, while Morrison takes up jazz as an aesthetic challenge in novels such as *Song of Solomon* and *Jazz*, but particularly also in her Pulitzer winning *Beloved*,[5] she ideologically charges jazz as a tool towards cohesion and identity formation within the black communities of America (cf. Eckstein 2005).

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[5] In an interview with Paul Gilroy, Morrison claims that "Black Americans were sustained and healed and nurtured by the translation of their experience into art, above all in the music. […] The power of the word is not music, but in terms of aesthetics, the music is the mirror that gives me the necessary clarity" (Gilroy 1993a, 181). For a fine introduction to Morrison's use of jazz, see Rice 2000.

On the one hand, such a view of jazz, and, by extension, of jazz literature, which closely links the validity of music to categories of race and social belonging, seems legitimate with regard to the history and continuing social struggle of African America. On the other hand, however, it has a very problematic side to it: First, thinking jazz in racial confines is clearly at odds with the fact that in its cultural genesis, jazz transcends any such confines by presenting perhaps the most ‘impure’ form of all arts. Secondly and more importantly, such an approach closes down the spaces in-between categories of race and gender which have only recently been conceptually opened by theorists of plural or hybrid identities such as Stuart Hall or Paul Gilroy. The imaginary community involved in jazz may be conceived of in very different terms in this respect. Gilroy, for instance, speaks of a particular “ethics of antiphony” (Gilroy 1993b, 200) in black music which he sees as manifest in the democratic intersubjective openness of jazz performances.[6] This argument is underlined by Cornel West, who states that jazz bears a “critical and democratic sensibility [that] flies in the face of any policing of borders and boundaries of ‘blackness,’ ‘maleness,’ ‘femaleness,’ or ‘whiteness’” (West 1993, 105). For West, then, the social functionality of jazz resides in its defiance of boundaries and social categories. Rather than just as a term denoting a musical style, West argues, jazz is to be seen as “a mode of being in the world, an improvisational mode of protean, fluid, and flexible dispositions toward reality suspicious of ‘either/or’ viewpoints, dogmatic pronouncements, or supremacist ideologies” (*ibid.*). It is this notion of jazz rather than that of neo-conservatives like Marsalis and Crouch, or that of Morrison’s progressive ‘black arts’ approach for that matter, that offers a key to better understand Jackie Kay’s use of jazz in *Trumpet*.

2. Aspects of Musicalisation in *Trumpet*

Trumpet is inspired by the historical case of the little known white pianist and saxophonist Billy Lee Tipton. Tipton, born in Oklahoma City in 1914 as Dorothy Lucile Tipton, tried to make an entry into the Kansas City jazz scene, but had to realise he had no chance to be hired as a woman. At the age of 19, therefore, he decided to cross-dress as a man which indeed gave him access to the bands and led him to some success; in the 50ies, Tipton had his own trio, yet eventually quit his career as a musician in 1958, allegedly fearing that the rising public fame would in the end dismantle his secret. It is not until after his death in 1989 that

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[6] Gilroy locates the “ethics of antiphony” in the “experience of performance with which to focus the pivotal ethical relationship between performer and crowd, participant and community” (Gilroy 1993b, 200).

Tipton was revealed to be biologically female, a fact which he seemed to have had successfully kept from both his five wives and three adopted sons (cf. Middlebrook 1998).

Billy Tipton's life and particularly his death, causing more media interest than his music did and making him something of a *cause célèbre*, certainly served as a model for Jacky Kay's evocation of the life and death of Joss Moody. However, there are significant differences: The novel's hero, for one, is of African and Scottish rather than American decent, grows up in Scotland, and has but one wife who did, and one adopted son who did not know about his transgendered life; as Kay notes in an interview, "real life can get away with things that fiction can't" (Bold Type 1999). Also, Joss Moody's musical career is set much later than Tipton's: In fact, it is only when Tipton winds up his career in 1958 that Moody publishes his first record *Millie's Song*. The music we are dealing with in *Trumpet*, then, is presumably not the dance-hall, swing-oriented performance of Tipton, but rather one more in line with the bop and free jazz movements of the sixties and seventies. Moody's life span (1927-1997) and discography (cf. 208) show some convergences, for instance, with Miles Davis, who of course started recording already in 1945, but was just a year older and also died in the 1990s. Joss' often referred to breakthrough album, *Fantasy Africa* (1966), moreover evokes the music of the likes of John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Sun Ra, Pharoah Sanders, Max Roach and others, who all explored African themes in their music during the sixties. Yet how does all that jazz feature in the narrative design of *Trumpet*?

The narrative of *Trumpet* sets in after Joss' death which reveals that he, who lived his life as a man, is anatomically female. What we learn about his life then only unfolds in the varied thoughts and memories of those who knew him or wish to find out about him. The two principle voices in this respect are that of his grieving wife Millie, the only one who knew his secret, and that of his adopted son Colman, who feels deeply betrayed after finding out about his father's biological sex in the funeral parlour. They make up two of three first-person voices in the novel, the third belonging to the tabloid journalist Sophie Stones, who plans a sensationalist book on Joss Moody with the help of Colman. Millie, Colman and Sophie's tales, moving in and out of each other, make up the bulk of the novel. Their accounts and memories, however, are interspersed with a number of further perspectives on the life of Joss Moody, rendered in third-person with fixed internal focalisation.[7] In a number of short chapters, we get, for instance, the doctor's view who diagnosed Joss' death, the registrar who confirmed it, the funeral director, Joss' drummer, a servant, and eventually Joss' own mother. These minor characters are not merely used to comment on Joss Moody only, but they are given enough time and space to briefly assert their own identities, philosophies, and even verbal styles, not unlike each soloist would in a good jazz performance. Joss Moody, in turn, dominates the novel by his absence. It is only in a letter to his son Colman towards the end of the tale, and in a central, dreamlike chapter entitled "Music" that we get direct access to Joss' consciousness.

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[7] Both Colman and Sophie's narratives in fact occasionally shift from first to third person as well.

The novel, it might be said on these ground, revolves around this central absence, around a silence which once embodied sound. To speak of a 'musical' structure in this respect requires some metaphorical abstraction. *Trumpet* does not provide us with a musical form in the clear cut way that for instance Patrick Neate's *Twelve Bar Blues* does, as Christoph Reinfand has worked out in detail in his contribution to this issue. On a metaphorical level, however, it is nevertheless inviting to draw parallels to aesthetic elements of jazz. As Jackie Kay herself stresses in an interview:

> I wanted to tell a story, the same story, from several points of view. I was interested in how a story can work like music and how one note can contain the essence of the whole. I wanted to write a novel whose structure was very close to jazz itself. (Kay in Bold Type 1999)

In the light of this statement, the novel may indeed be read as a kind of collective improvisation elaborating on a common theme, which is 'Joss Moody.' Being aware that music is not language, and that writing is by necessity bound to a linear sequence of signifiers as opposed to music's "'pluridimensionality' and 'spatialization' [which] can never be fully attained in verbal art" (Wolf 1999, 20), one might say that the multiplicity of perspectives and voices revolving around the mysteries of Joss' life are not unlike the explorations of musicians in jazz. They express their personal relationship to a common theme based on individual experience and their momentary disposition in a loose and largely free form of interaction which nevertheless comes to work together to form a polyphonic whole.[8]

I would argue, however, that the actual 'jazzthetic' scope of *Trumpet* is to be encountered in the novel's expressive and performative thrust. Like few other writers, Jackie Kay manages to present her narrative with a colloquial spontaneity which endows it with an effortless and resonating oral presence. The first few lines of the novel, rendering the thoughts and emotions of Joss' wife Millie, may already serve to illustrate this:

> I pull back the curtain an inch and see their heads bent together. I have no idea how long they have been there. It is getting dark. I keep expecting them to vanish; then I

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[8] Kay confirms this in a more recent interview: "I wanted to have a multiple-voiced narrative also so that it would be like a piece of jazz, with several instruments having their solo turns" (Kay in Tranter 2005).

> would know that they were all in my mind. I would know that I imagined them as surely as I imagined my life. (1)

What is immediately striking, here, is that Millie's meditative grief is rendered throughout in the present tense. The effect of this is clearly alienating, making it difficult to imagine the words to be set down in writing as, for instance, in a memoir. This is particularly true when Millie comes to relate past events in a very similar fashion, such as in "My four brothers are at my wedding. I have on a pale green slinky dress" (26). Her accounts present us with a spontaneous form of expression, relating her feelings and memories in a particular type of monologue - a solo, if you like, in musical terms - which she unfolds to herself as if in meditation. The spontaneous quality of her phrasing is further underlined by the rather short, yet nevertheless floating sentences very often introduced by the pronoun "I." They give her discourse a peculiar off beat rhythm, and the staggering phrasing creates a tension with underlines Millie's painful trying to come to terms with her husband's death on the level of content. Clearly, the peculiar use of present tense and the staggering, self-absorbed rhythm point to the looming presence of Millie's grief which she is unable to put behind her and relegate to the past. Additionally, however, they work to make her thoughts and acts seem to appear on the page just as she thinks and performs them; experience and expression, memory and enunciation seem to fall into one in Millie's phrases.

A similar effect of spontaneous creation is also palpable in Colman's voice. These are his first words in the novel:

> He never hit me. Never raised a hand or a fist. A belt, a buckle or a boot. I'll say that for him. Not once. Hardly ever raised his voice. Didn't need to. He'd hold my hand in the street. Like that. Holding my hand in the street for people to see. Father and son out and about in the street. (45)

Colman's phrases sound perhaps even more immediate and more naturally oral than Millie's. They are very colloquial, and full of the frustration and anger in the face of what he sees as his father's betrayal. The often elliptical phrases immediately evoke a spoken, performed discourse. They are dialogically addressed to someone, with the journalist Sophie Stones as their most likely addressee, even though we cannot know for sure: Coleman's lines may also address a larger implied audience in which we as readers certainly partake. Notwithstanding, the resulting impression of immediate expression and creativity further associates the novel with musical performance: It is as if the novel's lines emerge while you read them, on the spot, forged in the moment of their enunciation as in a jazz improvisation. Not only Millie and Colman, but all characters in the novel including those who are given voice in third person are in fact similarly provided with their own distinct ‘sound.’ In accordance with Bakhtin’s notion of *heteroglossia* (cf. Bakhtin 2000), their distinct verbal styles reflect their social standings, cultural backgrounds and age groups; beyond that, however, the discourse also expresses their momentary dispositions and emotions in a way that not only mimetic dialogue, but also diegetic narration seemingly ‘steps out’ from the page. *Trumpet* offers a thoroughly “aural” experience;[9] it is meant to be ‘heard’ even when it is read in silence.

3. The Politics of Jazz in *Trumpet*

By means of its “aural” quality, *Trumpet* is a novel that wishes to engage and to involve the reader in its call-and-response dialogues. While jazz serves as the aesthetic inspiration to this vocal addressing of an audience, it is also crucial with regard to the philosophy of being that is communicated in the performance of narrative content. As I have already suggested, *Trumpet* is grounded on a philosophy of jazz very much in line with Cornel West’s assertion that it embodies a vision which is deeply suspicious of rigid conventions regarding nation, gender or race. This is already indicated by the fact that Kay removes jazz from an African American setting to Scotland and London, asserting that its social functionality may well extend beyond national contexts. Rather than merely denoting the specific musical style of a canon of “Great American” artists, jazz is seen as a particular attitude, or as West puts it, as “a state of being in the world.” This may be further illustrated by taking a closer look at one of the novel’s crucial moments leading to Joss and Millie’s final mutual acknowledgement of their love.

After having met at one of Joss’ early club performances in Glasgow, they begin a passionate relationship in which Joss, however, manages to avoid all physical intimacy beyond kissing. This only changes when after three months, Joss takes Millie to a jazz club, and it is after he witnesses how his woman relates to the music he loves that their relationship takes on a new course. As Millie remembers in her own particular ‘aural’ style:

> I try tapping my foot in time to the soft shoe shuffling of the drum. At first I feel self-conscious. I’m not sure that my foot tapping looks like the other tapping feet. […] After a while I don’t even notice myself doing it. I have gone inside the music. It’s a strange feeling, but it’s there waiting for me. I am sitting in the middle of the long slow moaning of the sax, right inside it. I feel something inside me go soft, give in. I look over to Joss and find him staring at me. He’s seen it all happening. He looks right through me. (18)

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[9] The term ‘aural’ is Toni Morrison’s, who characterises her art as “aural literature – A-U-R-A-L – work because I do hear it” (Davis 1994, 230).

The communal experience of music, here, clearly denies confines of gender or race. Notwithstanding that Millie is white or a woman, she becomes part of the dialogic relation between audience and musicians when her careful dancing responds to the saxophone's calls that envelope her. The "something" "giv[ing] in" and "go[ing] soft" inside of Millie, moreover, may be read as the vanishing weight of social constraints such as the valuing of heterosexual and sanctioning of interracial relationships. The transcending thrust of music beyond essentialising categories is crucially to blame when, later that night, Joss and Millie's communion in music is followed by their first sexual communion. Having witnessed how Millie managed to open herself physically and emotionally to the liberating force of the music he loves in the club, Joss eventually dares to reveal himself, quite literally, to Millie in his bedroom, by unwrapping the bandages over his breasts. The thrust of jazz in *Trumpet*, then, is not to draw, but to withdraw boundaries of gender and race in a state of mutual connectedness in sound.

The notion that jazz may indeed replace the burden of essence altogether in the moment of performance is further sustained in the novel's central chapter entitled "Music" (131-6), opening with the line "[w]hen he gets down, and he doesn't always get down deep enough, he loses his sex, his race, his memory" (131). What follows is a mystical evocation of one of Joss' solo flight on the trumpet in which past, present and the future are conflated. Joss witnesses his own birth and death while the music takes over his identity, takes it apart, and eventually pieces him together again. There is clearly a narrative drive to 'musicalise' this sequence, such as in:

> And he is bending in the wind, scooping pitch, growling. Mugging heavy or light. Never lying. Telling it like it is. Like it is. O-bop-she-bam. Running changes. Changes running faster, quicker, dangerous. A galloping piano behind him. Sweating like a horse. It is all in his blood. Cooking. (131)

Kay's language, here, attempts to mirror the breathlessness and speed, the off beat phrasing, the emotional density and the swift changes of a jazz improvisation; indeed, the whole chapter reads, for many parts, almost like a 'manifesto' of the cultural validity of jazz that *Trumpet* is about. One of its guiding 'riffs' presents an association of music with blood: There is a meaningful progression from the statement quoted above that music "is all in his blood" (131), to "He is the music. The blood dreaming" (134) to "The music is his blood" (135). The rigidity of blood relations which determine our family and origin, our race and gender, is thus replaced by the performative fluidity of identity formation in the moment of musical creation. Essence no longer matters: At the climax of his solo, Joss "is a girl. A man.

Everything, nothing. He is sickness, health. The sun. The moon. Black, white. Nothing weighs him down. Not the past nor the future. He hangs on the high C and then lets go" (136).

The epiphany of this moment, placed at the very heart of the novel, not only represents a climax in music; it also represents the climax of the novel's thrust to de-essentialise notions of being and identity beyond the purely musical. The importance of Joss' transcendence of his own self in music reverberates throughout the novel, finding echoes in all aspects of Joss and Millie's courageous defiance of social conventions in real life. Jazz is given the power of an ethical statement: *Trumpet* employs it as a larger metaphor celebrating the power of creating personal as well as collective identities by transcending biological, social and political boundaries.

Having stated this, it is important to note that the power of self-fashioning is by no means idealised in *Trumpet*. The novel is careful to stress that we cannot do without at least some kind of sense of a stable self. In the "Music"-chapter, Joss has to therefore re-surface again at the very end of his solo, slowly recovering from a state of contingency to a state of coherence and identity (136). The blissful transcendence of identity in music, this implies, is never permanent, but something that may only be created performatively and, at the end of the day, transiently in a world that otherwise demands at least some sense of a defined self. Identity, Kay implies, not only involves notions of creative self-fashioning (the aspect George Herbert Mead refers to as "I" in his triangular model of identity formation), but also the aspect of the self as a responsive social object (Mead's "Me," which forces the "I" to negotiate a socially responsible "Self," cf. Mead 1934). Kay stresses the fact that social realities and constraints do not cease to matter and cannot be simply 'performed away' at random. The novel is very explicit about the racist abuse which Joss, Millie and Colman have to face, and one indeed wonders with Colman that "[i]f the jazz world was so 'anything goes' as my father claimed, why didn't he come clean and spit it out man? The 1960s were supposed to be cool. […] Why not a woman playing a fucking trumpet man, what's wrong with that?" (57). And while the jazz scene is far from being immune to bigotry, Joss himself is not aloof of prejudices and exclusions himself. Thus, when he propagates the cultural importance of black music, he stops short in his embracing argument when it comes to musical forms that are not to his liking:

> Black people and music; what would the world be without black people and music. Slave songs, work songs, gospel, blues, ragtime, jazz. ('Rap?' Colman would say, what about rap?' 'No, that's just a lot of rubbish,' his father would say quite seriously. 'A lot of shite. Rap isn't music. Rap is crap. Where's the story?') (190)

Nevertheless, jazz, as a metaphor of being, remains standing as a counterforce to social determinism. By way of conclusion, this may be illustrated by briefly retracing the confrontation of Joss and his adopted son Colman, who also has an African biological parent, regarding their 'origin.'

At the outset of *Trumpet*, Joss and Colman present us with two oppositional views to identity and identity formation. Joss's conception of identity is that of a jazzman, living his life as he plays, as a performer. His self-fashioning, of course, only works in conjuncture with the responses of his 'others,' such as Millie's who marries him as a man, Colman's who unquestioningly accepts him as a father, or of the members of his band such as his drummer's, who "beat up everyone" who made fun of Moody's "high voice" or "baby face" (144), and later tells Sophie Stones that "[i]t's the fucking music that matters" (148). Within the security of this performative notion of a creative, call-and-response type of identity formation, the notion of a singular, defined 'origin' is seriously undercut: Joss advocates to imagine, rather than historically and socially trace, one's own past. This is particularly true with regard to his African ethnical background.[10] As Millie remembers when playing Joss' first big hit single 'Fantasy Africa': "We never actually got to go to Africa. Joss had built up such a strong imaginary landscape within himself that he said it would affect his music to go to the real Africa. Every black person has a fantasy Africa, he'd say. […] It is all in the head" (34). The notion of a 'Fantasy Africa,' in this respect, on the one hand embodies a strong desire to be culturally 'placed,' while on the other hand expressing an entirely performative relation to notions of both culture and place. When Colman questions his father about their African heritage and wishes to know more about Joss' own father, Joss advises his son to adopt precisely the same improvisational attitude towards the world as he does:

> He said you make up your own bloodline, Colman. Design your own family tree - what's the matter with you? Haven't you got an imagination? […] Look Colman, he said. Look Colman, I could tell you a story about my father. I could say he came off a boat on day in the nineteen hundreds, say a winter day. […] Or I could say my father was a black American who left America because of segregation and managed to find his way to Scotland where he met my mother. Or I could say my father was a soldier or a sailor who was sent here by his army or his navy. Or I could say my father was from an island in the Caribbean whose name I don't know because my mother couldn't remember it. Or never bothered to ask. And any of these stories might be true, Colman. (59)

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[10] For a lucid analysis of Kay's quest for an imaginary black Scottish Identity in *Trumpet*, see Jones 2004.

Colman, however, does not feel satisfied by this ("It drove me mad. Which one? I said. Which one is true?), while his father sticks to his point of view: "Doesn't matter a damn, he said. You pick. You pick the one you like best and that one is true" (59).

With Colman, Kay voices the problematic side of a purely playful, improvisational identity. Colman voices the need for some sense of stability of self and a down to earth relation to lived experience beyond the realm of performance. He questions the validity of imaginary relations, particularly with regard to his African origins: "It feels false to him, mates that get dressed up in African gear, wank on about being African with a fucking cockney accent, man. Back to Africa is just as unreal as far as Colman is concerned. He's never been to Africa, so how can he go back?" (190-1). But it is particularly the shock and hurt of what he sees as his father's betrayal, the revelation that his closest relations excluded him from a wholly different life than the one he knew, that makes Colman question the value of self-fashioning and performance. Instead, he embarks upon a destructive search for his father's roots and 'real' history, and decides to cooperate with the sensationalist and self-serving journalist Sophie Stones on this quest.

The story of *Trumpet*, however, in the end reconciles Joss' thrust at a purely imaginary and performative identity with Colman's desire for the "truth." In almost a *Bildungsroman* way, Colman slowly learns to accept his father's choices over the course of the novel, not least since he comes to understand his father's love of music and the life that it offered to him. In the end, he quits his cooperation with the journalist and joins his mother in their old rural Scottish family refuge by the sea. Joss, in turn, eventually acknowledges his son's need for 'real' stories to hold on to. In a letter to his son which Colman only opens on the bus taking him to his mother in Scotland, Joss writes: "You wanted the story of my father, remember? I told his story could be the story of any black man who came from Africa to Scotland. His story, I told you, was the diaspora. […] But I've changed my mind, now that I'm dying" (271). In the paragraphs that follow, Joss unfolds what he knows about his father and his own childhood, in a singular story which he offers to his son in order to be remembered or forgotten, to be changed or held dear (277).

To argue that jazz serves as a metaphor of existence in *Trumpet*, as an improvisational mode of being beyond the constraints of society and DNA, is therefore not to speak in favour of random constructivism. *Trumpet* acknowledges that there are stories that are 'real' enough, with which human beings place themselves and which they rely upon in the process of identity formation. While we have to deal with our bag of history, however, *Trumpet* suggests that we may nevertheless choose to reinvent ourselves by creating additional, alternative stories departing from those that are given to us. As each jazz musician starts from given material - a popular tune, an older riff - yet transforms it on the grounds of new associations, desires and ideas into something new, we may both acknowledge our nationality, race or gender while at the same time transcend it. Jacky Kay herself, for instance, recently chose to trace that part of her history which relates to her biological father on a visit to Nigeria, an experience she worked into her most recent book of poetry, *Life Mask* (2005). But it is quite unlikely that the much older performative relation to her "imaginary black family" will be much affected by this: The "shock of recognition" of a twelve-year-old first encountering Bessie Smith's face and voice, the ensuing call-and-response with her and others, and the improvisational, protean mode of all these dialogues offer more than just one story to be told; and none them, like Joss Moody's trumpet, ever lies.

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