

After Modern Jazz: The Avant-Garde and Jazz Historiography

by

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If you can hear, this music will make you think of  
a lot of weird and wonderful things.

You might even become one of them.

—LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka)

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## Acknowledgements

With recordings, there's always a chance to catch something you missed, to listen again, to get a second hearing. In the grain of the record, time is at your disposal. Life is not like that, of course, and neither is history. As Roland Barthes says, whatever our intellectual justifications, we don't re-read for "profit" but "in fact and always for an increase in pleasure; it is to multiply the signifiers, not to attain some ultimate of the signified."

In Barthes's sense, the writing of this dissertation has occasioned many pleasures, and in no sense have my repeated re-readings and re-hearings attained any ultimate signified. The dissertation is as partial a hearing as it always was, and will necessarily always be. And yet at the end of it, having perhaps become something of the "weird and wonderful" that Baraka and others hear in the music, I can only be grateful for where I find myself in the passage of time, a bit out of joint, and as Nas says "never on schedule, but always on time."

For their forbearance, generosity, intellectual engagement, friendship, criticism, love, kindness, and "good ears," as Charlie Haden would say, I owe thanks to many people across the spaces and trajectory of my life over the last decade or so. There are many who I will miss this time around, for which I am sorry.

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Somewhere around halfway through this project, one trajectory of my life came to a dramatic end and I found myself, in effect, wandering the streets of Ann Arbor existentially lost and alone. Several now life-long friends found me there, picked me up, and stuck around while I put myself back together again. I owe so much of my confidence in my abilities and the value of my perspective to the friendship, brotherhood, and intellectual camaraderie of Jay Pearson. Adam Shankland took me out and made me be social. Doug Bessette was around when no one else was. Stephanie Moody and Nate Houchens became my lifelong friends. My spiritual brother Dan Darling came to Ann Arbor, repeatedly, defying his inherent restlessness, to live and work and hang out while I carried on in the dissertation. Through all this my parents stuck by me, supporting my every move, or every missed opportunity to move on. My sister always was ready with a caustic but good-humored, “When are you going to finish your dissertation?”

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## Introduction

### Just the Facts of Another World

Put a label on music and some people won't buy it. But people are broader than that. I believe everyone on the street would be broader than that, given a chance. Does a house have to be built one way, does it have to have an east wing and a west wing to be a great piece of architecture? All these divisions!<sup>1</sup>

Let's forget about any order. In jazz the form has been treated as sacred. The form is not sacred with me.<sup>2</sup>

—Henry Threadgill

#### Forget Jazz: Mirrored Othering

Henry Threadgill's composition "Mirror mirror the verb," on the recent release of his Zooid group *This brings us to Vol 1* (2009), offers a useful entry point to his work since the 1970s, as well as to the whole problematic of "postmodern" black musical experimentalism, the terrain the following dissertation sets out to explore. There is a repeating two beat drum motif that appears throughout the piece, inaugurating musical structures and interrupting silences. The unique compositional method that Threadgill has developed involves intervallic structures; stacked harmonies; a numerical system indicating tones for potential

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Greg Sandow in the promotional material for the Columbia release *Carry the Day* (1994). Available on the web as "Fried Grapefruit: The Life of Henry Threadgill," <http://www.gregsandow.com/threadg.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in David R. Adler, "Be Ever Out," *Jazz Times*, March 2011, 22-27, 24.

improvisation; and musical lines that are broken down by instrument, the line crossing from one musical staff, one musical timbre and one musician, to another. This last compositional feature, the extension of musical lines from one instrument to another, is particularly evident in the stripped down, almost minimalist sonic palette of “Mirror mirror the verb.” The track, like many of his compositions, has an incredibly complex rhythmic structure, which gives the listener the feel of being on the edge of chance or anarchy, even though the rhythms are meticulously worked out. Not only are lines transferred between instruments, but they also literally mirror one another: patterns are quickly repeated in one timbre after another, never fully or predictably, but in a way that sounds as if the structures have been mirrored, turned upside down, inside out, or backwards as they thread through the ensemble. Threadgill is not a minimalist, however, but fundamentally a lover of shifting textures, timbres, and tonal colors—musical patterns come and go in his work, forming and diverging, passing from one instrument to the next in a kaleidoscopic deconstructed groove.<sup>3</sup>

Threadgill’s music is difficult, both to play and to convey in words: his ensembles will sometimes rehearse for months before they are able to play his compositions. The newest band, Zooid, is a quintet of relatively traditional instrumentation—saxophone/flute, trombone/tuba, bass, guitar, drums—and the music is mostly written out, as it has been for all of Threadgill’s ensembles since the 1970s. Starting with the famous trio Air with Steve McCall and Fred Hopkins in the mid 1970s, Threadgill has led a series of ensembles (X-75, the Sextett, Society Situation Dance Band, Very Very Circus, Make a Move) with radically varying instrumentation and sound. A “zooid” is a living cell or organism that is within another organism, but which has independent freedom of movement; zooids are often part

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Threadgill Zooid, *This brings us to, volume 1*, Pi 31, 2009, compact disc. For a good, accessible account, of Threadgill’s compositional practice as well as a career overview, see Adler, “Be Ever Out.” Zooid currently comprises Liberty Ellman (guitar), José Davila (trombone and tuba), Stomu Takeishi (bass guitar), Elliot Humberto Kavee (drums) in addition to Threadgill on alto saxophone and flute.

of biological “colonies”—conglomerations of organisms that function collectively. It is therefore a resonant metaphor for Threadgill’s music, which has an independent existence within the ensemblic collective, independent from even the musicians playing it. “Zoooid” is also evocative of the situated and constrained autonomy of creative music in the racialized space of American culture. Threadgill has been able to live following the dictates of his drive for creative experiment, a fact that testifies to the profound victories of black musicians’ struggles to wrest control of the means of musical production amidst white supremacist and state terror, material and discursive exclusions from the institutions of cultural legitimacy, and capitalist domination of cultural production.

Disagreement about the role of aesthetics, and especially the problematic category of *form*, in the cultural politics of black music has inspired heated debate since the 1920s. Nearly thirty years ago, literary critic Houston Baker argued that black vernacular music exhibited a strand of modernism that could be distinguished from dominant understandings of white Anglo-American modernism by its “mastery of form” and “deformation of mastery.” Baker pointed out black musical and literary modernism’s deft manipulation of linguistic style and literary structure, but also pointed to the disruptive and liberating forces of sound to *deform* the rigid discursive and conceptual structures that tried to deny or circumscribe black humanity. While this powerful problematic recast debates about the black arts in the 1980s, revising and recovering a useable past in both the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, in recent years its limitations, particularly around the axes of gender and sexuality, have become more apparent. In black music studies, Henry Louis Gates’s notion of *signifyin’* proved particularly influential: here was a critical tool that could break open the static analytical language of traditional musicology to reveal the vocalizations, slides, growls, yawps, and other sound effects of the jazz idiom that escaped written

notation. Gates's excavation of a "vernacular" literary theory carried the gloss of poststructuralist theory, and it also licensed musical scholars to make broad appeals to the extramusical in making claims for the "resistance" of cultural practices. What composer Olly Wilson had delineated as the "heterogeneous sound ideal" in his 1983 essay "Black Music as an Art Form," an ideal which he was careful to note was theoretically infinite in its potential variations, was reduced to a single trope. But the trope of signifyin' was nothing if not expansive, and its over-utilization proved ultimately depoliticizing.<sup>4</sup>

Both scholars were responding in different ways to the legacy of Black Arts revolutionary cultural politics. The problem of how to interpellate the cultural politics of cultural nationalism, revolutionary nationalism, black Marxism, and Third World feminism occupied a great deal of scholarly energy during the 1980s. It is sometimes hard to see, because these dynamics, along with feminism, gay liberation, and other emancipatory struggles among Asian-Pacific Islanders, Puerto Ricans, Chicano/as, and American Indians, were often folded in to the category of "new social movements." This conflation of often distinct or even contradictory struggles and politics was particularly evident among white male leftists, but it did at least respond to the fact that the organizational and mediatic

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<sup>4</sup> Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Black Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifyin' Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Examples of the use of "signifyin(g)" in jazz studies include Krin Gabbard, "Signifyin(g) the Phallus: *Mo' Better Blues* and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet" in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Gabbard (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 104-130; Robert Walser, "Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 165-188. Cf. Olly Wilson, "Black Music as an Art Form," *Black Music Research Journal* 3, 1983, 1-22. The problem with signifyin' was that it could be found anywhere, and thus could be put to use to defend almost any cultural politics, as Gates's own defense of 2 Live Crew's vapid consumerism and misogyny showed. The alibi that signifyin' provided to a generation of white scholars in particular, who could point to almost any black cultural practice as a comforting reminder that someone was still resisting, had a confounding effect on the politics of academic scholarship. In academic debates of the late 1990s and early 2000s there was often an almost schizophrenic situation in which everything could be judged equally resistant or "agentic", which made the persistence of domination a puzzle whose solution required a resentful projection back onto working people, whose imagination had been captured by the (bad) taste of mass consumption. This circular dynamic, for which Gates was of course not responsible, but to which his theory certainly contributed, exorcized the troubling legacies of Frankfurt style critical theory by celebrating populism as openly political or "progressive", then smuggling a disdain for the manipulated proletariat in the back door to explain an increasingly depoliticized cultural terrain.

models associated with Black Power had, for better or worse, profound effects on other movements during the first half of the 1970s. In African American studies, in addition to the obvious pressures to sanitize class conflict within black movements, one problem with black radical aesthetics circa 1966-1977 for later attempts to construct a useable past was the didacticism, sectarianism, and ideological rigidity that characterized the aesthetic and political debates of those years. It was ironic, or maybe not, that the polemical strand of Black Power-era literary culture, which was often pedagogical and shrill, including apocalyptic denunciations of the slightest deviation, was joined by passionate commitment to a counter-aesthetics and poetics that in practice was often far more nuanced, experimental, and performative than the more famous polemics.<sup>5</sup>

In a widely regarded essay entitled “Other: From Noun to Verb” Nathaniel Mackey proposes the phrase “artistic othering” to describe how “black linguistic and musical

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<sup>5</sup> As an example to think through the relation between didactics and poetics, take Amiri Baraka’s late 1970s “Communist poem” titled “Afro-American Lyric.” In 1982 he performed the poem with musicians Threadgill, McCall, and Hopkins for a radio program in Köln, Germany. Air & Amiri Baraka, WDR Radio Broadcast, Köln, West Germany, Recorded March 20, 1982, electronic music file. This recording has circulated among fans and collectors outside commercial distribution networks. It is available online from a blog dedicated to making out of print creative music available, <http://inconstantsol.blogspot.com>. Accompanied by Air’s relaxed blues vamp, Baraka begins the poem in the didactic register with declarations like, “Think about what needs to be” and “All of what’s needed is all of us” and “The ugliest ugly is the social ugly.” But Baraka quickly begins riffing, vocalizing on the phrase “simple shit,” drawing out the first syllable and turning it into a rhythmic cadence, soloing on the phrase even, three syllables over and over with many tones between. Here is one limit to Baker’s paradigm: yes, black sound deforms mastery, but it also deforms form, and *designifies* language. The “simple shit” of Baraka’s denunciations of the “grasping class, exploiting class, owning class, exploiting class, ugly class, bourgeois class,” and his calls for black unity, or bemoaning the capitalist uglification of the world’s beauty—all this is affectively powerful *in its performance*, in the designifying anti-formalist formalism of Baraka’s reading/singing. It is the rhythmic urgency and delicacy of the poet and musicians, the tension drawn by Baraka’s repeated (admission? reassurance?) that what he is saying is “simple shit” even if it is not exactly simply *said* that gives a tremendous affective power to the moment when Baraka declares “ain’t *nothing* legitimizes this motherfuckin’ upside down bullshit system.” As Aldon Nielsen writes about a similar performance with McCall and saxophonist David Murray, “The interactions among the musicians and with the live audience very nearly overcome those more heavy-handed passages. In its best moments, the recording shows us what can happen when musicians and artists attend carefully to one another’s registrations of meaning,” *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 196. I find this view, especially if we think of Baraka’s as a musical or *musicianly* reading, more compelling than Charles Bernstein’s claim that, “The shape of [Baraka’s] performances are iconic—they signify. In this sense the printed text of ‘Afro-American Lyric’ works to spur the (silent, atomized) reader *into* performance—in insists on action; the page’s apparent textual ‘lack’ is the motor of its form.” Bernstein quoted in Jeremy Matthew Glick, “‘All I Do Is Think About You’: Some Notes on Pragmatist Longing in Recent Literary Study of Amiri Baraka,” *boundary 2*, 37:2, 2010, 107-132, 125.

practices that accent variance, variability—what reggae musicians call ‘versioning’—work an estrangement on the “social othering” to which black people are subjected by racism (“other is something people do, more importantly a verb than an adjective or noun”). Mackey’s influential essay, delivered to a conference on “cultural diversity” in 1991, was an intervention into a specific conjuncture. He insisted on culture as part of a historical process rather than a set of transhistorical features: “The inequities the recent attention to cultural diversity is meant to redress are in part the outcome of confounding the social with the genetic, so we need to make it clear that when we speak of otherness we are not positing static, intrinsic attributes or characteristics.” I want to stress the conjunctural in Mackey’s text, its interventionist purpose, both to maintain his own insistence that artistic othering is itself also subject to variation, to “innovation, invention, and change” and to highlight that moment, the late 1980s-early 1990s, as the end bracket of my dissertation, the closing of the particular periodization I have adopted.<sup>6</sup>

Mackey’s essay records how Zora Neale Hurston’s ethnography often turned up “verbal nouns” in the vernacular linguistic practices of her African American subjects:

The privileging of the verb the movement from noun to verb, linguistically accentuates action among a people whose ability to act is curtailed by racist constraints. I prefer to see a connection between such privileging and such curtailment than to attribute the former, as Hurston occasionally does, to black primitivity. Language is symbolic action, frequently compensatory action, addressing deprivations it helps its users to overcome. The privileging of the verb, the black vernacular investment in what Hurston calls “action words,” makes this all the more evident.<sup>7</sup>

The verb “to mirror,” to return to Threadgill’s composition “Mirror mirror the verb,” may have once perhaps been a verbal noun, but if so the estranging effects of its verbalization have faded into ancestry. But Threadgill announces his interest in the movement of verbal

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<sup>6</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 265-285, 265.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

action—the title’s doubling makes it ambiguous: is it descriptive or hortatory? Is the composition *about* mirroring (meaning: the verb) or does the composition invite/command its listeners *to* mirror mirroring, or to mirror “the verb” (by, perhaps, *acting*: we mirror the verb *to mirror* when we play a role)—the ambiguity is ultimately undecidable. But it also invokes another kind of mirroring, as when composers use mirror writing as a kind of winking code, most famously in Sonny Rollins’s “Airegin” (1954), written at a time when Nigeria was still part of the British Empire, and when expressions of solidarity with African decolonization were potentially subject to public censure and rebuke. Militant opposition to white supremacy and colonialism in the 1950s was often linked to communism in the discourses of U.S. officials, policy-makers, and the press. Two years after Rollins wrote “Airegin” the singer, actor, athlete, and communist activist Paul Robeson appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives. He took the opportunity to denounce the members of the committee as being unable to speak critically about communism because of their historical complicity with slavery. Having already had his passport withdrawn by the state—“Oh, gentlemen, I thought I was here about some passports,” he said sardonically to the committee, “This is really complete nonsense”—Robeson was subjected to blacklisting and an attempted silencing through a media blackout and the removal of his films and records from circulation.<sup>8</sup> Robeson’s name

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<sup>8</sup> In articulating the reason behind the withdrawal of his passport, Robeson explicitly distinguished the question of his communism from the question of his support for African independence and U.S. black freedom. He argued that it was the latter that had inspired the attempt to repress him, and that his communism gave the state an alibi but little more. Here is the relevant quotation: “Could I say that the reason that I am here today, you know, from the mouth of the State Department itself, is: I should not be allowed to travel because I have struggled for years for the independence of the colonial peoples of Africa. For many years I have so labored and I can say modestly that my name is very much honored all over Africa, in my struggles for their independence. That is the kind of independence like Sukarno got in Indonesia. Unless we are double-talking, then these efforts in the interest of Africa would be in the same context. The other reason that I am here today, again from the State Department and from the court record of the court of appeals, is that when I am abroad I speak out against the injustices against the Negro people of this land. I sent a message to the Bandung Conference and so forth. That is why I am here. This is the basis, and I am not being tried for whether I am a Communist, I am being tried for fighting for the rights of my people, who are still second-class citizens in this

was in a way put “under erasure” and the attempt to suppress not only his political activity but the record of his activity as an artist and entertainer meant that his earlier prominence as well as the actual arguments he made, in the committee hearings and elsewhere, were subjected to a historical forgetting, an attempted removal from collective memory.

I recall Robeson here because of another example, a trace, minor and elusive, of the “rememory” of Robeson’s place in American culture that appeared in 1979—Henry Threadgill’s composition “Luap Nosebor” written for four flutes, and recorded in 1979 during the X-75 sessions but never released.<sup>9</sup> Another example of mirroring, both as mirror-writing and as a mirror held up to a repressed past at a moment when the Cold War repression that had tried to silence Robeson had relaxed briefly between the end of the Vietnam war and the renewed militarism of the 1980s. Robeson’s name is still encoded, or incanted/enchanted, by mirror writing. Nevertheless this recorded trace, this performative inscription, was forgotten and uncirculated—not because it attracted the attention of the U.S. Congress or other officials, but because it was shuffled among a series of record companies and producers for thirty years. As such it stands in this project as a kind of emblem for how the archival record is cut through with silences, and how counterarchival projects like Threadgill’s are inevitably structured by capitalist cultural production. “Luap Nosebor” is not marginal due to overt political repression, but because the profit imperative saturates the circulation of cultural commodities—both as purchasable commodities and as the archival repository for historical reconstruction.

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United States of America.” Robeson’s testimony is available online at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6440/>. Also see Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York, Knopf, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> “Luap Nosebor” was re-recorded in 1990 for the album *Flutistry* but again not released for another seven years. Flute Force Four, *Flutistry*, Recorded June 26, 1990, Black Saint 0164, 1997, compact disc. The 1979 recording has been finally released as part of a limited edition Mosaic box set of Threadgill’s Novus and Columbia recordings. *Henry Threadgill: Complete Novus/Columbia Recordings*, Recorded February 21 1978 – August 1996, Mosaic 247, 2010, eight compact discs.



With this in mind (Chapter One further discusses archives, records, and silences), I would like to close this section by briefly discussing the forgetting of jazz that took place in the conjuncture 1989-1993. The rest of the dissertation will confine itself to the period before the mid 1980s, but I want to take a moment to explain why I bracket the study in this way by posing some thoughts and questions about the conjuncture around the end of the Cold War. This section will be followed by a look at two 1980s records by one of Threadgill's groups, the Sextett (in two different incarnations), with an analysis of the writings of one jazz critic, Gary Giddins, as a way of exploring why I have chosen in this project to leave the discourse of jazz criticism mostly to one side. After that will follow a chapter summary, and then a concluding section that opens, through a rubric of attunement and anacrusis, a theoretical meditation on the writing of black musical history.

So why end the project before the late 1980s? One reason very specific to jazz discourse is that that conjuncture is known for the rapid implantation of the ideological hegemony of what jazz people call neoclassicism, or, more bluntly, neoconservatism. As it is often discussed jazz neoclassicism is a historical project very much bound up with one musician, Wynton Marsalis, two critics, Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch, and one institution, Jazz at Lincoln Center. However, it is better to see these figures as emblematic representatives of a collective project bringing together musicians, critics, corporations, and the state in a far-reaching effort to institutionalize and enforce jazz conservatism as an official national object of nostalgic remembrance. Many opponents of the neoclassicists premise their opposition on aesthetic or stylistic grounds, arguing that stylistic diversity and tolerance for innovation and extrageneric borrowing are now a permanent condition of jazz performance—and oppose the economic effects of the conservative aesthetics by pointing to disproportionate funding levels between Lincoln Center artists and more experimental

musicians. There has also been a critique along racial lines, with a number of white critics arguing that Marsalis and Crouch (and Albert Murray) promote a racially exclusive idea of jazz as black music, when, for some writers and musicians, the music is now global and multicultural, whereas other critics oppose neoclassical conservative aesthetics with a frankly reactionary insistence that whites be acknowledged as historical co-creators of the music.<sup>10</sup>

To get caught up in these debates, I think, causes us to miss—and be complicit in the forgetting of—what came before: *not* a mid-century golden age derailed in the 1970s by commercialism and politicized aesthetics, but the 1970s themselves as a period of the flourishing of creative musical experiments with far-reaching political implications. In fact, we can now clearly see emerging symptoms of the failure of the neoclassical project to reconstitute a (populist bourgeois) constituency for jazz on the basis of depoliticized nostalgia. First, the recurrence over the last decade of the age-old historical trope of the death of jazz signals a dissatisfaction with and a turning away from the triumphalist celebration of Marsalis et al. as the saviors of jazz. Second, the growth of intense activity on the web devoted to sharing the music, and developing a canon, of 1970s jazz demonstrates that in the wake of neoclassicism's failure to ideologically interpellate definitions of jazz, a mass online movement of music lovers is taking up the work of criticism and legitimation for themselves. Third, the Lincoln Center itself, as an institution, has been gradually extending the periodization of its own narrative of jazz's "wrong turn" as well as tentatively revising the stylistic boundaries of "real" jazz, as recent events show: adding Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* to the Lincoln Center repertory, inducting Ornette Coleman to the Hall of

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Porter's discussion of Marsalis as a public intellectual is a thorough and balanced introduction to the debates about neoclassicism. See Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 287-334.

Fame, and Wynton Marsalis's work on the music of Ray Charles and collaborations with Willie Nelson and Eric Clapton.<sup>11</sup>

These last examples still represent a very conservative aesthetic philosophy, but in any case, I think it's important to move beyond the polemics of the 1990s. After all, it is not only the narrow aesthetic agenda promoted by neoclassical artists and writers, but the (quite often unintentional or blind) collusion of capital, not just in disproportionate arts funding, but also in the very machinery of cultural production and distribution itself, that shapes the archive of "jazz." There are few 1970s ensembles more potentially "canonical" than Threadgill's trio Air, but according to Gary Giddins, the group's albums were "long unavailable and little acknowledged when they were in print."<sup>12</sup> In ways that have not that much to do with the "jazz wars" among aficionados and critics, there has been produced an unevenness in the archives of improvised music of the 1970s, and in the contemporary market for the music. Jazz may be a permanently tiny minority of the music market, but many of the LPs that have remained commercially unavailable in newer media like CDs and MP3 are now extremely rare commodities and can fetch surprisingly high prices on the aftermarket. The records that I write about in the dissertation were in many cases financed on a shoestring, poorly distributed, reproduced with a limited number of copies, and were often only marginally profitable. In a scandalous number of cases, musicians were neither paid adequately nor compensated for residuals in subsequent years. While there were new

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<sup>11</sup> The latest round of debate about the "death of jazz" erupted in print and online in the wake of Terry Teachout's article "Can Jazz Be Saved?" *The Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 2009. Cf. Gary Giddins, "How Come Jazz Isn't Dead?" in Eric Weisbard, ed., *This is Pop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 39-55. The online commentary surrounding mainstream media efforts to account for jazz's schizoid place in U.S. culture has been vast, including rebuttals, lists of favorites, and music sharing in the blogosphere. For an account of the online construction of a loose and expanding "canon" of 1970s jazz, see Nate Chinen, "In the Blogosphere, an Evolving Movement Brings Life to a Lost Era of Jazz," *New York Times*, December 6, 2006, E1. This is a place to note that the emergence of this mass, collective online research community has immeasurably enriched this dissertation project. For Lincoln Center's repertoire and projects, see their website at <http://www.jalc.org>.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 515.

openings for state and corporate funding, as well as university positions, it is undeniable that there were persistent inequalities in state funding for experimental music in the 1970s. After that period, state funding has been gradually withdrawn to the point that nonmarket-based arts funding in the U.S. today is almost entirely financed by corporate sponsorship. George Lipsitz has written persuasively on the historical shifts involved and their implications:

In his original and generative analysis of contemporary culture, Néstor García Canclini argues that commercial marketers and private foundations now serve as the primary patrons and generators of artistic activity, usurping a role formerly filled by social movements and the state. Like so many of the revolutionary transformations of our time, this change has gone largely unanalyzed, even though it has enormous consequences. The imperatives of commercial culture, and of what Canclini calls tax evasion masquerading as philanthropy, are poor substitutes for the kinds of support previously given to artistic endeavors by social movements and the state. The new forms do not erase the oppositional potential of art by any means, but they do function to suppress systematically the kinds of self-expression and self-activity characteristic of the “community-based art making” and art-based community making that did so much to create new artistic and social spaces in the past by linking artistic practices to social conditions.<sup>13</sup>

Thus archival silences were produced from two directions, by the more or less systematic defunding of the community arts that nourish creativity and innovation, and by the limited circulation of experimental art in a technological regime that emphasizes mass consumption and enforced obsolescence.<sup>14</sup> The former, however, is far more concerning, as we have reached a stage where it is possible that the systematic destruction of arts programs in public schooling has permanently and irreparably torn the cultural fabric that once sustained “jazz.”<sup>15</sup> But if that is the case, who cares a whit about the fate of jazz while black working

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<sup>13</sup> George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: the Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 123. He is referring to Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia Lopez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>14</sup> I.e., without arguing for technological determination, it is worth considering how much of the unevenness of the jazz archive is related to the attempt by the music’s corporate owners to maximize profits around the introduction of CDs in the 1980s: extending replacement sales as long as possible and failing to release titles expected to have marginal sales from the vault.

<sup>15</sup> To be absolutely clear, I am not making a predictive argument that “jazz” will disappear. In fact, the education of most contemporary jazz musicians has long since shifted to the formal training of music schools. I am, however, making a historical argument that the great innovations in 20<sup>th</sup> century music were for the most part made by musicians who had come up in the rich musical environments of urban and rural black

class communities are starved and demonized while also being strangled by militarized policing and the relentless expansion of the prison-industrial complex?<sup>16</sup> The music and *its* survival are important insofar as it had made realities like these intelligible/thinkable, and could perhaps again.<sup>17</sup>

If as Lipsitz suggests, collectives like the Black Artists Group (BAG) in St. Louis represented a social dialectic of the making of art and communities, that history was forgotten in the jazz debates of c. 1988-1994. This period of the triumph of “posthistoricism” (Walter Benn Michaels) saw the emergence of a series of hyperbolic ends: the end of Cold War was also the end of history (Francis Fukuyama), meaning the permanent closure of ideological conflict and disagreement concerning the fundamental organization of society. Policy disagreements might persist, but the hegemony of formal parliamentary democracy and liberal capitalism was assured, ideologized as the unsurpassable horizon of all politics. In the absence of social antagonisms future global conflicts would take place in the realm of culture or “civilization” (Samuel Huntington). If the history of black experimental music-making was distorted or displaced amid such neoliberal triumphalism, it was only one small part of an attempt to fundamentally reshape both an agenda for the future and an understanding of the past, especially leaving aside the radically unfinished projects of decolonization. What was also forgotten was the unfinished decolonization of the U.S. The raging “culture wars” of the early 1990s were symptomatic of

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communities, where music both saturated everyday life, and was rigorously taught by high school teachers in segregated schools as well as by musicians in the community. Although questions about how the emergence of hip hop and other contemporary musics relate to these material shifts are too large to get into here, it is worth pointing out that the perpetuation of instrumental music-making in a given community at least requires its schools to have music programs. Given the well-known and widely available research that links musical training to performance in mathematics as well as a whole host of quality of life indices, conservative attacks on arts in the schools are either incredibly short-sighted, malicious, or both.

<sup>16</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York: New Press, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> However this is to beg the question of *how* art makes reality thinkable, or better how aesthetics can reshape the terrain of the sensible that it shares with politics. See the discussion in Chapter One of philosopher Jacques Rancière.

the process of forgetting radical social movements and the unmet claims and expectations of a fuller democratization of U.S. social relations, the displacing of social antagonism onto a plane of cultural representation. By the 1980s, the community organizations and radical social movements of the 60s and 70s, when they hadn't been brutally suppressed, were struggling against a context of structural unemployment, violence, and the community-rendering destructive power of AIDS and crack, to which the state's answer was only: more policing, both in the usual sense and in Jacques Rancière's broader sense of a sensible ordering of the social that excludes or forecloses "politics" in the strict sense of an opening of a dissensus based on the excluded, the "part of no part" who claim the space of the common. The music had survived this depoliticizing process, however, and had encoded or inscribed in recordings some of the radical democratic possibilities that had otherwise been silenced.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). For a persuasive critique of Huntington's "culturalism" see Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves, 2004), 20-24. Slavoj Žižek has articulated the effective alliance between Fukuyama's celebration of a golden age of ideological consensus and Huntington's dark vision of endless culturalist war: "*The 'clash of civilizations' is politics at the end of history.*" He goes on: "The basic opposition on which the entire liberal vision relies is that between those who are ruled by culture, totally determined by the lifeworld into which they are born, and those who merely 'enjoy' their culture, who are elevated above it, free to choose it." Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 141. For the subterranean connection between Fukuyama and Huntington, in an unexpected alliance with a wide range of novelists, artists, and theorists since the 1970s who together have forged "the technologies (e.g. multiculturalism) for reconfiguring ideological difference (i.e., disagreement) as cultural, linguistic, or even just geographical difference," see the provocative analysis in Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 15 and passim. While the perspective of this project is deeply sympathetic to Michaels's critique, and the powerful revelations created by his *reductio* argument showing that thinking about social antagonism in terms of difference as such easily supports disabling processes of depoliticization. Less persuasive is the argument, made since the 1982 essay "Against Theory," that the theoretical escape valve from depoliticization is to ground interpretation in a notion of intention. Like many other influential theorists in and out of English departments, Michaels's argument is quite specific to theorizing textual objects, although he is also interested to some extent in painting. But music and sound in general, in their ephemerality, potential unpredictability, and almost inescapably collective creation (even in solo performance: see Chapter Six and the Coda), potentially disturb the theoretical ground of intentionality. In musical performance, the strict opposition, between text-as-material-object/subject-position-of-the-reader and text-as-meaningful-signifier/authorial intention, cannot be maintained due to the fundamental incommensurability of auditory experience. It is beyond the scope of this project to think this through in detail, but it is an area ripe for further research and theorization.

## Just the Facts ... of Another World

Thinking about different ways to remember the 1960s-1970s, even to express nostalgia for the period, without falling into a depoliticizing or policing narrative, leads me back to Henry Threadgill, and this time to his Sextet/Sextett records of the 1980s. In this section I want to listen to two records in conjunction made five years apart: *Just the Facts and Pass the Bucket* (1983) and *Easily Slip Into Another World* (1988). Although the instrumentation remained roughly similar between the Sextet and the later Sextett, there were personnel changes throughout this period. Three musicians—Fred Hopkins, Deirdre Murray, and Pheeroan Aklaflf—accompanied Threadgill in both groups. Olu Dara, Craig Harris, and John Betsch complete the line-up on the first album, while Rasul Siddik, Frank Lacy, and Reggie Nicholson occupy roughly comparable positions on the second. In fact, the two albums are each the second album of a trilogy of records that the various shifting iterations of the Sextet(t) made.<sup>19</sup> In listening to them and reading their cover images, I also want to engage the descriptions made by Gary Giddins of both albums, as well as his assessment of Threadgill's artistic trajectory and contexts in the 1980s. Ultimately I am arguing that jazz history must take its leave from its interest in tracking the critical assessments of jazz journalists. Of course I will at various points in the dissertation refer to critics, and I have consulted record reviews and articles in the jazz trade press and other venues for the entire period under discussion. But I think it leads analysis into an interpretive impasse to try to account for or refute the historical assessments of critics. Before I take my leave of the discursive apparatus of jazz criticism, however, I want to read Giddins listening to

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<sup>19</sup> Therefore the two sequences are *When Was That?* (1982), *Just the Facts and Pass the Bucket* (1983), and *Subject to Change* (1984), all on the About Time label; and *You Know the Number* (1986), *Easily Slip Into Another World* (1987), and *Rag, Bush and All* (1988) on RCA/Novus.

Threadgill, not because Giddins represents what's "wrong" with jazz critics; on the contrary, Giddins is an unusually perceptive and compelling critic who is justly regarded as a pre-eminent jazz journalist of the period since the mid-1970s. I want to engage Giddins critically, however, on the way he hears Threadgill in terms of tradition/temporality and genre/race. Thinking about criticism in terms of a discursive *project* that has its own investment in the registering of sensibility, I read Giddins on *Just the Facts* as arguing that Threadgill is locating his music "in the tradition." While this is not inaccurate—indeed any hearing of the album will find, I think, historical references, quotations, and allusions—what worries me in Giddins's approach is the construction of tradition as a binary and perhaps static or totalizing option in a cultural struggle with "expressionism" or the more free-form tendency of the avant-garde. The need to put Threadgill on the side of tradition leads Giddins to minimize the temporal anomalies and distortions of the Sextet's performance—the employment of mixed-meter, free time, and intervallic movement that takes up traditional sounds in order to play with them, artistically other them, in a project that doesn't preserve or repeat tradition so much as articulate nostalgia for a piece of it. Nostalgia, I propose, for the freedom movement—I argue that rather than an affirmation of tradition, there is a critical or negative edge to *Just the Facts* that keeps alive, if however ghosted or catechistic, the black church as the site of community activism and struggle. This then leads to a more general examination of the discursive production of jazz criticism through the deployment of intra- and extrageneric idiomatic referents.

Turning to *Just the Facts and Pass the Bucket*, the first thing to mention is the cover image. The photograph of the ensemble shows them in a cemetery, backs to the camera. Deirdre Murray stands on the left, with the men arrayed in a line to her right. All the musicians wear formal clothes, hats, and white gloves, and stand in a formal pose, with each



of their right hands placed behind them at the small of their backs. There is snow on the ground, and the trees are bare. The album has no notes, but only lists the musicians and the compositions. The first track, “Gateway,” offers a kind of percussion fanfare by both drummers before moving into a jaunty, disjointed horn part marked by rapid shifts in meter, interweaving lines that move between half-step dislocations and rhythmic unison; to a listener unfamiliar with uncommon time signatures, the piece seems to waver between two affective states, a driving groove (in common time), usually accented by Hopkins adopting a traditional “walking” pattern on the bass, which alternates with off-meter sections that give the impression of staggering movement. The next track opens with a slow, haunting section for the horns and cello (with occasional percussion accents), complex harmonies articulated in nearly meter-less time. If the piece recalls an earlier articulated soundscape, it is to my ears the very early AACM records that often employed a very loose or non-existent metrical structure, modernist harmonies lushly explored, and a minimalist clarity of instrumental timbre—records like Joseph Jarman’s *As If It Were the Seasons* (1968) or at the extreme end of minimalist experiment, Roscoe Mitchell’s *Sound* (1966). If as the title suggests we are meant to take this track as a sonic accompaniment to the cover photograph, then perhaps one’s initial suspicions of a reflective or mournful feeling are confirmed.

“The Black Blues,” however, explodes into a celebratory fanfare of reverent joy, the horns playing big stretched out ascending major chords, and the whole piece, once again with a shifting meter, but with a stronger and more consistent pulse than has yet been heard. Threadgill was fond of employing irony in his titles, as in the mournful feeling of a composition like “Celebration” on *X-75 Vol. 1* (1979): not to play with a binary opposition, but to explore the latent potentialities of the word and the emotive-affective power of music, i.e. a funeral as a celebration of life, or the haunting tones of a dirge having an enervating

effect, etc. I can't help hearing this kind of irony in "The Black Blues," which is not a blues in the formalist way many of us have been taught to think of it: to me it evokes a music of religious praise or community affirmation—the black church (but *how* is it that *I* hear the church in this, and what am I hearing? More on this below).<sup>20</sup>

In its initial minor tonalities, "Just the Facts and Pass the Bucket" sounds more "like" the blues, but again the time is stretched out, nearly meter-less, until the horns begin a repeated rhythmic figure halfway through, joined by Murray and the percussionists, with Olu Dara soloing above. "Cremation" opens as a trio for Harris (trombone) Hopkins, and Murray (both bowing their instruments), then moves into a hauntingly beautiful passage highlighting Murray's deeply mournful solo with challenging harmonic accompaniment from the horns and Threadgill's slowly trilling clarinet providing a background commentary. The pieces of the musical structure are finally assembled in the last two minutes of the piece into a bouncy but ominous rhythmic feel to accompany Murray's increasingly worried and frantic cello lines. Finally, "A Man Called Trinity Deliverance" opens with another kind of fanfare, which is suspended to make room again for the interplay of the two strings, with Threadgill's baritone saxophone and then the brasses added with their own independent lines—the lines slowly (much more slowly and painstakingly than would be the case with the later bands like Zooid) passing from instrument to instrument assembled into different pairs. The piece then settles into an alacritous groove set up by the strings and percussion, which again abruptly stops for a stretch-time section of lush harmonies with Dara's trumpet soloing above. The fanfare figure reappears, and then a rumbling percussion "interlude" that proceeds until the

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<sup>20</sup> Since we are on the terrain of *bearing*, it is important to note as I invoke the sound (a singular sound? a genre of sounds? a family or a tradition?) of the black church, I do so as someone who did not grow up in a church, and whose most immediate experience of black life was mediated by the distorting prism of mass media.

final staccato horn blast that closes the album, and, as Giddins remarks, “the whole album is made symmetrical.”<sup>21</sup>

The task that Giddins sets for himself in *Rhythm-A-Ning: Jazz Tradition and Innovation in the '80s* is very explicit: to find a useable past for “neoclassicism.” Writing in 1985, however, Giddins does not yet refer to the Marsalis-Murray-Crouch reparatory project, but instead sees the avant-garde itself as divided into two different historical registers: neoclassical and expressionistic. By expressionism Giddins refers to the stretched form free improvisations took in some ensembles of the 1960s and 1970s, the collectively improvised, sometimes hour(s) long performances often characterized by a kind of chaotic, intense, spiritual, or militant energy (indeed, some refer to Giddins’s “expressionism” as “energy music”). In his view, avant-garde expressionism opened up jazz’s past for exploration by a later generation of eclectics, a “neoclassical” generation that comprises players like Arthur Blythe, Anthony Braxton, and Threadgill himself—their interest in recovering “the past” Giddins sees as a new veneration for tradition that was missing from both jazz modernism and the radical expressionist vanguard. He recounts his experience with students: while they enjoyed the avant-gardists’ reimagining of traditional forms, they could not stomach the expressionist new thing: “I’m almost resigned to this response. Maybe only in a period of national tumult are people willing to listen to music for the pleasure of being tortured and tested. The avant-garde, by definition, has no right to an audience larger than its true believers. Besides, the violent expressionism of the ‘60s made the current wave of neoclassicism possible; it freed the present generation to look on the jazz tradition with agnostic curiosity.” This curious passage from resignation to alacrity is a strange welcome for the neoclassical, and perhaps a little disingenuous, since the rest of the book is concerned to

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<sup>21</sup> Gary Giddins, *Rhythm-A-Ning: Jazz Tradition and Innovation in the '80s*, (New York: Oxford, 1985), 187.

renovate a useable notion of tradition itself. Perhaps—it's quite likely that—Giddins is right in seeing a historical shift that connects a period of “tumult” to a taste for avant-garde “expressionism,” but one might also question the blithe way he welcomes the return to normalcy or the narrow affective range in which he wants to fit the memory of the avant-garde.

The specific context Giddins finds for Threadgill's work is a reissue of a 1958 album by a little-known New Orleans group called the Young Tuxedo Brass Band entitled *Jazz Begins*. It seems Giddins enjoys playing a kind of “blindfold test” with friends, playing the reissued album and asking them to guess the artist: “Everyone—five or six dupes in all—knew it had to be a release by some contemporary hot-shot eclectics.”<sup>22</sup> Thus the stage is set: Threadgill will renovate the tradition and disavow expressionism. And so, Threadgill's cemetery photograph and his composition “Cremation” evoke a thematic of death, which in turn resurrects what Giddins says is the only jazz tradition to explicitly thematize death, the traditional New Orleans second-line. Most reassuringly, “many of the techniques that make the record most rewarding are as old as Bunk.” In writing of “The Black Blues,” Giddins remarks, “It's always a mistake to indulge in programmatic description, yet the changeups between bright and melancholy passages throughout succeed in conjuring the deep dirges and second-line euphoria of New Orleans. The important point to make is that the music is almost consistently prepossessing.” Conjure, possession: truly this discourse is haunted by something—perhaps by the specter of valuation or value expressed in the strange word “prepossessing,” a term of praise certainly but also harkening back to the cover photograph,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 183. The title of the section on *Jazz Begins* (Atlantic 1297) and Henry Threadgill is, appropriately for our purposes, “Life After Death.” I should note that I have been known to play a similar game, with a record originally released the same year, Sun Ra's *Jazz in Silhouette*. I contend that unless one knows the album it is nearly impossible to guess when it was made. But in doing so the point I was trying to make was quite nearly the opposite one from Giddins's (i.e. insisting on the absolutely modern approach to big band music Sun Ra creates for that record). I don't think that *Just the Facts and Pass the Bucket* could, on the other hand, be mistaken for a record from the 1950s.

the quiet formal dignity of the “sextet” with their backs turned to the audience and critic, inciting an anxious bid to reestablish evaluative authority, even if in a mode of expansive praise of the full sweep of tradition. Again returning to “The Black Blues,” Giddins calls it “revival-house hollering,” so he thus, like me, hears not only the generic marker “second-line” but also something of “the church.” (This is what I will be getting to shortly: is it, perhaps, not the down home church of the critical imagination but the church of meetings, strategy, publicity out of earshot of the police power, and struggle, the church of “members don’t get weary” that Threadgill’s music and album cover evoke?)

What does it mean to continue to hear the black church in these sounds? I indicated above my feeling that Giddins and I in our hearing might be on the point of Threadgill’s rapier, our expectations toyed with in a deployment of “artistic othering.” My training in cultural history and some time reflecting on the position I occupy in addressing these sounds alike have left me wary of possibly reductionist reading strategies: antiphony, repetition with variation, or versioning, the “troubled sound” of the blues or the spirituals, as well as the wounding or reparative sounds of a multi-textured African “sound ideal.” These are all *there* in the music. Yet to hear in these sounding practices the preservation of cultural continuity, or tradition, and leave it at that, cannot finally come to grips with the othering at work. In thinking about certain evidentiary continuities Sterling Stuckey, writing in the mid 1980s, warns us not to discount the agency required to sustain cultural practices. He writes, counter-intuitively, “In blinding whites to the value of African culture, racism helped the slave, as segregation helped his descendents, preserve essentials of African culture. But the preservation of that culture during slavery owed more to its affirmation by blacks than to the negative thrust of American life.... On the contrary, slave ingenuity was indispensable to the

survival of African culture in America.”<sup>23</sup> While I have some reservations about the “oneness” of culture, the lesson to adopt is that the suturing, the reparative work of culture, is about syncretism and creativity, about the transmission of knowledge and the reproduction of structures of feeling, and most emphatically not about essence. This is why, pace Giddins, cultural tradition cannot be thought as a repository for static techniques—any articulation of or with those techniques is a deliberate taking up (or say, conjuring) of what had been heard and taken to heart, so to speak: it is an articulation, especially in music, that is essential as indispensably called up rather than essential as a historical invariable.

What is culturally essential is therefore that which can address an existential dilemma. One important example can be found in Anthony Braxton’s theorization of bebop: as he related to Graham Lock, “bebop was the name given to the vibrational and conceptual solutions that musicians like Charlie Parker evolved in response to the existential problems faced by black people in the early to mid-1940s.”<sup>24</sup> The existentialist maxim of “experience before essence” is an idea whose implications have arguably been more fully felt and realized in black experimental music since the nineteenth century than in the annals of Euro-American literary modernism or philosophy. Insofar as it is black *music* that “solves” existential dilemmas, its elaboration as theory is indefinitely postponed: if music intervenes in existential dilemmas by itself, what need is there for theory? If we take Braxton’s point that black experimental music can solve existential dilemmas, then it is a kind of “truth procedure,” albeit one that goes largely unrecognized or queried in theoretical discourse.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press), 83.

<sup>24</sup> Graham Lock, *Forces in Motion: the Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton* (New York: Da Capo, 1989), 159.

<sup>25</sup> The reasons for this are complex but cannot be disarticulated from the racialized canons and optics of “theory,” where Braxton’s theory, for instance, with its autodidactic and autoethnographic terminology, and other theoretical discourses that articulate black othering linguistically and conceptually, are not recognized as theory *as such*. Moreover, the place of music/sound in “theory” as a wide field of reference is actually quite limited. Where philosophical and literary texts are intercalated with music, it is often on the canonical terrain

Another dilemma is that the *articulation* of black music as a truth procedure has been worried, wounded, aesthetically “othered” precisely in the crucible of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial experience. When the European spokesman for *engagé* existentialism Jean-Paul Sartre addressed the *experience* of the colonized (but of course it was an experience he precisely could not inhabit) in the infamous introduction to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, he described an anticipatory expectation of violent retribution: violence was the only existential response Sartre could conceive when he imagined himself in the position of the colonized. As Homi Bhabha has shown, Sartre’s reading of Fanon on violence was quite misleading. The French philosopher’s confrontation with what Fanon called “The Fact of Blackness,” his attempt to think himself into the existential stance of the colonized threw him into the same Manichean colonial dilemma that Fanon despised. Far from celebrating an awakening to the necessity of combat, the idea of *authentic* blackness as violently masculinist, which is the picture Sartre tended to convey, Fanon critiqued the colonial context as a *socius* intimately sustained by violence, and was quite troubled by the dangers faced by postcolonial nationalism in socially and psychically exorcising this violent context. However he saw it as justified, even redemptive, Sartre’s inscription of the “The Fact of Blackness” as violent retribution at worst tended to sustain reductive readings of Fanon that evaded the dynamic of “sociogenesis” that Sylvia Wynter has theorized as Fanon’s intellectual intervention.<sup>26</sup>

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of European orchestral music, but particularly a Romantic and post-Romantic trajectory of Beethoven to Wagner, with some attention to the Vienna School. In the U.S. although there is a veritable publishing industry on John Cage, for example, as a radical experimentalist whose theoretical interventions have wide implications, there are relatively fewer secondary texts explicating the work of Braxton. However, this situation is undergoing rapid change, with Braxton as a central figure who may soon be “legitimated” in the theoretical canon, due to the intervention of studies by Radano, Lock, Porter, and others. Braxton’s theoretical texts, though, remain self-published, which might remind us of the significant institutional apparatus of editing, publishing, commenting, reviewing, and so on that sustains “theory.”

<sup>26</sup> In his foreword to a recent edition of Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, Bhabha revises interpretations of Fanon on violence that refer back both to Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous preface and to Hannah Arendt’s critique of the violence chapter. “For Arendt, Fanon’s violence leads to the death of politics; for Sartre, it draws the fiery, first breath of human freedom. I propose a different reading. Fanonian violence, in my view, is part of a struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression. It does not

In some ways, Giddins saw the “expressionist” avant-garde in comparable ways to Sartre’s reading of Fanon, except without the identification or celebration. That is, in thinking of “expressionism,” the ideological enemy of “neoclassicism,” as a “tortur[ing] and test[ing]” of the audience (and, no doubt, and in particular, the critic), he reduces its affective stance to a violent musical confrontation with the existing order. He describes the epigonal, passé avant-garde expressionists in these terms: “imitators who mistook freedom for license and justified excess with apocalyptic rhetoric.”<sup>27</sup> Recall how Giddins enlists Threadgill as a foot-soldier in the reaction to avant-garde expressionism. I heard *Just the Facts* as being in part an “artistic othering” of our listening expectations around time and genre—in terms of temporality especially the record plays with the form of musical time, and its visual, textual, and sonic referents suggest an ambiguous but critical nostalgia for the moment(s) of black freedom struggles. But for Giddins’s enlisting of Threadgill for a traditionalist project to succeed, he has to minimize these “expressionist” elements in his account of the music. To account for what Giddins calls expressionism we have to appeal to a different set of cultural contexts than the intrageneric stylistic disputes of the critic’s version. For instance, and almost at random, a reading of Fanon and his transnational-postcolonial significations in the 1960s: where this example can help us position avant-garde expressionism in a cultural-ideological-racial context of decolonization, when Giddens sees the music as expressive of “national tumult” he does invoke the period of decolonization, but in a way that narrows it drastically, and ultimately contributes (unwittingly, perhaps) to the silencing of radical voices and depoliticizing of cultural space.

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offer a clear choice between life and death or slavery and freedom, because it confronts the colonial condition of life-in-death.” Bhabha, “Foreward,” in Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), vii-xli, xxxvi. On sociogenesis, see Sylvia Wynter, “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience” in *National Identities and Socio-Political Changes in Latin America* ed. Mercedes F. Dúran-Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Moriana (New York: Routledge, 1991), 30-66.

<sup>27</sup> Giddins, *Rhythm – A-Ning*, xii.



Here I have, perhaps unfairly, shifted Giddens onto a different historical context, addressing his work of jazz criticism as if it were historiography. Indeed, this is precisely the problem for jazz historians in thinking about the role of journalism/criticism. For this dissertation, emplotting a narrative of decolonization over against one of “national tumult” is a macro-level concern. But it exemplifies a more general set of issues that my reading of Giddens indicates. First, the project of jazz criticism is to craft a compelling description of one affective experience of a musical performance, that invites the reader/listener to seek out their own affective engagement in dialogue, but not consensus, with the critic; a critic one disagrees with, but who articulates their point of view with grace, is well worth a read. In this, Giddens is a superb jazz critic and a pleasure to read.<sup>28</sup> The problem comes in when we decide to read Giddens as making claims about jazz or black musical history or as selecting relevant socio-cultural contexts for the music, where Giddens is no longer a critic, but a historian.<sup>29</sup> This puts a historian in a strange position. If you think of jazz critics as intellectuals, you can write a history of the intellectual frameworks and ideological investments of critics, and a history of the discursive enframing of the music, and ultimately its policing.<sup>30</sup> But this is not a history of the music. Jazz history as I conceive it in this project needs to appeal to a different set of relevant contexts for understanding musical changes.

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<sup>28</sup> And, while it doesn't really make any difference for this analysis, I would like to say that more times than not I agree with Giddens's affective experience of a record, and that as a listener and fan I have learned much from his work and had my experience of the music deepened by my reading of it. The divergences I am discussing here are structural, not personal, and related to what kind of engagement history writing should or should not take up with the vast archive of jazz criticism—better, what kinds of narratological and theoretical possibilities are opened and which are foreclosed by this or that thinking about jazz criticism as historical evidence.

<sup>29</sup> As Jed Rasula has noted, the vast majority of jazz history, considered as the material accumulation of texts and as the discursive regularities of the practice, has been written by critics acting as erstwhile historians-cum-ethnographers-cum-folklorists. Rasula, “The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History” in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 134-162. For a further discussion see Chapter One.

<sup>30</sup> As, for instance, John Gennari has done compellingly and comprehensively for U.S. critics in *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). The point is not to argue against such projects, just to describe their theoretical limitations when it comes to thinking musical performance, and improvisation, and especially recordings as the “object” of jazz history.

Ultimately, jazz critics are constrained by the necessity, in any given conjuncture, to create a useable past for jazz criticism itself. It is of course true that musicians actively engaged and confronted critics, followed their writing, knew them socially and personally, and could be profoundly materially affected by criticism or the lack thereof (the power of press and publicity to open economic opportunities). So a social history of musicians and a cultural history of musical production must both, in different ways however, take this social context into account. But insofar as the writing of jazz history repeats the terms (categories, evaluations, canons, intrageneric stylistic differences, and so on) of the criticism of a given period, it also repeats the policing and economic discipline of musicians on a narrative level.

Second, by the nature of jazz journalism (the material relations that sustain it, however marginal they may be) jazz criticism is ideologically invested in a contained understanding of genre. When, for example, a musician incorporates sonic elements or structures that obviously are not conventionally understood to belong within the borders of “jazz,” the critic is compelled to describe them as foreign bodies, traces of the generic (national, ethnic, idiomatic, economic, gender, sexual, and so on) outside that are more or less successfully incorporated into the genre of jazz performance. This is independent of any *valuation* of the performance, but it can importantly help to explain the strange resistance jazz critics have historically exhibited towards the musical transpositions that in part sustain any healthy performance culture. Many musicians, on the other hand, occupy a variety of idiosyncratic spaces in-between the genre and style classifications that are structurally implanted in criticism.

Third, even when musicians are not so clearly performing in the spaces between genre or style nominalizations, the ways jazz critics read musical allusions and extramusical references is constrained by the ideology of jazz as a bounded generic tradition. Here is

where the well-known problematics of the racialized restrictions on black experimentalism, as well as the policing of the popular, come into play. Again, however, the emergence of these problematics can be thought as structural: because jazz critics operated in a material context that invested them with a stake in the sustaining of jazz as a distinct genre, they (again) had to continually construct a musical past that would provide a framework to situate and establish the *value* of musical performances. Much of the conflict between critics was over the composition of this useable past, and we can define with some precision what effects this had on the language of valuation and contextualization of jazz criticism: what is continually constructed and reconstructed is an *affective-racial vocabulary of intra-idiomatic quasi-formalist musical references*. I will shortly turn to an example of what I mean, but let me unpack this formulation briefly. By quasi-formalist I mean simply that the enframing contexts produced in jazz criticism were very rarely formalist in a technical sense: they were “quasi” because instead of tracing a formal relation, the normal procedure of jazz criticism was to establish “influence” through a loose relation of “sounds like”; yet it was still a kind of formalism in that “influence” could be tracked through musical referents alone, although often supplemented by biographical information or oral histories. By affective-racial I mean to designate the fact that by relying on a notion of “feel” to assign the subgeneric or stylistic referents within jazz performance critics were racializing their vocabulary in two ways: first simply by institutionalizing the coordination of black popular/creative music with emotion rather than intellectuality—critics relied on feel because it was thought to be idiomatically appropriate to do so (and, to be clear, many musicians agreed on this point), but this was a legacy, however sublimated, of primitivism; second, regardless of how jazz critics identified the racial “reality” of jazz history (as led by white progressives, as authentically only played by black primitives, as played by black and white as equals, as played in differing or opposing

racial idioms, as black-innovated and white-imitated, as simply authentically black, as black allied with nonwhites, as multiracial/multinational, and so on—the black/white dialectic has been extraordinarily persistent in jazz criticism) racial ideology shaped their aesthetic-affective experiences, even and especially when critics adopted an ideology of colorblind liberalism (which made, for some, explicitly black or Africanist musicking unhearable as jazz).

With this analysis in mind, I would like to return to reading Gary Giddins listening to Henry Threadgill to illustrate some of the ideas presented above about the specificities of jazz criticism as a genre. In the chapter on Threadgill in his 1998 collection *Visions of Jazz*, Giddins makes an interesting revision of his correlation of Threadgill with tradition, temporal continuity, and generic inheritances:

One way of fighting sloth and despair is to swell the energy. In modern music that impulse has often meant electronics or free improvisation, but it is now more widely signified by effusive multiculturalism, ripe with polyphony, contrary rhythms, eclectic juxtapositions, usually electronics, and almost always animated by the spirit of dance. In its most elemental form, dance is the soul of irreverence, if not revolution. It impedes aging, mental as well as physical and is a bulwark against the death rattle of nostalgia. Threadgill has always been able to embody raw energy with his saxophone and in his bands. Even when Air played Joplin and Morton, you were less likely to meditate on tradition than submit to the immediacy of its racy attack.<sup>31</sup>

What has happened here? Critical judgments have a right to be inconsistent, but what structurally drives that inconsistency is often a conjunctural change in what kind of tradition needs to be invented, what kind of past will be useable. Where once Threadgill and Air's recordings of Joplin was a harbinger of the neoclassical emergence, fifteen years later they point to the staying power of eclecticism and innovation, and even "raw energy" (which smells a bit like "avant-garde expressionism"). In fact, in this new historical framing of

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<sup>31</sup> Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 513-522, 521. Subsequent quotations of Giddins are taken from this chapter.

Threadgill, the context of tradition in the 1970s-1980s looks remarkably different: *Air Lore* (1979)—the album on which the group played Joplin—was now read as “a key statement on the repertory mania and tradition-mongering that gripped jazz in the ‘70s and ‘80s and a forceful refutation of the academicism that too often sucks the life’s blood out of classic jazz” (515). Recall the earlier article on *Just the Facts*, where Giddins was at pains to show Threadgill as a traditionalist, even as stylistically indistinguishable from a New Orleans traditional-reparatory band from a generation before. What has changed is nothing other (nothing more) than the fifteen years between these assessments—the project of crafting a legitimating narrative for jazz criticism (current, eclectic, danceable, irreverent, young) remains.

In order to demonstrate the racialized indexing of intra-idiomatic genre references that I analyzed above, I would like to reproduce Giddins’s description of *Easily Slip Into Another World* in full. In addition, at the risk of belaboring the issue, I would like to chart what I see as a dizzying index of racial-affective intra- and extra- generic markers, highlighting them in bold.

The jacket ... depicts a small band shell, but Threadgill’s approach to the **brass band** has a blowzy quality for all the precision of his orchestrations: even a slap-dash effect requires practice to get it right. The **lessons of Morton and Joplin** resurface in radically altered ways throughout the album and its 1988 successor, *Rag, Bush and All* (RCA Novus), where unfolding structures suggest the plotting of complementary strains. Yet results are uneven. “Black Hands Bejewelled” (on *Easily Slip Into Another World*) is a persuasive take on **the Spanish tinge** as a setting for trombonist Frank Lacy and trumpeter Rasul Siddik to solo over fat open-palm chords, but the tune is cloying and Siddik hasn’t the technique to execute his ideas.

Then comes ‘Spotted Dick Is Pudding,’ a revealing, **raucous workout**, conceived and played in **a spurt of measured euphoria**. The rhythm *almost* arches into a **second-line strut** as Lacy growls the finish of his solo, but it’s the **gospel chords** that inspire Threadgill to his best work, voiced high and tight and building to a **shameless rapture** stressed with **split tones** and **shouts**. The music swells with shifting rhythms, a patch of double-time in the bass, and a parodic finish with a **fierce beating of drums** and a great bleating chord to bring down the curtain. ‘My Rock,’ with vocalist Aisha Putli crossing octaves, is reminiscent of the uses to which **Mingus** put singers. ‘Hall’ opens with a rhythmic vamp by bowed strings and shifts

with the brasses into a kaleidoscopic mode that suggests **Muhai Richard Abrams**, to whom it is dedicated, though the humor is all Threadgill's. His wit suffuses 'Award the Squadtett,' which begins with the drummers (Pheeroan Aklafl and Reggie Nicholson) matching rhythms and tones in **tribal style** and settles into a theme that sounds **like something Meredith Willson might have written for a brass band after spending a year locked up in the AACM rehearsal hall**. Threadgill's sax **barks** over and through his ensemble with the **rude authority of a drill sergeant**. Murray's cello solo is something of a keynote interlude, setting up a theme so suggestive of **convention music** you can almost see balloons falling from the rafters. (518-19)

Note that this passage employs both generic markers and a language of valuation or critique. There is a wide range of types of generic signifiers in evidence here—and while there might be differences of opinion about their meanings or selection, the key point is that they both saturate and scaffold the passage. There are a number of clear intra-idiomatic references—second-line strut, gospel chords, brass band, tribal style—as well as the proper names Joplin, Morton, Mingus, and Abrams (but note the difference between Mingus, whose influence is supposed by Giddins, and the others who have been explicitly “named” in Threadgill's work). There are also some liminal cases. Threadgill's “bark[ing]” like a “drill sergeant” is an extra-musical metaphor, but perhaps a more oblique reference to the common experience many musicians (including Threadgill) shared of military life. “Convention music” is perhaps extra-idiomatic, but could also refer to the march. And “the Spanish tinge” is a kind of dead metaphor for a long legitimized cross-genre borrowing. However, Giddins's use of this archaic phrase is interesting, as it is an old and mostly passé reference to what could be called “Afro-Cuban” or perhaps left unmarked as a normal mode of jazz performance. The evaluative comment of the “persuasive take” is interesting, too, as however habitual and pervasive in postwar jazz, the euphemistic “Spanish tinge” is the only referential element that obliquely hints at the possible transnational or diasporic (or extra-idiomatic) resonances of the album. Similarly archaic is “tribal style,” which could be indexed instead as West African polyrhythm or even a more specific reference. The point, however, is not to evaluate the

accuracy of the references but to see them as establishing a racial-affective field of reference. Tribal style, gospel chords, second-line strut, and brass band all suggest symptomatically a continuing investment in the archaic as such and in a traditional vocabulary of black idiomatic life.

There are also markers that index a racial-affectivity without specifically referencing an intra- or extra-generic point of connection. These are in effect free-floating points of racial-affective identification: “raucous workout,” “spurt of measured euphoria,” “shameless rapture,” “split tones and shouts,” and “fierce beating of drums.” My identification of these as idiomatic racial-affectivities could be controversial—could they not be simply evocative but race-neutral descriptions of musical emotion? Perhaps in some cases, but I think I am justified in seeing them as racialized points of affective connection to the music in particular by the description of “Spotted Dick is Pudding,” which is saturated by affective referents and framed by perhaps the two most important idiomatic referents to tradition in Giddins’s critical vocabulary: gospel and the second line. As I said above, the employment of an emotionally evocative language is in the criticism of black music always already racialized, because it carries the traces of a discourse of black desublimated enjoyment and the foreclosure of intellectuality.<sup>32</sup> Above all, however, to say so is not to censor Giddins, but to try to understand the conditions of possibility for his (and other critics’) discourse.

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<sup>32</sup> Incidentally, the title of Threadgill’s album *Rag, Bush, and All* (1988), briefly mentioned in the above passage, is a wonderfully witty riposte to discourses of tradition and vernacularity and genre in the discursive framing of black experimental music. Threadgill doesn’t disclaim, but wholly identifies with the idea that he speaks in and for a tradition that goes back to ragtime, that plays bush music, that moves among it all. Drawing on George Lewis and Nathaniel Mackey, we have to acknowledge that part of the forgetting of post-1960s experimentalism in black musical history is related to the ideology that encodes experimentalism as incompatible with blackness. It’s that supposed incompatibility that both produces the music’s marginality in the first place and makes it rich and politically potent. There is a persistence of ideologies linking blackness with a populist construction of vernacularity. Lewis’s documentation of the AACM as a working class cultural formation dedicated to experimental aesthetics, and the work of literary scholars like Aldon Nielsen, who notes the distortions and formal experimentation of the vernacular in black poetry. There is a “populism problem” in black musical discourse, a lingering attachment to imaginary linkages between racial authenticity and mass desire, which is evident in but not confined to jazz criticism. See Mackey, “Other: From Noun to Verb,” in

Why do historians remain locked in an imaginary struggle for symbolic authority with critics? Our jobs are, after all, quite different. The fact that Giddins heard something different from me, that his criticism challenged me to articulate my own view, suggests that his work functions as arts criticism “should.” It is a provocation, and a compelling description of a partial aesthetic experience, and it stimulates reflection and debate. Two issues, however, can be clarified here. I described above those elements in Giddins’s criticism that are present in jazz criticism as a genre, of racial-affective marking or identification. I need to record as well here again those moments in Giddins’s criticism as spurs, forcing me to take notice, and often to wince slightly, to feel unease, a discomfort not unrelated to the social and material contours of the situation: a textual communion and incipient, imaginary debate between two relatively privileged white men over the description and vernacular categorization (what is church, what is the Spanish tinge, what is second line?) and evaluation of the work of a black composer, himself (although does this qualification matter? does it condescend?) an exquisitely articulate participant in the discursive framing of his own and his contemporaries’ music. Separated though we might be by generation, having never met in person, my reflection separated by many years from Giddins’ writing, is it meaningful or helpful for me to note how this textually mediated encounter recalls a whole *genre* of social interactions, call them “white men bonding/debating over black music and the topic of race, the racial situatedness or embeddedness of the situation, arises, comes to mind, or intrudes as a meta-commentary on the social interaction itself” or mark them simply as situations that can occasionally cause me some discomfort. But it is *my* discomfort, and not Giddins’s,

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*Discrepant Engagement*; Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: the AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008); and Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Black Chant*.



presumably, that gives rise to the anxious querying of the matter of genre, so is the discomfort Giddins's to bear? Is the glibness I hear in his (and others') "racialized" indexing of genre itself a clue to a more thoroughgoing critique of the critic by the (academic) history writer, of the work or role of criticism as against the work of history or "culture critique"? Does it come down to a contest of authority, played out in the anxiousness of my interpretation, or provoked by the authoritative voice in which Giddins records his aesthetic experience? Why should our authority matter, the authority of critics and historians? What are we to the music and to the musicians? Medium, conduit, interlocutor, contextualizer, evaluator, judge, booster, jailer, thief? Does our discourse, mediated by imaginary distances of time, text, and genre, have material effects on the production and circulation of the music, the distribution of the profit it makes or the control over its creation? The second source of discomfort I have with these passages is somewhat different. Above I characterized Giddins's project as one of constituting a notion of tradition, of inventing a tradition, on which to base a "useable past" for a 1980s project of renewal in jazz. In this context or situation the distances of time and genre, the different stances of the critic and the historian, matter greatly. It is that distance that makes it possible for me to question a set of discursive links and regularities that connect Giddins's articulation of Threadgill's genre to a set of other contexts and historical trajectories that share a "family resemblance"—the "second-line strut" for New Orleans, the "tent-revival shout" for religiosity in all its dimensions, the continuity established between a late 1950s residual cultural preservation and a 1980s subdominant experimentalism. It is these contexts and their limitations that historians can not only critique, but must make efforts to escape, to suggest different modalities of description that slip out from the bounds of genre policing and the affective indexing of racio-idiomatic inheritance, and different temporalities that bend, flex, and break the

whiggish linearity and reactionary stasis that alternate in most jazz writing. In the remainder of the dissertation I work to assemble texts, historiography, and musical projects that refuse to follow, even in critique, the narrative forms of jazz history as written by jazz criticism.

Lastly, I will close with a few final comments on Henry Threadgill's albums *Just the Facts and Pass the Bucket* (1983) and *Easily Slip Into Another World* (1988) as together forming an emblem for some modes of thinking about the memory of the 1960s and 1970s. I said above that I had a suspicion that *Just the Facts* articulated a certain kind of nostalgia, nostalgia with a bitter or cutting edge perhaps, but a mode of remembrance of a certain kind of church, the church of a community-in-struggle. Just the facts, then, could be read as an ironic nod to the police (just the facts, ma'am), or a stripped down pragmatism, or perhaps a setting to work, getting serious and getting ready. And pass the bucket—for a contribution, or a community share, or something else being passed around or passed on. Or is the bucket for shouting or singing into? Or perhaps it is another one of Threadgill's ironic comments on genre, to gutbucket blues or avant-gutbucket as the critics' name for the only apparently contradictory experimental vernacular that emerged in the 1970s.

The back cover image of *Easily Slip Into Another World* is another mirroring, this time of the cover of *Just the Facts*. Here the sextet, composed of a different ensemble but with the same name and some of the same musicians, is lined up facing the camera, dressed not in funeral garb but in street clothes. Only Threadgill stands with his back to the camera, decked out in a paramilitary uniform. On the front cover he faces the camera, the image saturated with light. The colorful uniform is ambiguous too: the regalia, and the appearance of a single glove perhaps poking fun at the pop musicians of the day, or perhaps simply a "Black Hand Bejewled" rewarding artistry rather than militarism, transcendence over death. Another world is easy to slip into, but it is harder to come back and state the facts. The

world of music, a world of intervallic and interstellar travel, bathed in light but still unilluminated, resists the historiographer's careful accumulation of facts, but here goes anyway and pass the bucket.

### Chapter Summary

Part 1 of the dissertation, titled "Jazz Undead," focuses on the period before the mid 1960s, and ranges widely across the twentieth century, making occasional forays into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even earlier. Chapter One, "The Caesura of the 70s" is not an investigation of the 1970s as such but a historiographical argument about why jazz cultural studies and jazz history more broadly has had difficulty extending a generic narrative of jazz past the 60s. My argument is that jazz studies not only has to contend with the deeply conservative legacy of progressive, whiggish, and heroic narratives inherited from jazz criticism, but is also overdetermined by the historiographical unsymbolizable "event" that was the radical movements of "1968." It covers important secondary sources in jazz studies over the past decade, and then investigates some theoretical problems pertaining to the use of a sonic archive to write history.

Chapter Two, "The Work of Jazz in the Age of Sound Reproduction," argues that the term "jazz" does not refer to a discrete muscological object but to a master signifier of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus it is important to undertake a genealogical investigation of how jazz was *used* in addition to making claims about what it *was*, which are structurally bound to notions of authority and authenticity. Since a classical ideology critique of the deployment of jazz is a potentially unending project, in this chapter I focus on several discrete and conflicting ideological problems. The chapter revisits the conservative critique of early jazz on behalf of "high Culture" to recover the threat of blackface minstrelsy's "lord of misrule"

in the construction of a Jazz Age vogue. It then undertakes a genealogy of the trope of the “death of jazz” which had been proclaimed throughout jazz’s existence as a media phenomenon, from the late 1910s on, focusing on the return of jazz’s repressed necrology in the 1960s, which was received each time, on the occasion of almost every ghostly articulation, as if it were a first hearing. Turning to the source of the chapter’s title, I inquire into whether thinking about jazz along and against the grain of Walter Benjamin’s “work of art” essay can help us think the relation between the visual and the sonic in the machinery of mass cultural production—and I set Benjamin next to seminal jazz autobiographer Sidney Bechet, whose *Treat It Gentle* (1960) I read as constructing a mythic political economy to account for the spatial and discursive policing of jazz performance. The material, spatial policing and zoning of jazz, and the effect of postwar metropolitan segregation and disinvestment in African American migrant communities was an important context for stylistic, aesthetic, and political debates about jazz modernism in the 1950s. In light of these considerations of the work “jazz” did, I return at the end of the chapter to thinking about attempts to define the *object* of jazz history. If an archaeology of jazz discourse, noting its debt to Euro-American modernist primitivism and the derisive pleasure of the blackface mask, cannot ultimately dispel the assumptions of and libidinal investments in black desublimation as an antidote to modern anxiety, what strategy could black intellectuals adopt to adequately present black vernacular musics? This is the terrain, I suggest, for the famous debate between Ralph Ellison and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) on the history and aesthetics of black music and its relationship to U.S. culture.

Chapter Three, “Adorno, Jazz, and Postwar Black Musical Modernism,” discusses Theodor W. Adorno’s notorious dismissal of jazz in “*Über Jazz*” (1936) and other essays. If the object of jazz history is elusive, even more so is the target of Adorno’s critique: since the

simultaneously but rarely overlapping rise of interest in both Adorno's aesthetics and jazz in the 1980s academy, a debate has raged about how to situate his apparent hatred of the music in an appreciation or renovation of his larger theoretical program. I offer a reading of Adorno's essay as the hoped-for counterpart to Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay: indeed, these two works are torn halves of a dialectical whole to which they do not, however, add up. It remains an open question whether Adorno would have had any sympathy for either jazz modernism (bebop) or the later iterations of a jazz avant-garde. His critique, however, does have some interesting overlap with the early avant-gardists' aesthetics and their challenge to jazz criticism. Adorno's "deafness" (Fred Moten), I suggest, may not help our hearing, but it could help us to *think* the reasons why the affection of white bourgeois audiences for jazz does not alleviate but in fact sustains racial and class domination. Adorno's position might be understood as presenting a potential *opening* for black vanguardist modernism.

Part 2 is called "Ascension" and focuses on the period after 1965. Early that year, John Coltrane recorded two versions of "Ascension" which were released on Impulse the following year. Each version is an album-length improvised musical performance for an expanded rhythm section (two bassists) and seven horns (five reeds and two trumpets). The other saxophonists who played with Coltrane, in particular, are worth noting because they each were important avant-gardists in their own right: Marion Brown, Pharoah Sanders, Archie Shepp, and John Tchcai. The performance mixed dense, droning, and occasionally frenetic passages of ensemble playing on a loose harmonic framework with individual soloing. Yet for many free improvisers, it was a watershed recording that indicated innovative possibilities of group improvisation and free-form structure. For Coltrane, the title's meaning was spiritual; as with the 1964 album *A Love Supreme*, Coltrane both addressed

his music to the universe and to its Creator, and wanted his music to convey an oceanic feeling of cosmic unity. His absolutely sincere devotion to his craft and to the music as a universal language for the praise of all creation made him a subject of veneration by musicians, and other creative intellectuals, many of whom admired in Coltrane a singleness of purpose, discipline, and serenity that could perhaps be adopted to a politically militant stance, despite Coltrane's personal reluctance to engage in overt political commentary. As a spiritual term, "Ascension" refers to a transfigured life after death, but also to the unreality of death, the proof that what had appeared as death was in fact a new life, in Christian theology both a resurrection and a sustaining of the prophetic beyond a state-ordered execution: not undead, but undying, transcendent. The titles of the dissertation's two parts act as a meta-commentary on the generic "necrology" (Adorno) of the art of jazz.

"Ascension," as I am adopting it here however, also means to indicate the dialectic of jazz's status as a genre category in the postwar period. Jazz ascended cultural hierarchies in the wake of the 1940s critical debates about bebop and swing, but at the price of an intensified policing of generic boundaries (the iconic 1950s term "main stream" originated in jazz discourse as a generic disciplining apparatus) and a Cold War mobilization of musicians and jazz as an ideology for a nationalist project of global integration. This project was contradictory, as musicians' travels and the spread of black modernist music to audiences in the "Third World" stimulated internationalist connections between black Americans and the decolonizing global South. As Penny Von Eschen shows, the U.S. State Department tours often served to increase widespread identification with black musicians and their predicament in a segregated United States.

At the same time, a transnational intergenerational cohort of intellectuals, musicians included, were captivated by the nationalist struggles for independence in Africa and Asia

and emerging freedom movements in South Africa; for black Americans in the U.S. these identifications were often particularly crucial and stimulated new interest in Africa as a jazz thematic and as a source of sonic tools to transform musical aesthetics. Artists, writers, and musicians gathered in urban enclaves to debate, create, and forge new political institutions with widely varying intentions and degrees of stability. Meanwhile the civil rights movement, built on the struggles of countless organizers and ordinary people, attracted the solidarity of a national mass movement. The momentum created by these activities, articulated in mutual solidarity with anti-colonial nationalisms in the “Third World,” fueled a period of tremendous creativity and cultural ferment. Radical creative intellectuals engaged in long-term projects that critiqued U.S. culture across the board, joining and inspiring a multinational, multiethnic, cross-class political formation that sought a radical reconstruction of U.S. society—while the contradictions and impasses around gender and sexual equality within these movements generated further criticism, research, and activism. U.S. intellectual culture was thoroughly altered, meaning not only print culture and university curricula but also the “common sense” of the shape of politics, boundaries of citizenship, and modes of public address and decorum—the “distribution of the sensible” of U.S. culture was temporarily made dissensual, and this dissensus has to varying degrees remained open to this day. Following Nikhil Pal Singh and others, this period can be thought of as a *decolonization* of the U.S.<sup>33</sup>

“Ascension” can refer, then, to the social mobility of the critique of the “jazz business” and the white-dominated cultural machinery of black cultural definition, its migration from the musico-critical to wider social fields. Chapter Four, “Disintegrationist

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<sup>33</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), esp. 174-211.

Intimacies: Slavery, Internal Colonialism, and the Political Economy of Black Culture,” takes up an analysis of the 1960s discussion panels about jazz, race, and black nationalism as a genre of public discourse that can be compared to other, similar genres such as the many confrontations between black and white historians on the terrain of the historiography of slavery. Anticipating other emotionally intense, and highly gendered, public debates between white and black men about the representation of black history, the panels also subtly evoked and engaged popular, academic, and policy debates about slavery and black cultural pathology. Musician-writer-activist Archie Shepp’s mid-1960s declarations about the socio-economic referents of “jazz” informed a musico-cultural politics that addressed the legacy of black dehumanization and proslavery ideology (a legacy that continued to inform the U.S. historiography of slavery into the 1970s) with a dialectic of “love” and “despair.”

Chapter Five, “We Have Come B(l)ack: Free Jazz, Africa, and the Transnational Formation of a Revolutionary Aesthetic,” argues that travel and transnational itinerancy were important dynamics in shaping the revolutionary new musical possibilities of the 1970s. Following Don Cherry’s global migrations out of the cauldron of the New York avant-garde in a search for new sounds and musical communion, we can see this period as an important genealogy for the idea of “world music.” Sold in the 1980s as a neat packaging of New Age exotica, world music in the earlier conjuncture of 1967-1974 was part and parcel of a revolutionary overturning of cultural hierarchies. This was a kind of “Ascension” of Coltrane’s own project to deprovincialize jazz (his much-touted universality was crafted in the creative encounter of jazz and Afro-Asian musics). In fact, the idea of world music was intimately tied to the trajectory of African decolonization; by the late 1960s, however, that trajectory had become uncertain and contradictory. The chapter explores this dynamic by analyzing the appearance of several U.S. free jazz musicians at the 1969 Pan-African Festival



of Arts and Culture in Algiers, Algeria. Immediately after the festival, the African American participants joined a much larger expatriate community of musicians in Paris, where a multigenerational and multistylistic recording project began for the short-lived BYG Actuel label. Often read as a record of some of the most “out” or intense free jazz music, I read the Actuel albums instead as a collective meditation on the parameters of black identity in the encounter with the Parisian context certainly, but also crucially with a politically complex African context; moreover, it was in Paris where the first musical encounters happened between the very different strains of “free” improvisation of New York and Chicago, so even the genealogy of “American” free jazz requires an outer-national frame.

Finally, “Ascension” refers obliquely to the depopularization of jazz. As it transcended its generic limitations and discursive policing, jazz was also subsumed by economic marginality. By the end of the 1970s, even as jazz was repeatedly celebrated as a uniquely American heritage (for example, jazz musicians were feted at Jimmy Carter’s White House), it had arrived at a position as a permanent cultural subdominant: jazz in all its conflicting styles has accounted for roughly 3-5% of U.S. record sales since the 1970s.

Chapter Six, “Duets and Neoliberalism” charts a different way into the records of the 1970s by focusing on the make-up of the ensemble. It notes the surprising prevalence of duo performances in the recorded archive, and discusses the duo form as a way of thinking through the communicative possibilities of improvised music. For many writers since the 1970s, neoliberalism names the new settlement that coalesced after the collapse of the radical social movements of 1967-1974. I suggest that duos were an economic strategy of survival for improvising musicians, but at the same time an aesthetic strategy that featured an idiom of dialogue and mutual recognition rather than the atomized individualism of market relations. In an era, the late 1970s, suspended between the radical collective potentialities of

1967-1974 and the coming return with a vengeance of militarism and class warfare from above on the horizon, there was a caesura of historical time in which there flourished a musical production perhaps unprecedented in its stunning and ambitious creativity. The duo form offers a way in to this period, but what really stands out is the tremendously shifting range of ensemblic forms, from solo performances to large groups and extended compositional projects.

### The Resistance of the Object

Turning to Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003),

I come across the following extraordinary passage:

Ensemble is and requires attunement not only to the name but to the phrase. The task of developing that attunement is given to us by “The Burton Greene Affair”; by the illusion of singularity and the illusion of its plurals’ intersections and divergences; by the myth of the crossroads at which would be played the drama of the negative, of differentiation and relation, of an impulse to name and represent. That which would be named—the sound of the structure and agency that is improvisation—is that which the crossroads only figures: the ensemble. Ensemble.<sup>34</sup>

“The Burton Greene Affair” is a 1966 text that appeared in the jazz magazine *Down Beat* and later in *Black Music* (1967) by LeRoi Jones (but, as Moten’s text shows, the name of the text’s author is elusive, ambivalent, “off to one side” or between LeRoi Jones, Amiri Baraka, and Johannes Koenig): it has something to say about a certain neglect of attunement on the part of white pianist Burton Greene, who despite his frantic activity cannot quite find the music’s being, cannot quite inhabit its ontology, cannot hear or play its “structure and agency.” I cannot speak fully to the effect of Moten’s text on my own writing, but want to gesture at it by way of a few remarks about attunement, which I have adopted here as the title of what otherwise could be a preface. “Otherwise” because it is not the making-before or the saying-

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<sup>34</sup> Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, (Minnesota, 2003), 138-39.

before that I want to emphasize here but how a certain attunement might alter the writing of a history, of a narrative. Attunement suggests auditory connection or hearing, but also an unvoiced negation: an attunement might signify tuning up or getting in tune with “the rest” or “the others” of the ensemble, or it might signify a tuning in (as one tunes a radio), or a crafting or honing as in fine-tune, but it also signifies a not-tuned or a suspension of tune, an (a)tuning that is not quite an “out of tune,” and still less a formalism of *atonality* (to speak of dis-chord or –cord would be anticipating too much, not least of how tunings come together in ensemble), but an out of step or out of time in the improvisation of the tune, a distortion of tune both as “the tune” (i.e. the song form) and “tune” as the tempered scale. Many or all of these things are happening in a given performance, and can be heard or reinscribed in/about a given audio inscription or recording. Or at least that reinscription might be attempted, but for a historian, this presents some difficulties. For a white historian, the difficulty of not *being* like Burton Greene, or say the fear of being called or called on or named as Greene was, might be said to present certain other anxious difficulties. But however real/material those difficulties, it is important to be attuned as well to what Moten refers to as “the illusion of singularity and the illusion of its plurals’ intersections and divergences,” which I take to mean in part the illusionary power and lure of not only the singular as exception or typical case, as in a genre history of “major” works, but of the singular as element in the making of the multiple, that itself is not quite adequately captured in terms like *particulars* or *universals* for the simple reason that these too are illusionary because trapped by a certain thinking of essence or immutability. For Moten, to think and record improvisation and the recording of improvisation is to run up against the “resistance of the object.” The object, as record, as improvisation, as the speaking commodity of the enslaved or dominated human being, and its resistance in and to language in the materiality of

sound—this is terrain upon which I have set out, perhaps foolishly, to write history. On the next page there is a passage including something that Moten “reluctantly call[s] a sentence only because I can then, by way of a certain principle of expansion, think of it anacrustically, as an opening of an improvisation of rhythm”:

*The resistance to analysis that is carried out in and by the complexity of the object is everything. It occurs in the break, the sexual cut, between simple naming and complex description, both of which are rendered impossible by the object in its complexity. The distinction between the object that would be named and the musical—which is to say organized—compound no longer performs. This performatively induced nonperformance occurs within and as a chain of differences and modalities—totalizing systems and exclusionary singularities—that are embedded in “The Burton Greene Affair” as both name and description.*<sup>35</sup>

I cannot claim to be writing history in/as improvisation, and still less can I claim a history of improvisation, if it is the case that both naming and description are impossible. More prosaically, I cannot claim to have responded fully to the challenge Moten proposes to the act of writing (about) music/ally, because the dissertation takes up a language of naming and complex description, one that is both necessary and impossible in the writing of history. As in the opening paragraphs of this attunement, the dissertation will emplot capsule “descriptions” of musical performances. Moreover, I cannot claim to have written an (opening of an) improvisation (of rhythm). This is partly for generic reasons—disciplinary history should in my view lean closer to thinking its theoretical limits, but I am still committed to its value and its public intervention into the social dialectic of memory/forgetting. But there has been much (attempting of) improvisation, audible and traceable in this form of the dissertation. Above all, I have tried to be sensitive to the resistance of the objects in my archive to the linguistic descriptive practices that might enframe them—ultimately my approach is to see musical performance as unsymbolizable and as such a presence/absence in historical narratives that is distorting, that introduces

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<sup>35</sup> Moten, *In the Break*, 278n70, 140.

breakdown or “breakdown of breakdown,” as Moten says describing Jones/Koenig/Baraka’s description of the broken ensemble of Burton Greene/Pharoah Sanders/Marion Brown. What music breaks down is both the description in language of its own performance, but also collectively the logic and order of a historiographical narrative. Music resists emplotment, and it also can productively distort the encrusted periodizations and temporalities, the ordering of events and contexts, and the privileging of actors and spatialities, that make historiography an ideological project par excellence.

To return to my title, there is finally anacrusis, also borrowed from Moten, which in music is a phrase that precedes the first bar, the opening of a phrase that will set up the downbeat. Outside or before the commencement of a rhythm, it also sets the pace that will proceed after the coming of the One. I am intrigued by the potential of thinking anacrusis as a metaphorical trope, like metonymy or synecdoche. Another trope, catechresis is a metaphor with a misleading or improper referent: as Gayatri Spivak, the great contemporary theorist of catechresis, says, it is a “false but productive analogy”—more productive than its dictionary definition, “abuse or perversion of a trope or metaphor” might suggest: indeed, “even the most hegemonic identity would show itself to be catechrestic upon close scrutiny.”<sup>36</sup> Anacrusis might be thought of, then, in catechrestic terms: as that which forms an impossible outside of the performance, that refers in the opening of the music, before its commencement, to the rhythm to come. Anacrusis might be thought of as a specifically proleptic catechresis, an anticipatory invitation of a “to come” that remains outside the frame but inside (rhythmically prefigured in) the phrase. Like a kind of “Acknowledgement,” as in the first movement of Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*, of what always remains to come and never

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<sup>36</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). For these usages, see 179, 141-2n43, 14. As Spivak reminds us, even the term “postcolonial” is a catechresis because the situation to which it refers, an ending of colonial relations and the uneven global distribution of labor, nowhere exists.

as yet arrives. Here then is its political meaning, like the “democracy to come” that Jacques Derrida wrote about so often in his later years, anacrusis suggests perhaps something on the horizon—not an object which we can ultimately approach but the horizon itself somewhere in the beyond of which there is a different rhythm, a freedom, that keeps us moving. A politics, elusively articulated, that is about democracy as that which has not yet taken place—on the other side, though, anacrusis might be said to suggest what Nathaniel Mackey calls the “sexual cut,” or “the insistent previousness invading each and every natal occasion.” Where we look for the advent of the anacrustic anticipation of a democracy to come in the origin stories of nativity we find only an unending previousness that harbors apocalypse.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate, Vols. 1-3*, (New Directions, 2010). The quotation, from the first book of Mackey’s ongoing epistolary novel, *Bedouin Hornbook*, has been taken up by a wide range of literary and cultural critics in recent years (and it appears as an epigraph to Moten’s book). I would like to supplement these usages only by pointing out a few things about the context in which the phrase appears. The main character N. and Angel of Dust, his epistolary interlocutor, have apparently had some disagreement about N.’s use of the phrase “sexual cut.” To clarify, N. describes a kind of waking dream he has experienced while listening to reggae, a music, he says, “where the syncopation comes down like a blade, a ‘broken’ claim to connection.” A sense of “peril” or “danger” is “beaten back by the boldness” of that claim. In the dream-image, N. imagines he is floating and “being towed into an abandoned harbor.” Here the description of the image becomes extremely dense: “I wasn’t exactly a boat but I felt my anchorlessness as a lack, as an inured, eventually visible pit up from which I floated, looking down on what debris looking into it left.” Crudely speaking, one might say that this is about a certain loss of the certainty of connection, and the extreme anxiety of knowing that such connections (to the past, to others, to our identities) are composed only of the traces (the debris) left by our own search for connection. In the dream, N. “turned out to be a snake hissing, ‘You did it, you did it,’ rattling and weeping waterless tears.” Although not listed in the new discography printed with the collected first three novels of Mackey’s series, this appears to be an allusion to a cut on (Rahsaan) Roland Kirk’s 1961 album *We Free Kings*, where Kirk’s vocalized flute style is featured (he growled and hummed and sang in a voice that doubled, harmonized, or commented upon the sound of the instrument as he was playing it). It is oblique, but it might be the “free kings,” the masculine aristocratic inheritance of an idealized African past, and the flight from and vertigo inducing loss of that tempting manly identity and that potential edenic home that links the dream image to the “invasion” (by, in part, the transfigured serpent) of nativity. But “You did it” also echoes a rarer performance, Jeanne Lee’s accusatory, repeated “I know you did it” on Marion Brown, *In Somerhausen* (1969), which could be read as a performative of assigning in the present the lasting historical responsibility for slavery. “You Did It, You Did it” on Kirk, *We Free Kings*, Mercury SR 60679, 1961, 33 1/3 rpm. “Malipieros Midnight Theater” on *Marion Brown In Somerhausen*, Recorded live at Bayerisches Staatskonservatorium der Musik, Würzburg, Germany, May 17 1969, Calig CAL 30605, 1969, 33 1/3 rpm. The watery pit and the waterless tears sound very much to me like signs evoking the Middle Passage. To complete my citation of the passage, Mackey continues, “I don’t know about you, but my sense is that waterless tears don’t have a thing to do with romance, that in fact if anything actually breaks it’s the blade. ‘Sexual’ comes into it only because the word ‘he’ and the word ‘she’ rummage about in the crypt each defines for the other, reconvening as whispers at the chromosomal level as though the crypt had been a crib, a lulling mask, all along. In short, it’s apocalypse I’m talking about, not courtship.” I point to the density of this passage not so much to defend an interpretation but to point to the impossibility of an easy interpretation of its politics. Perhaps we could say the connectivity of identity is troubled and fragmented, and also mourned as a lost bridge to potentially world-ending loss. The rummaging whispers, again to my ears, recall Jeanne Lee. But the

To stop with that, however, may be to evoke what Dipesh Chakrabarty refers to as a “politics of despair.”<sup>38</sup> The music, however, takes us other places. To close this opening for the moment, then, one more passage from Fred Moten:

Having been called by call and response back to music, let’s prepare our descent: let the call of call and response, passionate utterance and response—articulated in the scene [Frederick] Douglass identifies as the ‘blood-stained gate’ through which he entered into subjection and subjectivity; articulated, more precisely, in the phonography of the very screams that open the way into the knowledge of slavery and the knowledge of freedom—operate as a kind of anacrusis (a note or beat or musicked word improvised through the opposition of speech and writing before the definition of rhythm and melody. Gerald Manley Hopkins’s term for anacrusis was encountering. Let the articulation of oppositional encounter be our encountering: a nondetermining invitation to the new and continually unprecedented performative, historical, philosophical, democratic, communist arrangements that are the only authentic ones.<sup>39</sup>

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profound opacity of the passage recommends perhaps some skepticism about the uses to which it can be put. Mackey, 34-35. Note that Moten presents several compelling extended interpretations of this passage in *In the Break*.

<sup>38</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 45-46. My thinking about history writing has been profoundly shaped by successive encounters with this book. By “despair” Chakrabarty means something beyond the common sense meaning of this word as resignation or passivity. Rather, “I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenship in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity. The politics of despair will require of such history that it lay bare to its readers the reasons why such a predicament is necessarily inescapable. This is a history that will attempt the impossible: to look toward its own death by tracing that which resists the best human attempts at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems, so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous.” While Chakrabarty has moved away from the “politics of despair,” since these lines were first written in 1992 (another intervention into the “posthistoricist” conjuncture of 1989-1993), I still find his description of the problem apt. But he is right, I think, that despair does not name the affect this “laying bare” of the immanent techniques and repressive effects of history writing carries with it. Indeed, although I have in this section emphasized some mournful elements of the necessary impossibility of writing about music, and indeed tried to suggest along with Fred Moten the continuing resonance of historical trauma and catastrophe in fracturing “word and world,” I nevertheless think the project of clearing space for the music to ensound *itself* without the frames, claims, and disciplining moves of the historian is at least potentially a joyous one. Moten, *In the Break*, 140.

<sup>39</sup> Moten, *In the Break*, 21-22.

## Part I: Jazz Undead

### Chapter One

#### The Caesura of the 1970s

[J]azz is limited expression. But yet it is ambidextrous. When you say jazz musician, you say, “Oh wow, who is this? They are out there. Jazz.” You think of jazz as suddenly being way out. But another thing is jazz is very sophisticated, very highly evolved and everything. So I use jazz, but it's not one of my favorite expressions to express music. Because it is all music. Jazz is limiting. I think it is limiting.

—Amina Claudine Myers<sup>1</sup>

The specific challenge of jazz's recorded legacy is to admit a broader range of media to the historical palette of memory.

—Jed Rasula<sup>2</sup>

Since the late 1980s, narratives of jazz after modernism have been subjected to a massive historical forgetting. In this dissertation, I draw from the substantial archive of sound recordings and other evidence to articulate the ways in which jazz after 1960, and in many ways before, was and is a collective and creative project of postcolonial aesthetics. In a

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Amina Claudine Myers, “Reimagining Africa: From Popular Swing to the Avant-Garde,” *Afropop.org*. This is from an internet radio program that is available online in both audio and transcription. See <http://www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/191>.

<sup>2</sup> Jed Rasula, “The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History” in Krin Gabbard, ed., *Jazz Among the Discourses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 134-162, 153.



lot of ways, jazz was always already postcolonial, in the sense that it was intimately bound up with African American nationality formation, with all the class, gender, and other political contradictions such national projects have entailed. Jazz musicians had to contend with colonial and neocolonial forms of domination in their work as artists and entertainers, and in their everyday lives as black people caught up in the quotidian terror and exploitation of U.S. apartheid and “racial capitalism” more generally.<sup>3</sup> It is dispiriting, but hardly surprising, that despite the recurring celebrations of jazz as an *American* national art form, or as a unique contribution, or gift, to world culture, in the debates over the inheritance of the musics called jazz, the postcolonial experimental archive as it was elaborated during the 1970s has been largely silenced.

A number of scholars and writers, for example Valerie Wilmer, George Lewis, Eric Porter, Fred Moten, Brent Hayes Edwards, Nathaniel Mackey, John Szwed, and Ronald Radano among others, have called attention, in a variety of registers, to the vital creative work of black musical experimentalism in the 1970s. Yet for the most part, jazz cultural studies as a more general academic project has focused predominantly on a “golden age” of jazz, roughly between c. 1928 (Louis Armstrong’s Hot Fives Recordings) and c. 1967 (John Coltrane’s last recordings and premature death). This somewhat habituated narrative truncation is out of balance with the richness and scope of the archive of post-1960s experimentalism in “jazz,” the irruption of complex, contradictory, and interweaving trajectories in “post-songform” creative music.<sup>4</sup>

Even in such seminal recent studies as Ingrid Monson’s *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (2007) and Scott Saul’s *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making*

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<sup>3</sup> On “racial capitalism,” see Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> On “post-songform jazz,” see Andrew Raffo Dewar, “Searching for the Center of a Sound: Bill Dixon’s *Webern*, the Unaccompanied Solo, and Compositional Ontology in Post-Songform Jazz,” *Jazz Perspectives* 4:1 (2010): 59-87.

*of the Sixties* (2003) the narratives do not extend much beyond the late 1960s. In these cases, there are compelling narratological reasons for scholarly choices regarding temporal scope. Both studies argue for a powerful affective, contingent, and even spiritual, linkage between a genre of black music and the civil rights movement. Saul focuses on the genre of “hard bop,” particularly on Charles Mingus and John Coltrane, but situating them within a generic tendency towards the investiture of modern jazz with the impulses of the blues and the sounds of the black church. He investigates the cultural contexts for hard bop’s notions of freedom and transcendence, finding resonances across mediums—painting, film, photography—that help to distinguish the affective dimensions of hard bop as a genre. Hard bop and the civil rights movement alike articulated a conception of freedom that went against the grain of dominant American intellectual discourse: freedom as a matter of collective discipline and shared destiny, as against the individualist and potentially anarchic freedom to consume that was contrasted with Communist “slavery” in Cold War apologetics. Monson constructs a genre of modern jazz that differs in interesting ways from Saul’s construction of hard bop. Monson’s “freedom sounds” were internationalist in scope of address and inspiration. Her study charts the interanimation of the U.S.-based civil rights movement and African decolonization. This refers both to the programmatic aesthetics—the stated content and musical borrowings and allusions—of modern jazz, its address to and adoption of pan-Africanism and African diasporic (West African, Brazilian, Afro-Caribbean) modalities, and to the institutional and strategic alliances that connected civil rights organizations and modern jazz musicians.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

The intervention of the avant-garde in jazz—the intervention of experimentalist and innovative aesthetics—and the cultural politics that these experiments engendered, and were attuned to, extended well beyond the 1960s, however, and the racial and cultural politics of that era. Both studies reach conclusions somewhere around 1969-72, and while “the long sixties” as a mode of periodization has many justifications, from another perspective the forces and dynamics explored in these studies could be usefully extended.<sup>6</sup> The spiritual impulse that Saul uses to connect John Coltrane to figures generally considered more artistically conservative, such as Horace Silver or Art Blakey—and the combination of the blues, aesthetic invocations of blackness, spiritual questing, and the rhythmic feel of “driving” swing that Saul more generally uses to frame hard bop as a genre—all of this can be found in the recordings of the mid 1970s and even later.

Consider for example saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, whose post-1967 albums can be seen as extending hard bop into new sonic terrain. The Impulse albums *Karma* (1969), *Summun Bukmun Umyun—Deaf Dumb Blind* (1970), *Live at the East* (1971), *Black Unity* (1972), and finally *Love in Us All* (1974) can be seen as marking a path across the aesthetic and critical frontiers between hard bop, “spiritual” jazz, the avant-garde, and fusion. Sanders’s open structures, modal harmonic patterns, use of drones and vamps, and spiritual programmatic themes owe much to Coltrane, and explicit evocations of Coltrane’s legacy are prominent, for example on “Memories of Coltrane” on *Live at the East* or “For John” on *Love in Us All*. Only a bit more obliquely, Sanders interrupts Leon Thomas’s famous vocal on “The Creator Has a Master Plan” (*Karma*) at about eleven minutes in with a saxophonic incantation that marks a shift from a relaxed blues vamp to a more open, stretched out

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<sup>6</sup> Both studies in general, and Monson’s study in its specific focus on decolonization thus conform to the general outline sketched by Fredric Jameson in his essay, “Periodizing the ‘60s,” *Social Text* 9/10 (1984): 178-209. For more on the issue of periodization and the overlapping frames of musical, social and political history, see especially Chapter Five below.

passage that clearly recalls the opening “Acknowledgement” of Coltrane’s 1964 masterpiece *A Love Supreme*. Over the next several minutes the vamp is rebuilt (by bassist Reggie Workman, pianist Lonnie Liston Smith, and Thomas’s percussion and yodeling vocal style) into the relaxed, laconic, almost narcotic groove of the track’s opening, before being accelerated, broken apart, and rebuilt several more times over the piece’s thirty minute length. The vamp remains in flux, subject to collective manipulation that pushes it to the edge of chaos and beyond. This movement inside and outside, the construction, deconstruction, and reproduction of musical assemblages, is emblematic of free jazz after 1965, when passages of “free blowing” coexisted with other structures, either written or collectively negotiated.

If Coltrane and followers like Sanders limn the border between hard bop and free jazz, then the trajectory of another canonical figure, Miles Davis, suggests another extension of hard bop beyond a stylistic boundary. Davis’s mid sixties group was famous for the “controlled freedom” that they enacted in performance, the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structure all stripped of obvious instrumental marking but nevertheless silently guiding each member of the quintet as they improvised together and in dialogue. This kind of ensemblic freedom mixed with discipline and recurrent but elusive order was repeated in an altered musical context in the 1970s, in Miles Davis’s various electric bands between *Bitches Brew* (1969) and *Agharta* (1975).<sup>7</sup> Consider as well more “marginal” or counter-canonical musicians, for example Muhal Richard Abrams, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Alice Coltrane, or Carla Bley. Each of these musicians in the period after 1967 undertook a series of ambitious projects that extended the soundscape and *métier* of experimental jazz: what kinds of narratives, with what distortions of routinized claims about the music’s gendered,

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<sup>7</sup> For “controlled freedom,” which was pianist Herbie Hancock’s phrase, see Saul, *Freedom Is*, 10-11.

racialized, and political identities, would be produced by a periodization and a construction of genre that took into account the panoply of musical projects these names represent. For example, George Lewis's social history of the AACM shows how a narrative of black experimentalism looks radically different when hinged on the multi-generational emergence of the collective's musically diverse composers.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Monson's well-considered and crucial focus on the political and aesthetic resonances between jazz and African (and U.S.) decolonization can be usefully extended beyond 1970: such figures as the U.S. black expatriate Randy Weston, or the South African Abdullah Ibrahim, both pianists, continued to evolve an Africanist jazz aesthetic in the 1970s; indeed, they represent only two examples among many others. In fact, creative and affective solidarity with African freedom movements as both the struggle against colonialism and the focus of the Cold War shifted to southern Africa in the early to mid 1970s was a key thematic thread linking that period both to the 60s and to an earlier period of anti-colonial activism in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, no single study can approach the fantasy of a comprehensive history that takes the whole temporal range of the music, and every relevant context, into account. It is nevertheless of methodological interest to think about the kinds of narratives that can be scaffolded upon specific artistic trajectories, both individual and collective. The concern here

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<sup>8</sup> George Lewis, *Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Also note how George Lipsitz's important essay "Like a Weed in a Vacant Lot: The Black Artists Group in St. Louis," in *Decomposition: Post Disciplinary Performance*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Leigh Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 50-61 reframes the period to emphasize the shift from the contradictions of Great Society urban investment amid deindustrialization to the more troubled environment of "benign neglect" and the relegation of arts investment to large corporations, with consequent devastating effects on the school music programs that had served in the mid twentieth century as the basic infrastructure for jazz modernism.

<sup>9</sup> On the later moment, see below Chapters Four and Five. For overviews of political conflicts, decolonization, and Cold War dynamics (including proxy wars) in southern Africa during the 1970s, see Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Rivers, 2004); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For anti-colonial black American and African intellectuals and artists in the 1930s and 40s see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

goes beyond the problem of canonization in jazz, about which so much has been written. It is not only that the inclusion of counter-canonical musicians, including and especially female musicians given the notions of masculine heroism that have historically shaped the jazz canon, can help to disrupt the sedimentation of the “great man” narrative of jazz as a linear succession of styles. Beyond that, consider what is lost when we remain restricted by conventional periodizations of the sixties. To establish 1968 as a symbolic break is also implicitly to render the creative projects of the subsequent period as so many epigones. Indeed, a feeling of epigonality, of belatedness or redundancy—or, alternatively a sense of fated expectation, an awaiting upon the arrival of neoclassical aesthetics—often haunt the narratives of post-1960s jazz.<sup>10</sup>

The musical term “caesura” can be adopted as an apt metaphor for how existing periodizations determine the narrative shape linking the avant-garde of the 1960s to the conservative resurgence of the 1990s. In music, a caesura is a rest of indeterminate length, a suspension of musical time that can only be rescinded by an extramusical gesture, either the dictatorial nod of the conductor or in more participatory musics some unanimously agreed upon signal. Although jazz cultural studies, since its inception as an academic interdiscipline, which occurred around the same time as the ascendancy of the neoclassical ideology to cultural hegemony outside the academy, has always officially renounced a progressive, linear “modernist” narrative linking temporally and stylistically distinct genres under the master category of jazz, the period immediately prior to its academic emergence has proved troubling precisely because of the difficulty of assembling a coherent image of a 1970s and 1980s cultural dominant amid the debates, both within and without the academy, about what

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<sup>10</sup> This tendency is observable even in such a seminal study as Ingrid Monson’s. See the last pages, where the problem of populism in 1960s jazz slides quickly into 1990s neoclassicism with the 2005 tragedy of Katrina as a poignant coda. See Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 319-321.

constituted the inheritance of a “jazz tradition.”<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of inside the caesura, where historical time continued apace even as musical temporalities grew ever more resistant to narrative closure, a polymorphic and transgeneric experimentation had in fact become the cultural dominant.

Turning to two other key works in recent jazz historiography can help to clarify how aporia or caesura of 1970s experimentalism has been bracketed out of historical narratives.

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<sup>11</sup> A key event marking the emergence of jazz studies as an academic field was the Wisconsin conference, later collected into a book edited by David Baker, *New Perspectives on Jazz: Report on a National Conference Held at Wingspread, Racine, Wisconsin, September 8-10, 1986* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990). Other important early texts include the essays in *Black American Literature Forum* 25, No.3 (Fall 1991). For the notion of dominant, emergent, and residual cultural forces, see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-27. One way of thinking about the repertory-preservationist project of neoclassicism is as a residual cultural formation that through intense capitalization combined with an explicitly conservative politics of nostalgia attempts to claim a hegemonic status. This project would thus ideologically emplot experimentalism, under the sign of the “avant-garde,” as a permanently emergent and marginal addendum to the grand continuity of jazz tradition. Thus in the “jazz world” one often encounters ironies such as the one I witnessed at the 2009 Chicago Jazz Festival, where The Trio of Muhal Richard Abrams, Roscoe Mitchell, and George Lewis were introduced as musicians on the “very cutting edge of the newest kinds of jazz.” No doubt the music was challenging, but who can make a claim to “tradition” if not these leaders of the AACM, who had been playing together off and on for well over thirty years? These kinds of habitual framings of the “new music” tend to reproduce an expectation that the music is inaccessible, obscure, alien, overly intellectual, or simply too weird to open one’s ears to. Each new exposure to sonic difference, when framed in this way, ends up potentially reinforcing the music’s “outside” stigma: outside the tradition, outside the vernacular inheritance, and outside the pleasures and joys of listening. This is not ultimately to endorse the proposition, sometimes made during the 1960s, that the “inaccessibility” of free jazz was simply a matter of uneven capitalist promotion (for example, Archie Shepp’s famous castigation of jazz promoters and record executives to the effect that if he were promoted as heavily as rock acts he would draw similar audiences). Sitting behind me at the festival was a group of listeners who were looking forward to hearing Muhal Richard Abrams, who they knew as an important educator in the community who had “helped out” a young musician in the family. But as the performance got underway, their commentary gradually shifted into derision: “When’s the music going to start? Play something!” As my neighbors became increasingly distressed, and mockingly amused, an ambulance passed by on Michigan Avenue: the sirens looped through Lewis’s laptop and then were immediately and expertly mimicked by Mitchell and elegantly incorporated into the sonic palette of the improvisation. It is anecdotal (as is, ultimately, the vast majority of the evidence deployed in the debates about the “jazz audience” since the 1960s) but this experience spoke volumes to me: the music *is* often distinctly challenging, it does require an appreciation of technical and affective subtlety, and in fact a mode of attentive listening that cuts against certain modalities of enjoyment and pleasure, while giving access to others. But to leave it at that, without interrogating the reproduction of listening expectations, is to submit to a reified populism that fails to account for the forces that continually work to structure enjoyment itself as immediate, accessible, and available for purchase, liberated because open to consumer choice. There is a certain strain in jazz writing, epidemic in jazz criticism, but occasionally audible in academic texts as well (for example, in Iain Anderson’s generally excellent study referenced below) that would read anecdotal evidence like mine as confirmation of an incompatibility of certain kinds of musical experimentation with the tastes of (mass, ordinary, vernacular?) “black audiences.” It is this projection of populist desire onto a univocal black particularity, which undermines a hearing both of the variations and discord within the vernacular and the universal dimensions of musical singularity, that must in my view continue to be conscientiously resisted. Instead we might renew older modes of inquiry into the material and ideological reproduction of the “popular” as set of habitual listening practices and social conventions that is repeatedly (re)aligned with the market demands of the mass production of culture.

Iain Anderson's *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (2007) is a detailed historical analysis of free improviser's engagements with the institutions and discourses of jazz and the American arts more generally. Anderson carefully traces the critical controversies that erupted in the wake of the sudden notoriety of "free jazz" at the beginning of the 1960s. His balanced account presents the views of musicians, critics, and reader responses to the jazz press, as well as the wider discourses of American letters and arts funding. The book compares the problem of jazz's, and especially free improvisation's, declining audience and popularity to black cultural nationalist efforts to connect radical art and mass black audiences, seeing black nationalist jazz musicians and critics (especially Amiri Baraka, A. B. Spellman, and Larry Neal) as precursors to Black Power era radicals. He is particularly sensitive to the frustrations and impasses produced by the difficulty of making experimental art and aesthetic philosophies resonate with working class black audiences, who were variously constructed by cultural nationalists as woefully behind the times or at a cutting edge of soulful spiritual unity that intellectuals were precluded from by their obsession with jazz. In turning to the seventies, however, Anderson shifts interpretive registers, arguing that as jazz's status in the marketplace withered, musicians sought alternative sources of funding from universities, NGOs, corporate foundations, and the state. He provides an acute analysis of the "ingenuity" of musicians' use of protest (especially groups led by Archie Shepp and Rahsaan Roland Kirk) along with more traditional appeals, to secure funding for their art. But whereas the book is strikingly attentive to the aesthetic strategies of the early 1960s New York avant-garde as evidenced in recordings, the music drops out of the second half of the book.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Iain Anderson, *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 153-181. For contrast see Lewis, *Power Stronger than itself*, who argues that despite the dramatic increase of arts funding for jazz in the 1970s (up from virtually nothing in previous years), the funding



John Gennari's masterful survey of the development of U.S.-based jazz criticism brackets the 1970s in a different way. After a brilliant chapter analyzing the conflicts among jazz critics during the 1960s over race, genre, black nationalism, and the avant-garde, including an excellent discussion of gender and the emotional and political sources for critics' varying anxieties about their own masculinities, Gennari turns not to an extension of these themes into the 1970s but instead to an extended analysis of Ross Russell's *Bird Lives* (1973). Indeed, Gennari again brilliantly excavates the ideological investments in gendered and racialized notions of improvisation, spontaneity, and sexual, culinary, and narcotic excess in Russell's romantic account of Charlie Parker's life, suggesting that the ongoing debates about Parker's genius, creativity, masculinity, and relationship to black populism, European music, and other cultural strands serve as a kind of palimpsest for the competing constructions of the jazz inheritance as a whole. It is not that, in his case, Gennari ignores the music of the 1970s. On the contrary, his accounts of the critical writing of Gary Giddins, Greg Tate, and Stanley Crouch, among others, in the 1980s emphasizes their varying commitments to differing historical constructions and evaluations of 1970s experimentation. But that era itself, and any more detailed account of how critics assessed the music at the time, is absent. Gennari glosses the caesura of the 1970s like this: "The widespread popular image of [Wynton] Marsalis as jazz's savior hinges on a particular reading of what happened to jazz in the early 1970s. This was a time when the major record companies chased

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decisions were still structured by a racialized genre system that profoundly disadvantaged black musicians, who regardless of style were categorized in terms of jazz, and therefore had access to a profoundly unequal share of funding in comparison with classical and academic composition which were both coded white and better funded. Moreover, Anderson summarizes, "name musicians from the 1960s who had not benefited from teaching positions, artist-in-residence opportunities, or visiting lectureships represented the exception rather than the rule." However, he later reports that by the late 1970s, only fifteen percent of the 500 or so higher education institutions that offered jazz courses also had a degree program; and that in 1980 "only 37 percent of jazz programs—which study a field dominated by African Americans—employed even one black instructor (full- or part-time)." Anderson, *This Is Our Music*, 157, 181. Thus the question of what narrative is dominant remains open: the slim and often transient opportunities carved out by activist musicians within an academy rocked by black student protest and curricular transformation, or the mostly white-dominated institutionalization of higher education programs in jazz.

crossover gold with electronic fusion, while many of the music's key figures expatriated to Europe, sought sanctuary in university teaching positions, or hustled gigs in studios and pit bands."<sup>13</sup> The 1970s were an era of the death of key figures, the institutionalization of jazz education and repertory, and implicitly aesthetic stagnation: the impression the analysis makes is that there were no significant recordings or musical innovations at all in the 1970s, which is not empirically accurate. Pace Gennari, who is otherwise so attentive to the dialogic relationship between and among critics and the music, this account of the 1970s is history as alibi. If musicians were crossing over, or migrating beyond the borders of the United States, or making music with the added security of teaching jobs, or just holding out in the margins, their musical exploration nevertheless continued. The 1970s jazz press was animated by fierce and probing debates about the value and meaning of generic boundaries and market pressures (fusion, crossing over), and if U.S. critics sometimes failed to witness the increasingly transnational dimensions of post-songform jazz performance, the international jazz press did not. Figures like Anthony Braxton and others initiated an intense intellectual effort to dismantle the categories of jazz journalism and replace them with complex conceptual architectonics of world musical creativity.<sup>14</sup> These challenges to the existing regimes of jazz criticism were in effect invitations to critics to develop new modalities for writing about creative music, or hold their tongues. How critics responded to these challenges, even when they ignored them, is worth knowing: the critical stances of the 1980s and 1990s have a history.

We can begin to see the shape of the 1970s caesura in this historiographical archiving of silences. The bracketing of the 1970s in jazz narratives accomplishes a distinct ideological-

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<sup>13</sup> John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 342.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Braxton, *Tri-Axium Writings*, Vol. 1-3 (Lebenon, NH: Frog Creek Music, 1985). Braxton's philosophy was initially composed during a hiatus he took from the music scene in the early 1970s. See also Graham Lock, *Forces in Motion: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton*, (New York: Da Capo, 1985).

political suturing. There is, articulated in a variety of permutations, a temporal hiccup between the 1960s and the 1980s (specifically the late 80s – early 90s moment of the end of the Cold War). This temporal displacement stitches together what were in fact two historically distinct and conflicting articulations of black cultural nationalism. The moment of black literary nationalism’s appeal to free jazz as the music of blackness (Baraka, Spellman, Neal), and of free improvisers asserting a radical aesthetic program with varying degrees of solidarity with the emerging Black Arts paradigm, is made to bleed into and juxtapose a later expression of cultural nationalism (Crouch, Marsalis), this time premised on the vitality and immutability of tradition, and of the essential, even exceptional Americanness of black culture. Both powerful intellectual articulations have emphasized the masculinity of their cultural vision in contrast to the effeminacy or queerness of their putative opponents, and both cultural nationalisms engaged in intense debates with a variety of interlocutors. There is a discernible libidinal or psychic investment, I will argue later, in the jazz-historiographical construction of cultural nationalism’s interlocutors as primarily white liberals and its proponents as especially representative of blackness or the black radical tradition as such. In this sense, jazz discourse has been, and to some extent remains, a crucial venue for the formation of one particular construction of the black-white binary model of U.S. “race relations.” This marriage of white men and black men in a multigenerational narrative of misunderstanding and hurt feelings, when elevated to the status of the American narrative of race as such, leaves a lot out (to put it mildly). An ongoing but troubled commitment to this special relationship may help to explain the obstinately deaf, dumb, and blind (to paraphrase Pharoah Sanders) perspective that jazz discourse often brings to bear when it comes to issues of class, gender, sexual, national, ethnic, and stylistic diversity. The effort of this dissertation to explore the caesura of the 1970s, separating the narrative

bookends of the embrace of white liberalism and black cultural nationalism, may contribute somewhat to the collective scholarly and creative project of exploding the (gendered, heteronormative, and raciological) black-white binary.

In addition, wider ongoing cultural contests over the meaning of the 1960s have had a discernible influence on the persistence of disputes over the contours and limits of jazz as a genre. Debates about the jazz inheritance evoke the contested terrain of racial authenticity and political authority. That jazz is a global and multiethnic form in the post-1960s era is undeniable, and yet the music's deep historical ties to black American and African diasporic identity provoke in some commentators deep and intractable anxieties about questions of cultural ownership and racial essentialism. I think this goes some way towards explaining the unusual rhetoric that jazz historians sometimes use when discussing black cultural nationalism. Whereas for U.S. and African diasporic cultural and intellectual historians more generally, cultural nationalism is one strand of thought among many historical threads, in jazz discourse since the 1960s cultural nationalism can sometimes stand in for black protest as such. Reading many of the commentaries on jazz in the 60s, one would gain little insight into the fact that even at the height of the Black Power movement cultural nationalism was fiercely debated and contrasted with a more class-oriented revolutionary nationalism; or that cultural nationalism itself was internally conflicted over a variety of issues, from the best relationship to adopt towards African culture (ancient to modern) and anticolonial freedom movements, to the value of separatism, to the role of force and violence in securing black autonomy and black unity. For some less careful jazz writers, a few musicians and intellectuals stand in the narrative of the 1960s as synecdoches for both black nationalism and the "New Thing." For example, Archie Shepp, Cecil Taylor, and Amiri Baraka are sometimes presented as having seamlessly unanimous political views (which they did not), or

as representing both the aesthetic strategies and politics of other members of their generational or stylistic cohort (which they did not). Neither the contentious role Baraka himself played in Newark grassroots politics and in the National Black Convention movement, nor the implications for his musical views of his 1970s adoption of a revolutionary socialist (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) ideology are substantially illuminated by jazz discourse.<sup>15</sup>

The unusually central role attributed to cultural nationalism suggests that the narratological structure of jazz historiography is ideologically overdetermined. In its original Freudian articulation, overdetermination referred to the multiple sources of dream images or symptoms; however, overdetermination should not be simply reduced to multiple causation.<sup>16</sup> Rather, in the Freudian theory overdetermination indicates both overlapping sources for the dream/symptom and an analytic-hermeneutic method of interpretation that does not isolate empirical causes, but instead listens for the form they take in the unconscious. Indeed, as Slavoj Žižek writes, analysis of the dream rebus takes into account

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<sup>15</sup> On Baraka's politics, see Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). For a contrasting view of Baraka's thought and politics see Jerry Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). There are exceptions to this characterization of jazz writing... One significant one is Fred Ho's discussion of Baraka in his book of essays *Wicked Theory, Naked Practice: A Fred Ho Reader* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> As it often is in Anglo-American analytic philosophy, where overdetermination means the combination of more than one distinct cause, where each cause is sufficient. That is not the notion I mean to suggest here, but rather the post-Althusserian use of overdetermination to describe the conflictual causation of social reality. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1969). It is worth briefly recalling that for Althusser, the borrowing of the term from Freud was meant to account for historical fluidity and discontinuity, to explain how certain social ruptures could occur without fundamentally disturbing the structure of dominance sustained by the economic domain. It is interesting to think of the event of free jazz as one such rupture, where a variety of social forces (especially including the mobilized political subjectivities of a cohort of musicians) coalesced to challenge and in many cases overturn a wide variety of established intellectual structures, ideologies, and material practices, even as the overall structure of dominance was left undisturbed. The ultimate "test" of the Althusserian program, however, were the events of 1968 themselves, and the key methodological-political question is whether those events vindicate Althusserian "pessimism" about the gap between political action and infrastructural determination, or whether the denunciation of the events as the effect of bourgeois manipulation heralded the adoption of Althusserian concepts as weapons of domination. For a compelling statement of the latter view, see Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Continuum, 2011). For more on 1968 see below. Rancière's maxim, "there is no theory of subversion that cannot also serve the cause of oppression," is useful to keep in mind when evaluating the political claims made on behalf of free improvisation, especially those deployed in the present work.

the triangulation of “the *manifest dream-text*, the *latent dream-content* or thought and the unconscious desire articulated in a dream. This desire attaches itself to the dream, it intercalates itself in the interspace between the latent thought and the manifest text; it is therefore not ‘more concealed, deeper’ in relation to the latent thought, it is decidedly more ‘on the surface,’ consisting entirely of the signifier’s mechanisms, of the treatment to which the latent thought is submitted.”<sup>17</sup> In psychoanalytic interpretation, the hermeneutic investigation of the dream image does not simply reveal the latent content as the “secret” of the dream, but uncovers (i.e. speaks out loud) the latent content in order to discover and dispel the desire/symptom that is manifested in the very form of the dream. By turning to the language of dreams, desire, and unconscious symptoms, I do not intend to equate historical narratives with dream images, but I do want to suggest that, especially at the largest scale, historiographical periodization is *symptomatic*. Zizek’s commentary extends Jacques Lacan’s assertion that “Marx invented the symptom,” noting the parallel structures of Freudian analysis and Marxist ideology critique: both proceed by hermeneutically uncovering a latent content, then actively setting aside that content in an effort to pinpoint the formal heterogeneity, “a certain fissure, an asymmetry, a certain ‘pathological’ imbalance which belies the universalism of the bourgeois ‘rights and duties,’” the symptomatic breakdown “heterogeneous to a given ideological field and at the same time necessary for that field to achieve its closure, its accomplished form.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 21. This is why, in Zizek’s account of ideology, and particularly commodity fetishism, ideology cannot be reduced to “false consciousness.” Ideology is not a mistaken view of reality, but that very reality itself. Thus, in the example that recurs repeatedly in his work, in commodity fetishism it is not that we falsely believe that relations among men are really relations among things. In fact we know very well that commodities are produced in a certain social context, that money is just an ordinary object elevated arbitrarily, or that in digital financial calculations money is ultimately a purely symbolic entity, a string of code that only has meaning because of social convention. But despite this belief we *continue to act* as if money were magical, and as if commodities existed in a social relationship, and it is our actions that create social reality *itself* as ideology.

Returning to the topic of overdetermination, then, the important thing to note about jazz historiography is not (only) the “latent content” of homosexual interracial sexual desire fueling the emotional experiences of anxiety, frustration, possessiveness, love, friendship, and intimacy that so consistently animate jazz criticism; like the latent dream content, these feelings and thoughts are hardly unconscious. Rather, jazz narratives are overdetermined by the multiple forces combining to make a temporal hinge, and an aporia, of the period 1968-1974. Consider the following: the cultural dominance of the civil rights-to-black power narrative as both an emotionally triumphant story of national celebration, and its simultaneous ideological use as a declension narrative, where black extremism forfeited the good will of white Americans; the celebratory nostalgia for the 60s as a period of cultural awakening, the contrasting conservative demonization of the same period as the source of social instability; academic and activist readings of the early 1970s as a period of alliances across barriers of difference, or alternatively as the period when radical and left-liberal hopes of profound social transformation collapsed. It is the undecidability of the meaning of the events of 1968 that returns—in jazz, in the form of black cultural nationalism.<sup>19</sup>

The transnational turn in U.S. historiography and American Studies has disturbed the exceptionalism and blindness to empire that have shaped state and media narratives of the 1960s, as well as a generation of historical research that has extended temporally and conceptually our understanding of the modern black freedom movement. Yet I also want to point to an affectivity that transcends the old provincial concerns of Americanist

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<sup>19</sup> The problem is obviously not confined to the psyche of that much-maligned subject, the white (male) liberal, but consider briefly how the tendentious “victory” of Crouchian black cultural nationalism as triumphant Americanism in the 1990s might have deeply satisfied, disturbed, and stimulated the unconscious desires of white liberals who had experienced the jazz debates of the 1960s. The angry misconceptions with which liberal jazz critics and fans often reacted to assertions of black cultural ownership and creative autonomy were obviously accompanied by deep desires for recognition of their own deeply felt but inarticulately voiced feelings of sympathy and allegiance to black cultural expression. With Crouch they can have the satisfaction of finally seeing the cultural victory of a cantankerous African American opponent while continuing to sate at the table of exceptionalist American pluralism and shared cultural heritage.

historiography, a shared affective experience that is transnational in scope if widely varied in content, and that is the traumatic experience of historical rupture itself, the sense of a rupture that disrupted the (appearance of a) “normal” progression of temporality. The events of 1968 were the first “global revolts” to be shared as a planetary experience of images, symbols, slogans, and sounds, and while I think it is right to be cautious in declaring a universality especially given the profoundly uneven patterns of social distribution that characterize the world then and now, I remain sympathetic to Paul Gilroy’s invocation of a “planetary humanism” whose articulations can be traced to this period (and to Frantz Fanon, Bob Marley, and many other figures who celebrated a proleptic, unrealized, perhaps oneiric “emancipation to come”).<sup>20</sup> Again, while the shared experience of 1968 was “planetary” in the sense of spanning the globe, the actual experience of cultural and incipient political rebellion was uneven and largely confined to the major capitalist and state socialist countries. Nevertheless, one feature of planetary humanism may turn out to be a new relationship to temporal experience, a shattering or relaxing of temporality that has deep and polyvalent sources but is not unrelated to new cross-border experiences of musical time. The extraordinary memoir by Brazilian *tropicalismo* musician Caetano Veloso, for example, illustrates a generational experience of global-trotting emancipatory dreaming distorting an experience of the unfolding of time. Here is a writer explicitly concerned to “escape” the American century, yet as the memoir circles back around, again and again, to the years of the late 1960s, an affective experience of the text begins to take shape in the form of the narrative’s own recursivity. For poet and critic Stephen Paul Miller, in the 1970s the temporal succession of events began to fold together in patterns suggestive of Ashberry’s

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<sup>20</sup> For an account of “global revolts” see Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). For “planetary humanism” see Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).



“convex mirror.” The 1970s, he argues, experienced “rippling epistemes” where the pace of historical change began to speed up or slow down, jump forward and stagnate in unpredictable temporal rhythms. Miller proposes a strategy of “microperiodization” to account for this new experience of time, which I have adopted to some extent in Part Two of this dissertation.<sup>21</sup>

So although there are many challenges to constructing a narrative of experimental music in the 1970s, this is not to say that there have not been scholars who have done important and seminal work on the period. In this section I will give a brief overview of some work on jazz in the 1970s. If periodization is the problematic that illuminates the historiography of jazz writing that stops at or leaves out the 1970s, the problematic of work that is explicitly dedicated to that period is genre. For lovers of the music of this period, a shift to the question of genre will not seem counterintuitive here. Indeed musical genre was a crucial terrain where affective conflicts over how to interpret, respond to, reject or remain faithful to the events of the 1960s were waged. If 1968 introduced a temporal break that frustrates periodization, the 1970s witnessed a fracturing of notions of genre that had previously been thought stable. In fact, genre categories, especially in music, have become so fluid in the wake of the 70s that it is an open question to what extent cultural studies that use genre as a point of departure are still conceptually coherent. In this dissertation, I have attempted to recursively problematize the genre categories that structured my own research by, for instance exploring a thematic of the “necrology” of artistic/commercial genres

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<sup>21</sup> Caetano Veloso, *Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil*, trans. Isabel de Sena (New York: Knopf, 2002). Stephen Paul Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

(Chapter Two) and playing with various expansive ways to think the position of “jazz” as a symbol of unresolved mid-20<sup>th</sup> century antagonisms.

In thinking about the trajectory of “jazz” into the 1970s, a good place to start is with the new genre category of fusion. Fusion is important not only as a temporarily profitable marketing category in the early to mid 1970s, but also as a provocation to think the limits of and interactions among genres in various states of disintegration or flux. In particular, fusion implicitly raises the question of whether musicians working “between” genres are producing a dialectical synthesis of opposed musical logics, assembling a bricolage of disparate musical elements, or innovating new sonic regularities through a combinatory process. Fusion is often thought of as “merger” or synthesis of jazz and rock, each in turn imagined as a distinct body of musical ideas, when in fact fusion better describes a variety of musical “in-betweens” that appeared in the 70s. If the generic limits of jazz were under dispute, rock was by the early 1970s no less an anxious category: a prominent theme of rock criticism in those years was the exhaustion of the framework, or spirit, of rock and various attempts (by corporations, by “progressive” musicians interested in developing the music’s harmonic and instrumental languages, and ultimately by the DIY rebels of punk) to revive it. For jazz, fusion not only indicated a rapprochement with rock but also with black populism, gospel, soul, and funk—and “free jazz” was by no means cloistered from genre fluidity, as is illustrated particularly compellingly by Ornette Coleman and other “harmolodic” technicians of “free funk” in the late 1970s (see Chapter Six). The triangular opposition of tradition (modern) vs. fusion (commercial) vs. free (avant-garde) that often shapes popular understandings of jazz in this period does not do justice to the blurring of categorical boundaries. Finally, although fusion is certainly a crucial problematic, insofar as it is

sometimes presented as *the* story of jazz in the 1970s it serves as an unwitting accomplice of the erasure of black experimentalism in the 1970s.

Kevin Fellezs's lively and penetrating new study of fusion, *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion* (2011) is helpful in clarifying what is at stake in generic and subgeneric stylistic naming practices. His study is interesting in its explicit opposition to dialectical models of generic synthesis. As he comments, rather than synthesizing rock and jazz,

[T]hese “ain’t jazz, ain’t rock” musicians troubled genres by *staying between them*, creating an informal, even feral, set of musical practices and aesthetics. By doing so, they articulated a way of being both inside and outside of genre categories, disturbing assumptions about musical traditions, including the ways in which membership (legitimacy), mastery (authority), and musical value are ordered. Most important, they transformed the relationship of individual traditions to musical traditions.... Theirs was not a program of synthesis but an aesthetic of mixture, a construction in the liminal spaces between genres.<sup>22</sup>

The unnamed experimentalism that often went by “fusion,” Fellezs argues, constituted a “broken middle” between established categories. The perspective that Fellezs develops is important because it avoids appending fusion to another progressive narrative of jazz styles. In contrast to post-1980s jeremiads by some conservative intellectuals, fusion is not a “wrong turn” taken *by* “jazz” in the 1970s but a multiracial fugitive musical practice that attempted to disregard existing genre limitations.

In Eric Porter's seminal study of jazz musicians as writers and public intellectuals, the 1970s appear as a period of creative ferment and political tumult. Focusing more on “avant-garde” acoustic musicians than the plugged-in fusionists of Fellezs's study, Porter intricately charts the rise and disintegration of the Collective Black Artists, a New York-based group of musicians who militated for the alignment of creative music and radical

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<sup>22</sup> Kevin Fellezs, *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 5, 8.

politics. He also discusses the written work of Yusef Lateef, Marion Brown, Wadada Leo Smith, and Anthony Braxton, who each wrote detailed treatises on the relationships among creative music making and other spiritual, technical, and cultural “affinity dynamics,” as well as the material “reality dynamics” of global culture, to use Braxton’s terminology. In each case, Porter makes compelling connections between the intellectual theories and key sound recordings of the period: for example, *Yusef Lateef’s Detroit* (1969), Brown’s *Afternoon of a Georgia Faun* (1970) and *Sweet Earth Flying* (1975), Smith’s self-produced Kabell records, and Braxton’s important series of recordings for Arista in the mid-70s.

Ronald Radano’s study of Anthony Braxton analyzes those same recordings on Arista as emblematic of a complex series of negotiations among musicians, executives, and critics that attempted to produce “Black Experimentalism as Spectacle.” Radano shows how Braxton was positioned to take up a media role as a new genius figure for the 70s who would guarantee both the inheritance of jazz tradition and the continuation of a progressive, modernist momentum in jazz’s narrative trajectory. The jazz media’s project of recreating the jazz spectacle around another “great man” foundered on the conflict between inherited ideologies of jazz as primitive, economic restrictions imposed by the record company, and Braxton’s own aesthetic ambitions, which ran counter to the moderating expectations of both critical and commercial discourse.

Radano shows up the limitations of the “great man” heroic trajectories in constructing a linear narrative of jazz progress, but his work, along with other key studies like Graham Lock’s *Blutopia* and John Szwed’s *Space is the Place*, in their biographical focus, nevertheless do not fully depart from modes of narration depending on the centrality of one or several canonical figures. The canon is almost inevitably reproduced as it is revised and challenged—any selection of musicians will simultaneously suggest and resist the impulse to

name heroic or genius figures. Such focused studies are extremely valuable but nonetheless cannot fully account for the collective richness and diversity of the archive of post-1960 experimentalism. For example, the interventions of key figures such as Braxton and Ornette Coleman were profoundly collective in nature—Braxton’s compositional work, leaving aside for the moment solo performances, was always situated in a musical collectivity (key collaborators from 1968-1974 include Muhal Richard Abrams, Wadada Leo Smith, Leroy Jenkins, Dave Holland, Sam Rivers, Barry Altschul, and Chick Corea, among many others). The irruptive event of Ornette Coleman’s music from the mid 1950s into the 1980s is inconceivable without the collaboration of Charlie Haden, Don Cherry, and Ed Blackwell, initially, as well as lesser known innovators like the Los Angeles-based John Carter and Bobby Bradford, and dozens or hundreds of musicians over the next several decades (e.g. by the late 1970s Jamaladeen Tacuma, James Blood Ulmer, Ronald Shannon Jackson, and others). The studies of Braxton or Sun Ra, by Radano, Szwed, and Lock of course recognize the collective and participatory nature of the music’s creative interventions. But the methodological tensions involved in narrating collective musical creation remain.<sup>23</sup> Neither is

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<sup>23</sup> Jed Rasula points to the “unresolvable heterogeneity of cultural practices” as a limit to the kind of historiography sought here. Jazz, he argues, is not composed of “collectively stipulated projects; the transfiguration of music through time is not the progressive realization of a goal. It is only retrospectively that a purposive momentum is evident, and that is of course what is designated as its history. However, ‘purposive momentum’ may be realized *as music* as readily as history, which is why I am inclined to think of jazz *as history* inscribed in another register,” Jed Rasula, “Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History” in *Jazz Among the Discourses* ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 134-162, 148-149. While I strongly agree with Rasula’s conclusion that jazz qua records *is already* history (see below), I cannot fully assent to the alignment of “projects” with “progressive ... goals,” nor with the foreclosure of collectivity consistent with the idea that jazz is fundamentally an individual mode of expression. Indeed, Rasula discusses Ornette Coleman on the following page as “an ‘original,’ not a prototype.... Coleman, like every other jazz notable, solved an individual rather than a collective problem, which was *how to play*.” Admittedly the flurry of name-dropping in the previous few sentences could be seen as the historian grasping for the armor of knowledgeable authority; however, I want to insist on a sense that creative projects are not necessarily progressive (linear) nor only inscribed retrospectively by historical discourse. An aesthetic project can be composed of as an open-ended set of political or textual commitments, a musically articulated sonic palette, or a grouping of thematic associations or historical references, for example in Air’s recurring musical citations of Scott Joplin. Or, as in the case of the AACM, a collective project can consist of empowering individual members to pursue their own compositional and stylistic sound. While it is true that Coleman’s style did not inspire imitation as such, still I have to insist that for it to be performed and phonographically inscribed it was

the problem fully resolved by focusing on cohorts, generations, or locations: musical itinerancy, in terms of style and ensemble in addition to geography, frustrates the historiographical desire to create bounded narratives.

In the following chapters, I have tried to allow creative trajectories to cut across the narrative at oblique angles, following certain musical, material, social, and planetary movements until arriving at yet another crossroads.<sup>24</sup> However, this dissertation in no way proposes a “solution” to the various intractable problems of jazz narratology so evident in the 1960s and 1970s historiography. Indeed, readers who have their own attachments and allegiances to different strands of the sonic archive under consideration here may find my narrative and musical choices to be partial or even abrasively idiosyncratic. I make no claims to have written a comprehensive overview of black experimentalism after 1960, if such a thing is anyway conceivable. Rather I have tried to emphasize diverse creative itineraries, following musicians as well as musical ideas, allusions, and references, across the borders of genre, style, record label, instrumentality, and ultimately across the borders of nation and self-enclosed identity. For after all, the musical archive, itself composed of material objects, was created within a material social experience comprising migration, travel, and the spiritual “astral” traveling, mediated by recorded commodities, of trans-diasporic musical

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necessary that it be *learned* and responded to by his collaborators: thus the problem to be solved is ultimately *how to play together*. That each of Coleman’s long-term musical allies had a meticulously individual style (in Rasula’s wonderful phrasing, a “recognizably distinctive personal movement”) does not contradict the communion of their work together. Ibid, 151. For a discussion of Charlie Haden in particular as a student of Coleman, see Chapter Six.

<sup>24</sup> A recent focus of studies of black experimental music has been the community organizations of musician-composers and other artists that were established in the 1960s. While I do not treat them fully in this historiographical survey, they have been perhaps the most helpful resource in my conceptualization of the relationship of musical experimentalism to community-based and discursive African American cultural politics, for the collective social historiography they inscribe overturns many assumptions of previous jazz writing. The social history work of Steven Isoardi on UGMAA in Los Angeles, Benjamin Looker and George Lipsitz on BAG in St. Louis, and especially George Lewis’s magisterial study of the AACM in Chicago (and Paris, and New York, etc.) have truly revolutionized the field. Without diminishing the transformative contribution of these social histories, I wish only to note here that organizational histories do not necessarily completely solve the narrative decisions of how to account for the artistic and planetary mobility characteristic of improvising musicians after 1960.

connectivity. Tracing the conceptual routing of experimental identity takes the narrative across a number of distinct aesthetic and political stances, and a collective, if inevitably selective, account of 1970s musicianship can help us to understand the ways in which even explorations of cultural “roots” are routed through material and spiritual lines of flight.

### Silence and the Sonic Archive

As we have seen, since the 1990s there have been a recurring series of heated debates around the inheritance of jazz idiomatic language. The categories used in these debates—tradition, fusion, commercialism, the avant-garde—are often deployed statically and ahistorically. Used in such a way, these categories often end up reifying the generic boundaries and conceptual categories of difference rather than acknowledging the far more fluid soundscape of musical activity as recorded in the available sonic archive.

The production of the silences in the experimental archive mirror and are shaped by the marginal location of their production in the time the objects were recorded. In his important work, *Silencing the Past*, historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly.”<sup>25</sup> Historical narratives incorporate silences because the process by which traces of the past survive into the present cannot be isolated from power. Power, and for formal history writing particularly the power of the state to preserve records, but also the disordered, haphazard and contingent power of the capitalist marketplace, affects both which traces of the past are preserved as well as how

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press: 1995), 27.

they are valued, ordered, arranged, and interpreted. There is therefore a profoundly material basis for the silences that haunt historical narratives.

In the case of recorded music, thinking through the political construction of silence is complicated even further for a variety of reasons. In *Noise: the Political Economy of Music* (1977; 1985) the French economist Jacques Attali proposed a speculative history of music as the “channelization” of ritual sacrifice/murder. Attali argues that noise is violence, and threatens community; therefore the boundary between noise and music is precisely isomorphic with the boundaries of the political community, and music, as the sublimation of noise and ritual murder, reflects society as in a mirror. Because music encodes and orders sound/noise into information, it also occupies a privileged, anticipatory temporality with regard to political change: music processes information and encodes the changing boundaries of society much faster than political institutions, so it works also as prophecy of coming revolutions in the material conditions of social life. Music is a mirror held up to a society that has not yet come into being. The scandal of Attali’s argument was to reverse, in a Marxist register, the usual order of temporality that obtained in Marxist doctrine between base and superstructure: Attali argued that changes in the musical superstructure predicted changes in the base.<sup>26</sup>

This dynamic was, however, complicated by later political economic modes of musical production. The musical economy that Attali calls “Repeating” was inaugurated by the invention of phonograph recording in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; as he makes clear, the use of recording technology to mass produce musical commodities was not intended by the technology’s inventors nor by the rulers of the state or monopoly capitalism. The resulting explosive transformations in humanity’s relationship to music and listening were both

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<sup>26</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).



unintentional and cataclysmic. Before, however, music could be inscribed in recordings, mass produced, and stockpiled, sound itself was culturally circumscribed as a discrete scientific and discursive object. Jonathan Sterne describes how cultural shifts in thinking about sound and hearing anticipated the technological innovations of sound reproduction.

He writes,

As there was an Enlightenment, so too was there an “Ensoniment.” A series of conjunctures among ideas, institutions, and practices rendered the world audible in new ways and valorized new constructs of hearing and listening. Between about 1750 and 1925, sound itself became an object and a domain of thought and practice, where it had previously been conceptualized in terms of particular idealized instances like voice or music. Hearing was reconstructed as a physiological process, a kind of receptivity and capacity based on physics, biology, and mechanics. Through techniques of listening, people harnessed, modified, and shaped their powers of auditory perception in the service of rationality. In the modern age, sound and hearing were reconceptualized, objectified, imitated, transformed, reproduced, commodified, mass-produced, and industrialized.<sup>27</sup>

In Attali’s view the trajectory inaugurated by sound reproduction was the ultimate privatization of musical experience and therefore a catastrophic and pervasive silencing of the political-ritual power of music. Where music had been experienced collectively as part of a social ritual that symbolized and exorcized threats to the community, now it was trapped and contained within a commodity in principle no different from any other object mass produced for exchange. The use value of music was transferred to the exchange value of the record and then lost in a maelstrom of the formal equivalence of commodities in exchange. The characteristic practice of dealing with the reserved music produced in a regime of silence (Attali describes silenced workers making silent records in a factory: when they both leave the factory, the records will have more to say) was *stockpiling*, Attali’s term for the accumulation of a temporal burden involved in the new regime of musical production.

People buy records, and thus exchange money (labor power measured in time) for music

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<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

that they have to expend more time to listen to; the records pile up, a stock of “leisure” expenditures that has become a mute testament to the loss of meaningful collective ritual.<sup>28</sup>

To think an archive of music, therefore, is already to think through several dramatic transformations in the cultural history of human societies. A musical archive is a stockpile of silences, both as a selective inscription of musical history, and in itself as an unheard repository of ritual practice. As *the* recorded music par excellence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, jazz was poised at the cusp of these shifts. It is quite strange, then, that jazz historiography has done so little theorizing of the epistemology and ontology of recorded sound. In his indispensable essay “The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History,” Jed Rasula explores how jazz history habitually relies on and disavows the evidence of recordings. Jazz “history” as a written genre consists largely of a loose journalistic assemblage of oral testimonies framed by critics’ authoritative voices. However, almost all jazz histories rely on recordings, but since recordings are suspected of being unreliable witnesses as they reproduce only a small percentage of the everyday musical working life, this reliance is disavowed. In fact, a “positivist” jazz history that dispensed altogether with recordings would have to make do with an arid and boring “paucity” of evidence; recordings are themselves an empirical resource, but their use in practice contradicts the deeply held ideological convictions of jazz discourse: “Material documentation is missing,” Rasula writes, “only if one aspires to superimpose aesthetic order on an otherwise heteroglot profusion by the persuasively simple hypothesis of progress.” Moreover, jazz history denies its reliance on records because it purports to be narrating some “putative essence” or “living tradition” that is the more authentic, more truthful Other scene where jazz really exists beyond the “blatant artifice of technology”; with its troubled relationship to primitivism, cultural difference, and

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<sup>28</sup> Attali, *Noise*.

authenticity, “jazz history is closer to anthropology, at least if we consider Lévi-Strauss’s distinction that history attends to the conscious, and anthropology to the unconscious.”

Rasula’s central hypothesis, however, is particularly crucial for any jazz historiography that seeks to employ records as evidence:

My contention is that recordings are vexatious for historians precisely because they are a medium of inscription; the act of writing a history must covertly contend with a history already in the process of transcribing itself, rendering the historian’s account a surrogate act masquerading as authority.... [T]he historian setting out to compose a written history of jazz will find that history already composed, and made audible, in recordings. In the place where a history would assert its powers of attorney, an intrusive sound emerges.<sup>29</sup>

The idea that jazz has inscribed its own history in recordings offers a compelling challenge—not only to jazz critics who have written the vast majority of the music’s history, but also to the critical project of jazz cultural studies and to the practice of academic history writ large. Historians of music and other aesthetic media in a variety of cultural conjunctures, and theorists of aesthetics alike, can learn from the problematics and fierce debates of jazz

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<sup>29</sup> Rasula, “The Media of Memory,” 144-45, 135-36. I had first encountered this essay as an undergraduate, so I suppose I should have known better, but when I began the research for this dissertation, now years ago, with the little musical stockpile I had accumulated as a good if slightly more avid than average citizen of the regime of repetition, adding to it gradually and regularly confronting the practically infinite library of the already extant inscribed history of the music, I was more than a little thrown by precisely the experience Rasula describes. Is this experience qualitatively different from the sense of heft and responsibility other historians legendarily experience in their mythic journeys to the archives? Instead of being awed by the reach or opacity of the state, I was overwhelmed by the seemingly endless recursivity, elegance, and, as Rasula says, heteroglossia of the non- or anti-textual history I was dutifully “reading” and attempting to process into some kind of order. I was not consciously trying to “superimpose aesthetic order,” but narratives are ordered, and selections have to be made, and frankly the great majority of the written texts of jazz history are little to no help at all, in their frantic need to discipline those intrusive sounds into the relatively conservative apparatuses of influence and progress. I am writing this now in part to disclaim my power of attorney, any appeal to my own authority that I might make in order to *speak for* the music or its practitioners. But the truth is the assumption of that kind of critical voice has never come easy, and so I continued piling on and reshuffling my stock. It is hard enough to *speak to* the sense of liberation, of illicit joy, that my archive brought as I enjoyed its value. My ambitions now for the project are not to convey the order of the archive, such as it is, as something immanent to the sound, but rather to destabilize some of the unities that continue to govern jazz history, to disrupt discursive and sonic regularities by laying tracks against the established grain. I am reminded of what Albert Ayler reportedly asked Amiri Baraka (and so many others): do you think it’s about you? This question seemed temporarily at least to lift the weight of identity from Baraka’s critical shoulders and he wrote a series of articles whose imaginative power and enthusiasm are still inspiring. Those essays, collected in *Black Music*, were, many of them, attempts to create a language with which to praise the music. It is telling that despite its enlightening effect Ayler’s question did not decrease Baraka’s feeling of responsibility towards the music, the feeling that he owed it a debt. That debt, I want to attest, is real, and is owed to the ancestors, and I am glad to assume my part.

history to open their texts to the inscription of a non-discursive, material history. I suspect that although the claims made for jazz, including Rasula's, often have a note of exceptionalism, his critique of the historical emplotment of aesthetic archives has a wider reach. The material history encoded in archives, as is the case with jazz, is inescapably heteroglot—such is the nature of aesthetic media—and a serious engagement with aesthetics puts historians in the position of constantly rethinking and revising the ordering categories they deploy—their concepts of periodization, genre, and other discursive regularities.

For jazz history, an important implication of Rasula's critique is that the time for setting the agenda of jazz narratives on the writing and ideologies of critics has now passed. If jazz history is to refocus on the projects of musicians *as creative intellectuals working in the realm of sound*, then the material basis for that historiographical shift is the record (as sound-writing, as aesthetic object or work of art, and as commodity). This does not, however, in my view dictate either that only those trained in formal musical analysis can write jazz history, nor that historians are limited to a kind of quasi-discography, listing dates and titles and instrumentation. Rather, we can think about the record as an object that by encoding sound also transmits an affectivity. Proponents of radical empiricism, like Brian Massumi, suggest that a keen attention to speculative philosophical and cognitive-scientific accounts of experience alike challenge common sense assumptions about the temporal, spatial, and embodied boundaries of subjectivity and objectivity. While my emotional response to a recording is subjective, the affect that passes through my experience is not. What history can do is mobilize the affectivity of the aesthetic object in its description of contexts in which the aesthetic object is situated. History, to adopt a different register, can attend to the conjuncture into which the aesthetic project intervenes, and it can listen for the subtle ways

in which the sound may address a conjuncture, estranging its normative meaning by suturing a surprising or unexpected affect to it.<sup>30</sup>

Ornette Coleman's music can provide an example. Coleman's work between 1959 and 1961 now carries the status of the ultimate canonical expression of late modernism in jazz. What we have to hear, but are functionally unable to, is that for a number of listeners Coleman's music sounded the death knell of jazz professionalization, in the particular, and perhaps the Euro-imperial notion of "art" itself. However impossible, it is nevertheless necessary to attempt to account for these (mis)hearings through the partial, fraught, and alienating defamiliarization of our inherited listening regimes (the particular distribution of the sensible that has now incorporated the "late modernist" Coleman as exemplar of a particular era in musical production, but which has had a provisionally more difficult time incorporating Coleman's music since the early 1970s).

### The Distribution of the Sensible

Ornette Coleman's records, when we put them on now, *sound* different than they did to many listeners in 1959, not because of some magical property of the music captured by the recording apparatus, but because our ways of perceiving his music have been changed. No doubt this is a commonsensical claim, and can easily be applied to any recorded music linked historically to a specific period. What is more difficult to tease out are the political resonances and implications of this change, and how to describe the way a sonic practice can affect what one hears. One might say that we (those who listen to Coleman) have become habituated to sounds that once were new and radical, or we might say that tastes change, that

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<sup>30</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

they are generational or linked to a vague *Zeitgeist* or *mentalité*. And, of course, in this there is nothing peculiar to sound. Although it often seems different, somehow magical, that we are able to hear the sounds Coleman made in 1959, at least as they were encoded on tape and vinyl, materially it is not much different from the magic of seeing a Bob Thompson painting or reading a LeRoi Jones poem (to mention two of Coleman's Lower East Side contemporaries).

If one wanted to understand the politics of that sound, that painting, or that poem, there is a choice between two fundamental approaches: the first would be to gather together the statements of political affiliation made by or on behalf of the artist and the art work, and try to discern to what extent people in the past "read" the art as engaging in politics; or we could look or listen to the art itself, employing a variety of methodologies to "read" the art work as engaging in a dialogue with other texts, pictures, or sounds. Michael Denning's influential history of the *Cultural Front* (1997) offers a clear analytical language to distinguish between these two kinds of historical reading: the first is "cultural politics," the institutional and discursive networks of affiliation and solidarity that linked artists to each other and to other social actors and which offered a public forum for the articulation of collective aesthetic projects; the second is "aesthetic ideologies," the politically-informed and shaped artistic practices that artists brought to bear in their practice, in different ways and to different extents, and the philosophies that informed their practice in its social or political dimensions.<sup>31</sup>

Forgive my plodding through territory that everyone will find routine, but I want to unpack two aspects of this familiar problematic. First, as two kinds of "reading," the problematic generalizes interpretive repertoires germane to written archives or texts,

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), esp. 51-159.

mapping them onto (via a broad palette of methodological techniques) non-linguistic media to which the textual repertoires do not quite apply. In other words, to “read” a picture or a sound is to be interpreting it metaphorically, as if it were (comparable to) language. This is a familiar problem to cultural historians of visuality, orality, and aurality in general. Second, that same textual maneuver means the history of aesthetic objects remains at a remove from the work (qua operation on or intervention into the social field) that the object does, framing the object as discursively intelligible through the mediation of the texts and statements of the people who made or experienced the work (qua material result of creative activity).

I find it useful to unpack these interpretive options because in constructing a sonic archive, I found myself, for all the rich interpretive possibilities opened up by various methods of “reading” cultural history, straining against the limitations of what a reading of instrumental music could produce. Although improvising musicians, both modern and “after modern,” often integrated musical performance with text (recitations, incantations, singing, poetry, explanatory notes, even song or album titles), what was textual made up only a part of the aesthetic range of the recorded object and, of course, only a part of the experience of hearing it. In addition, what was texted or *spoken* was often itself so embedded in musicality that to reproduce it as text or citation within a written history was to do violence to the tonal, rhythmic, and affective qualities carried by its sound but lost in its reinscription (see Chapter Six for more on “transcribing” the speech/song of improvised vocality). And since much of these performances were indeed improvised, the puzzle of the ontology of the musical work could not in this case be solved by reference to a score or other written representation (if it even can with notated music): in addition, it was my opinion that however valuable the methods of musicological analysis, they did not help me to write

history for an audience of historians, culture critics, and listeners, only some of whom could be expected to (wish to) read transcriptions.<sup>32</sup>

Much of the aesthetic, and affective, experience of musical recordings is partitioned from their textual reference or frame, and the “reading” strategies developed in cultural history, especially since “the linguistic turn” of the 1980s, were provocative but also inadequate methods to come to some rapport with a sonic archive. Moreover, I came to believe that this inadequation was problematic not only on epistemological grounds, but also and especially when it came to politics. If this project were to leave jazz criticism behind, as I proposed doing in the “Anacrusis and Attunement” above, in part for political reasons, in order not to periodize the narrative of jazz around the anxious response of liberal jazz critics to non- or anti-liberal aesthetic radicalism, then what would act as a textual anchor for its interpretations? There were also difficulties posed by conjunctural factors: while I consulted the small magazines of the black freedom movement and found much useful material, deep interest in the aesthetics of jazz in that arena was likewise sporadic or partial in a way that made it difficult to locate a narrative of musical innovation and indeed a politics of sound there. While there was much more historical interest in the ways writers of the black radical

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<sup>32</sup> I did not begin this project as a collector, although I was an avid “fanatic” (Adorno insists we not shorten the word and thus lose its fascist resonance) for the music. The research for the project made me a collector, however, about which I would like to offer a few reflections. To make a record collection of an “unpopular” genre is to become a bricoleur of suppressed cultural moments. To become something strange and estranged (in a quasi-Brechtian aesthetic sense), to find oneself in a process of becoming other through an immersive experience of art, to have the near-obsessive relationship to tracking the minutiae of recorded history (discography) as a necessary counterpart to one’s sonic diet, is on the one hand merely the experience of art lovers across media and genres. Yet this music—what is so presumptuously and yet compellingly called “the music” by those in the know—is unusual in many ways. Not least is that the continuing crisis of legitimacy in jazz discourses both necessitates and supplements the obsessive pursuit of a comprehensive archive. My everyday practice as a historian is in some ways little different from the avid collector or aficionado, perhaps with a bit more effort towards coverage, and with a bit more self-consciousness about critically interrogating my subjective experience and how that drives my listening, and indeed perhaps ultimately an approach to listening that aspires to a “structural” listening, not necessarily in Adorno’s sense of following the compositional structure, attuning one’s mind to the introduction and development of musical ideas, but instead a focus on the construction of relations within the ensemble, the ongoing processes of structuration and deconstruction in dialogue that constitute ensemblic co-composition or improvisation.



tradition took up the music, than perhaps in the overanalyzed critics or the mostly tone-deaf mainstream media, I found myself sympathetic to Harold Cruse's complaint that the central importance of the music in theorizing African American cultural production was not fully recognized by the writer-activists of the 1960s.

Perhaps in reaction to the declared aesthetics of certain jazz critics and certain radical writers, each of whom wanted to claim (and police) jazz, and recruit musical ideas as political representation, I ultimately began to harbor suspicions about what one might loosely term "functionalism" in the way cultural history links aesthetic media to politics, whether the latter was thought as representation or cultural hegemony or social movements or the interest group politics of the liberal state. In each of these political contexts, art was often imagined to work as an effective and affective criticism of or supplement to a defined political project. Art's effectivity was often thought in terms of mobilization or in terms of pedagogy: moving people to act politically or transmitting the information or emotion that would spur them towards political action. Whatever theoretical limitations a functionalist approach to cultural media may have, what made it particularly troubling for this project was the obvious failure of the aesthetic project of "free jazz" in functionalist terms. The existing historiography, following the rhythms of coverage in jazz magazines, movement journals, and the national media, reproduced profound anxieties about the increasingly dysfunctional character of musical practice: experimentalist aesthetics was not serving the desires of jazz critics to sustain and grow a jazz audience, nor the imperialist vanity of the mainstream media that looked to jazz for confirmations of U.S. exceptionalism. Nor did free jazz ultimately serve the functionalist desires of black revolutionary nationalism, which appealed to the music both as heroic example, but also as the pedagogical tool that would awaken the black "masses" and infuse them with revolutionary desire. Various explanations for the

failure of this latter functionalist desire have dominated the literature, and historians have crafted narratives around the “irony” or the “contradiction” that the revolutionary nationalist search for “populism” was fused to a resolutely “confrontational” or “avant-garde” aesthetic that proved largely “unpopular” among “jazz” audiences. (I apologize for this flurry of scare quotes—I mean them to highlight the investment of existing analytical languages in discursive referents that are politically charged, languages whose terms tend to prejudice both the creative projects of post-songform jazz and the political projects of its creators.) To open functionalism up to question, however, did not mean to abandon a political interpretation of “after modern” jazz, and have recourse to a realm of pure aesthetics or isolated creative freedom, for that view of art is its own form of functionalism (in which art serves to legitimize and sustain the existing order of things).<sup>33</sup>

Instead, I have chosen to adopt an understanding of the relationship between politics and aesthetics borrowed from the philosopher Jacques Rancière, who has proposed that politics and aesthetics do not need to be related mechanically or functionally because they occupy the same terrain: the distribution of the sensible. To understand what Rancière means by that phrase it is necessary briefly to unpack his understanding of politics. In contrast to a certain common sense idea that “everything is political,” Rancière identifies

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<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile my listening continued apace, and I remained convinced that I was hearing a politics in the music, and I collected and archived the discourse produced by musicians, who spoke, not about, but around the music in a way that rhetorically reserved space for it, a mode of discursive style that I was equally convinced was itself a politics. At the same time, I sought out historiographical and theoretical models to frame analytically the act of listening to music. The citations throughout the dissertation are a record of the many works that in particular influenced both the narrative periodization and the modes of analytical description adopted herein. But it is important to note here that the languages of “theory” too, as well as cultural history, indicate a relative paucity of approaches to sound. This is not to say that there is not increasing interest in sound among historians and theorists—indeed, the time of my research and writing coincided with an effusion of new scholarship and innovative thinking about sound, noise, recording, and instrumental music. It is truly an exciting field to engage with—but the hegemonic theoretical texts are overwhelmingly oriented around text and vision, and often fail to engage hearing even when its importance would seem indisputable. For just one telling canonical example, see the discussion in Chapter Two of Walter Benjamin’s “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” which says surprisingly little about music and sound recording. Perhaps that is because Benjamin’s essay was meant to be the counterpart to one written by Theodor W. Adorno, who despite his stylistic, philosophical, and temperamental difficulty as a theorist was one of the greatest philosophers of music in the twentieth century. See Chapter Three for a discussion of Adorno and jazz.

politics as a specific emergence that challenges the division or partition of a community into (ac)countable parts and the uncounted. In his *Dis-agreement* (1994), he argues from readings of classical philosophy, especially Aristotle's *Politics*, that politics as such is the opening of a dissensus, or a contestation over that which is common—commonly held, common to all or any one. In ancient Athens, democracy, strictly understood as the rule of the people—that is, the rule of those who otherwise have no part in the community, no wealth or fame or status—emerged contingently, threatening the oligarchic order. The threat of democracy to the existing order had to be managed and contained, but the introduction into history of a recurring struggle over the boundaries of that containment inaugurated politics proper. Politics qua dissensus is the opening of those boundaries to the “part of no part,” those who are excluded and unsymbolized—uncounted—in the community's self-representation. Politics is that which addresses, not everyone as a collective or totality, but anyone, as in “whoever happens by.” What can be thought to be the concern, held in common, of this anyone, is the political, but the radical implications of the extension of the common mean that a political event, a dissensus, is necessarily led by “the part of no part” on behalf of the common itself. Political dissensus has occurred throughout history, and its movement is not linear—any opening can be foreclosed—but its self-movement is towards democracy: not the actually existing democracies of two-party consumer choice between managers of the capitalist marketplace and the state, but democracy as the universalization of the common.<sup>34</sup>

The force that is opposed to politics as Rancière conceives it is what he calls “police”—this refers not to an organized group of armed men licensed to enforce the law, but also to a whole range of apparatuses (*dispositifs*) that constrain and channel social energy, as well as to the logic of partition that divides the community into the countable and those

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<sup>34</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

“of no account.” Following Foucault, Rancière acknowledges that power pervades social relations, but does not take from that the conclusion that everything is political (indeed he writes that to say that power pervades the social body is to not say much at all, for the task still remains to understand how to intervene in power relations). Instead, the exercise of power goes by the name police. For our purposes of thinking about creative music, the police can refer to the disciplining of generic boundaries, the racialized inequalities of state and corporate funding, the machinery of market saturation and the promotion of distracted listening, as well as the legal and licensing barriers to employment of jazz musicians, the economic constriction of performance spaces, and not excluding the actual police who are a pervasive specter haunting jazz history (and, in Langston Hughes’s famous version of the origins of bebop, the music is a mimesis of police brutality). In all these ways, the field of jazz and, for lack of a better signifier, post-jazz, is saturated by the police.

Rancière traces the partition of the community, which is also the partition of the sensible/intelligible, back to Aristotle, among others, for whom the distinction between speech and voice determined the difference between humans who could be political actors and humans who were excluded from the sphere of the political, of the discussion of the common. Therefore those who were part of the community were those who could be heard as articulating a grievance in language—when human grievances or demands were unintelligible, they were relegated to the (empty, meaningless) voice. This is not (only) about linguistic differences and translation. Instead, what Rancière generalizes from Aristotle is that the boundaries of the political, and that which is put at stake in the eruption of dissensus and the introduction of politics, is the distribution of the sensible, literally that which can be experienced as sensory information, and that which is bypassed as noise. In addition to the social apparatuses that historians are familiar with—institutions or discourses,

for example—Rancière posits the sensory apparatus as the field upon which political conflicts are waged. Dissensus is a challenge to the existing distribution of the sensible, and politics occurs when the sensory apparatus is redrawn in such a way that previously meaningless sensory data becomes intelligible.

Aesthetics and politics are related simply because they occupy the same terrain. Just as politics alters the distribution of what is heard as speech and what is passed over as noise, so does art introduce changes in the sensory distribution of experience, making visible or audible what had been invisible or silent/noisy. The work that art does as an aesthetic redistribution of the sensible is not separate from politics, but in itself creates openings for political activity. Adopting Jacques Rancière's idea of the distribution of the sensible, of the dissensus of what *can be heard* as (political) speech versus what exists outside the sensory frame as (animalistic, meaningless) noise, moves us away from functionalist accounts of the *connections* between politics and aesthetics and onto a terrain—the sensible itself—that is shared, and where by implication the shifting boundaries of sense and the senses affect each practice across their shared space. I will return to Rancière's framework periodically in the arguments to come (and, it should be noted, the dissertation employs the word "politics" in more traditional ways outside of the strict definition it takes on in his philosophy), and there is a rough narrative trajectory that traces what was sensible across the following chapters. The next two chapters will outline the work of a jazz discourse in a way that emphasizes its policing effects, and will read the reception of Adorno as still engaged implicitly in the police logic of partitioning jazz. In part two, there is a broadly sketched narrative dialectic between the opening of a dissensus in the 1960s, and its partial closing in the 1970s. Politics in this period can be characterized by a world historical political project, followed by an intensified policing campaign that worked to manage the fallout by redrawing the sensible around

affects of fear and resentment. The dissensus opened by “1968” has never yet, however, been fully closed, although much that was perceptible in that moment has fallen into background noise. In improvised music, the continued aesthetic challenge not only to generic boundaries but to the aesthetic exploration of the human qua decolonized, deprovincialized universal suggests the ongoing relevance of the sensory *dispositifs* (partially preserved in recorded objects) of the 1970s.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2006).

## Chapter Two

### The Work of Jazz in the Age of Sound Reproduction

They'd both also heard a voice—a faint, faraway voice which asked, “Who are our true rulers?” Possessed of a strong nineteenth-century accent, the voice, barely pausing a beat, went on to answer, “The Negro poets, to be sure. Do they not set the fashion, and give laws to the public taste? Let one of them, in the swamps of Carolina, compose a new song, and it no sooner reaches the ear of a white amateur, than it is written down, amended (that is, almost spoilt), printed, and then put upon a course of rapid dissemination, to cease only with the utmost bounds of Anglo-Saxondom, perhaps with the world. Meanwhile, the poor author digs away with his hoe, utterly ignorant of his greatness.” That they'd both heard it had to do with the odd bond Penguin's retreat had brought to the surface, the otherwise Atlantislike relational “glue” which took the place of a place. It was as if the “place” he'd gone off to prepare was not so much a place as a certain rapport, a “place” neither wholly here nor wholly there. It was a “place” which was more than one place at once, a utopic ubiquity which, though always there, was never all there.

—Nathaniel Mackey<sup>1</sup>

For the very first Four Tet recordings, I was obsessed with free jazz, and the whole spiritual jazz thing from the late '60s and early '70s. There was so much dance music coming out that was claiming to be influenced by jazz music, but was always really mellow, much more laid-back, and the influences were always fusion influences rather the really dark, evil sort of jazz that I knew and loved. I wanted to do a contemporary record that was influenced by the evil dark jazz, and the whole first album was all about that. When the next album came out, I abandoned the whole jazz thing—not because I wasn't into it anymore, but because I suddenly started thinking about what was possible with this project and where it could go. I became a lot more ambitious.

—Kieran Hebden<sup>2</sup>

...the jazz machine will pound away forever.

—Theodor W. Adorno<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, *From a Broekn Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate. Volumes 1-3* (New York: New Directions, 2010), 392.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Inglis, “Kieran Hebden is a producer who puts the intelligence into Intelligent Dance Music,” *Sound on Sound*, July 2003. Available online at <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/jul03/articles/fourtet.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 148.

### Minstrel Returns and the Work of Jazz

In the third volume of his epistolary novel, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*, entitled *Atet A. D.*, Nathaniel Mackey relates a shared dream experience where his protagonist N. and a friend and fellow musician hear a voice, in a “strong nineteenth century accent,” asking, “Who are our true rulers?” The quotation that follows is from a text with a strange currency since its publication in 1845. This text is an article in the antebellum magazine *The Knickerbocker* entitled “Who Are Our National Poets?” by James Kennard. In its original articulation, Kennard’s quotation could be read as satirical, meant to puncture the search for an American national literature by naming the true American poetry as the poetry of the enslaved. He refers to the career of black poetry and song on the minstrel stage. His account of the literary and cultural nationalism made possible by black poets is in part a reading of minstrelsy’s explosive popularity in the twenty years in which it had developed from a ritual of Atlantic spectatorship into its commercial domination of the popular theater. Kennard, in a much less often quoted moment of his essay, tries to categorize the strange hybrid sounds of the black poetry sweeping up the pleasures and desires of a circum-Atlantic popular culture as a “rude kind of opera, combining the poetry of motion, of music, and of language! ‘Jim Crow’ is an opera; all the negro songs were intended to be *performed*, as well as sung and played. And, considering the world-wide renown which they have attained, who can doubt the genius of the composers?” Kennard’s “rude ... opera[s]” are the minstrel shows themselves, but ambiguously as well the slave performances that supposedly furnished their inspiration. He writes that there is no aspect of plantation life or “negro character” that cannot be glimpsed in the songs of these downtrodden poet-composers. But



a racial ambiguity explodes into a shocking assertion of the shared inheritance of black composition as it has been circuited through the commercial minstrel stage:

While writing this, your city papers advertise: "Concert this evening, by the African melodists." *African* melodists! As well might the Hutchinsons call themselves *English* melodists, because their ancestors, some six or eight generations back, came from England. Whether these performers are blacks, or whites with blacked faces, does not appear; but they are doubtless meant to represent the native colored population of "Old Varginny," and as such should be judged. They are *American* melodists, *par excellence*.<sup>4</sup>

The passage that N. and Penguin both hear in a dream had returned in the 1970s as if now in a dream of cultural memory, repressed but returning to shape the history of black music, black performance, and white racial mimicry. Eileen Southern quoted it in her pioneering scholarship on *The Music of Black Americans* (1971) as evidence of the far-reaching power of black song in the antebellum period, and Eugene Genovese repeated it, citing Southern, in his *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1976). As literary scholar H. Bruce Franklin noted in 1978, these citations may have downplayed the derisive sarcasm of the original: for Franklin, the target of Kennard's attack was the presumption of those who sought a national literature at all, when artistic greatness was cosmopolitan (and Anglo-imperialist) in orientation; in Franklin's account, Kennard held the "negro poets" beneath contempt, and his parody and ridicule would have been apparent to his readership. Eric Lott's seminal 1995 study of minstrelsy, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, approvingly cites Franklin in order to claim the "true rulers" passage as evidence that Kennard's "mismanaged reactionary irony reaches straight to the heart of the problem, fueled inexorably by cultural anxiety and dread. For the outcome of such a national culture, as Kennard demonstrates, would amount to little less than insurrection."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> James Kennard, Jr., "Who Are Our National Poets," *The Knickerbocker*, October 1845, 331-341, 334.

<sup>5</sup> Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: a history*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 93. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, (New York: Vintage, 1976), 250-51. H.

Kennard's suggestion that the Negro poets are the authors of a true national American literature and the creators of a new hybrid form of art that combined gesture, song, and language was perhaps, then, a modest proposal that was meant to be laughed away or treated as a cautionary ghost story, but if so it nevertheless came true in the twentieth century. Kennard's own stance might be better seen as an open question—a Christian moralist and opponent of the expansion of slavery, there are clues in Kennard's oeuvre that he might have been more earnest in “Who Are Our National Poets?” than it might appear. In an imaginary dialogue about the prospect of war with Mexico—a war he did not live to see—Kennard has one of his interlocutors imagine the effect of the incorporation of Mexican territory as a disintegration of slavery through the migration of the enslaved. In the new territories, the enslaved “will mix with the Indians; the colored population will in time far outnumber the whites, that it will be impossible to keep them in a state of slavery, and liberty for the dark-skinned race must be the inevitable result. O, what a blessed thought,—that the down-trodden African will be able to stand erect and say, ‘I, too, am a man!’” Kennard rejects this logic, but only on the Christian grounds that an evil committed to obtain a good result is both still evil and has an uncertain outcome. The moral justice of the end of slavery in a demographic surpassing of white supremacy is upheld. In any case, regardless of how we interpret the sincerity of Kennard's article, Mackey's situating of Kennard's fear/hope of the “Negro poets” cultural rule in a dreamworld suggests we take it seriously as a sign for encapsulating the movement of black music in the twentieth century: the eruption of a new, hybrid sonic modernity that “electrified the world.” The “object” that Kennard describes as a “rude form of opera”—or, following the commercial discourse of his

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Bruce Franklin, *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison*, (New York: Oxford, 1978), 73-86. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (New York: Oxford, 1995), 99.

time, “African melodies”—that object does not name a concrete historical formation, but is rather an elusive trace, a haunting of the categories and hierarchies that attempted to fix culture, race, and aesthetics. So how to write this object/trace/transmission that works its way from Kennard to Mackey’s dream? In this project, I think of jazz not as an aesthetic object, but as a set of overlapping and contradictory projects. Jazz is an empty signifier that has been put to use in hegemonic struggle—therefore, to think about the work of jazz is not to presume the efficacy of the name, but to unpack the naming of different artifacts of jazz as the outcome of political struggles, struggles which in turn were complexly historically situated and interlinked with the processes of the formation of a national-popular from the “rude opera” of black poetry and song.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, is referred to by “the work of jazz in the age of sound reproduction”? First, it refers to the object form of the artwork itself, as embedded in the commodity form of recordings. Second, the work refers to an abstract aesthetic object itself the product of labor (as in *artwork*). Since the temporal existence of musical composition is in some ineffable way distinguishable from the time encoded into the recorded commodity, it is important to trace, following Walter Benjamin, the effects of mechanical reproduction, the creation of aesthetic commodities, on archaic or idealistic notions of this second, more abstract understanding of the work of art. Third, the work of art names the labor of cultural production itself, the enmeshing of aesthetic histories in a political economic field, and a perspective on musicians as both creative intellectuals and culture *workers*. Finally, I mean “work of jazz” in the sense of the contradictory ideological work done by the category itself. Rather than see jazz as an object to be defined, specified, bordered, and defended, I see jazz as a floating signifier in the mid-century world, a placeholder for transformations that could

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<sup>6</sup> For the work and opinions of Kennard (1813-1847), see *Selections From the Writings of James Kennard, Jr., With a Sketch of His Life and Character*, (Boston: William D. Ticknor, 1849). For the passage about Mexico, see *ibid*, 201.

not be named otherwise, and for the creative work that could channel the affective dynamics of those changes.<sup>7</sup>

This last sense of “work” might seem to suggest that jazz was an imaginary construction in the hegemonic unconscious of American national identity, which is true, but to leave it there would be to miss the way jazz itself was a formation that allowed for the construction of certain kinds of oppositional imaginary kinship among black people, to misunderstand how jazz could be mobilized in a struggle against the very forms of domination that the consumption of jazz helped to reproduce and sustain. In fact, the recent interest of scholars and creative intellectuals in jazz has been precisely an interest in these oppositional projects that partially took over (i.e. hegemonized) the empty signifier jazz. In the remaining chapters of this dissertation I will be considering the various emergences of a jazz avant-garde in its problematic relationship to the dominant projects of “jazz.” The difficulties of the counter hegemonic project of resignifying jazz as a representation of histories of black struggle against race and class domination led many musicians in and out of the avant-garde to express sincere doubts about the viability of “jazz” as a name for their creative projects. At the same time, to see the avant-garde as the only aspect of the hegemonic struggles going on around the name of jazz would be to seriously misrepresent the music’s history and the history of the socially engaged musicians of every era and every

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<sup>7</sup> I wish to note here a debt to the scholarship of Thomas Holt, and in particular his suggestion that *race*, as a concept, can be tracked by the different kinds of *work* that it does in social relations. “Perhaps in the word ‘work,’” he writes, “we can convey the dynamism and contingency of phenomena that other descriptors might render flat and ahistorical. In doing its ‘work’ race articulates with (in the sense of relating to) and sometimes articulates for (in the sense of speaking for) other social phenomena, like class, gender, and nationality. And through that articulation—in all its forms—it often achieves social effects that mask its own presence, or the presence of other forces, like class. Sometimes transforming other social categories, sometimes itself transformed by them, race can seem either to be all or not to be present at all.” *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 27. See also Holt, “Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review*, 100:1, (Feb 1995): 1-20.

stylistic division within the “ecumenical” field of jazz.<sup>8</sup> The secondary literature, reviewed in the previous chapter, provides many examples, but let me review a few key moments. Duke Ellington’s *Black, Brown, and Beige* (1943) is a key artifact of Popular Front mobilization of jazz in efforts to claim the inseparability of the global struggle against fascism with comparable struggles against imperialism and racism. This was a period that saw the production of such seminal cultural performances as Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” and the increasingly historical and programmatic shift of Ellington’s music, beyond his epic “tone parallel” of African American history itself. Eric Lott, moreover, has written influentially that the stylistic inventions of bebop, particularly its emphasis on rhythmic intensity and complexity, parallel the struggle against racial domination.<sup>9</sup>

Although such perspectives have inspired this project, it is equally concerned to track the question of what perspectives on the history of “jazz” we miss when we adopt a counter-hegemonic position. For, the ideological work of jazz in the twentieth century was intimately bound up in the complex psychic knots that were the legacy of slavery. We must think about ideological work as deeply enmeshed in unconscious forces (dreaming, intimacy, desire, longing, fear, etc.). Jazz might be seen to condense into a palimpsest several kinds of imaginary proximity: a temporal-spatial proximity to nature or a folk past, an intersubjective proximity mediated by (recorded) music, and a fantasy of the unmediated naturalness of black performance. All of these affective forces shaping diverse encounters with jazz were

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<sup>8</sup> Eric Porter employs the term “critical ecumenicalism” to describe jazz’s social and stylistic heterogeneity. See *What is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), esp. 70-71.

<sup>9</sup> See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Verso, 1997), 328-348. On Duke Ellington and the Popular Front, see Kevin Gaines, “Duke Ellington, *Black, Brown, and Beige*, and the Cultural Politics of Race,” in Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, eds., *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2000), 585-600. For a discussion of Ellington’s intervention into critical discourses of jazz, concert music, and romantic racial primitivism, see Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 219-270. Eric Lott, “Double-V, Double Time: Bebop’s Politics of Style,” *Callaloo* 36, (Summer 1988), 597-605.

part and parcel of the ongoing racialization of identity, but also space, political-economic resources, access to elite cultural networks, and so on. The case of jazz is a particularly powerful demonstration that history should think the imaginary together with the material because jazz performance acted as a screen for the projection of racial anxieties. But, that screening of jazz performance was simultaneously enacted by the policing apparatus that is a constant, but rarely theorized shadow hanging over the history of jazz. The overwhelming presence of the police in jazz history narratives as a kind of naturalized backdrop to the music needs to be thought through rather than assumed. Bryan Wagner has described the emergence of black vernacular culture as deeply embedded in the history of the police power in the U.S., meaning not only the police as uniformed law enforcement, but the police as a whole systemic set of regulations, enforcements of spatial exclusions, discursive constraints, and ideological and imaginary constructions of difference as danger.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). To return to Rancière's problematic, from which Wagner draws, "police" works as a kind of "anti-politics," and policing always enforces and redraws the exclusive boundaries of political community, whereas the name politics refers to the claiming of what is held in common by the "part of no part" of the excluded, thus radically opening the exclusions sustained by police. Extending Wagner's brilliant insight of reading together police with emergent discourses of the black vernacular to 20<sup>th</sup> century urban space and jazz, I have in mind here a widely known but as yet not fully synthesized material history of U.S. metropolitan space. Scholars of urban history have in the wake of pioneering studies by Arnold Hirsch and Thomas Sugrue investigated the confluence of federal, state, and municipal governmental power, together with market forces and popular action, in enforcing segregation in the postwar period. Moreover, a wide variety of case studies of urban renewal and highway construction make possible a synthetic judgment that the postwar United States witnessed the systematic destruction of black neighborhoods and especially business districts which were linked discursively to crime, vice, and material decay through a logic of "environmental" causes of social problems. The federal highway system was constructed, in Detroit, Chicago, Miami, Oakland, and many other locales, through the use of eminent domain, on the ruined thoroughfares of black nightlife and segregated community services. An ancillary effect of this project of building, destruction, and primitive accumulation was the degradation of the infrastructure of jazz performance (later chapters will take into account some of the effects of this material disappearance). See Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Nathan Connolly, "By Eminent Domain: Race and Capital in the Building of an American South Florida," PhD dissertation, (University of Michigan, History, 2008). In my own research, I have explored the imaginary prefiguring of the public policy decisions that led to the erasure of "Paradise Valley" from the landscape of Detroit: Robert Maclean, "Imagining Paradise Valley: the Informal Economy, Gendered Spaces of Nightlife, and the Politics of Black Culture in World War II Detroit," (unpublished seminar paper, 2003). The "infrastructure of jazz performance" was always already enmeshed in the policing and zoning of racialized

In searching for models of thinking about how a dreamworld invested with unconscious fears and desires takes material shape in an urban landscape, we might turn to the writings of Walter Benjamin, who in his unfinished work *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project) deliberately set out to conceive the arcades as the material and spatial manifestation of the dreamworld of mass culture.<sup>11</sup> Benjamin gives us a language to think about the simultaneously imagined and material nature of mass culture through the concept of the dreamworld; this notion of the dreamworld also helps us think about how Mackey transforms and takes up—in a dream—Kennard’s sense of the global reach of black culture even as it was contained and constrained in the form of blackface’s derisive mimesis.

Whence the “Negro poets” of Nathaniel Mackey’s dream-parable, whose words, if not the authors themselves, disseminate into the furthest reaches of “Anglo-Saxondom”?

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public space, a history that established interesting parallels with gay history, the history of commercialized sex districts (i.e. “taxi dance halls” in addition to the policing of prostitution per se), and the containment of cross-racial and cross-class interaction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban U.S. For a superb social and cultural history of the connections among discursive constructions, policing, and oppositional identity formation in gay spaces, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic, 1995). A provocative study that links policing to cultural fears of interracial sex is Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). In the “jazz world,” policing was particularly evident and destructive in the context of New York through the city licensing of musicians via the notorious “cabaret laws” that required musicians and other cabaret workers to pass a morals test and be free of any police record. The laws were formed in 1926 amid a context of hysteria about the popularity of jazz as an inspiration for the flaunting of Prohibition laws, and had a powerfully negative effect on jazz history, silencing native New Yorker Thelonious Monk for much of the 1950s. By the later period, the cabaret laws were linked to a moral panic about jazz musicians as useful scapegoats for the problem of illegal drugs. See Robert Maclean, “Monk’s Silence: Nightclubs, Heroin, and the Cabaret Laws in Postwar New York,” (unpublished seminar paper, University of Michigan, 2002). The conflict between a musical culture that sustained cross-class and cross-racial interaction and the police enforcement of spatial segregation was particularly brutal in Los Angeles. See Mina Yang, “A Thin Blue Line Down Central Avenue: The LAPD and the Demise of a Musical Hub,” *Black Music Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (Autumn 2002): 217-239. For context see Horace Tapscott with Steven Isoardi, *Songs of the Unsung: The Musical and Social Journey of Horace Tapscott* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) and Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). In all these instances, the point I wish to emphasize here are the deep imbrications of racialized public policy, policing apparatuses, and an imaginary of public space invested by discursive, affective, and indeed unconscious forces.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Benjamin, Rolf Tiedemann, ed., Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans., *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). The secondary literature on Benjamin is vast. I have particularly benefited from the work of Susan Buck-Morss, especially *Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). Also see Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002) and *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1979).

Does this nineteenth-century register of a racial binary and the imagined distance between its poles—despite the intensive, brutal, commercial, or affective intimacy that could characterize “the utmost bounds” of the extension of Anglo-American hegemony—have any purchase on the multipolarity and imagined parity (i.e. the forms of contemporary “colorblind” ideology) that characterize “our” (post)postmodern racial landscape? Mackey takes up Kennard’s “modest proposal” instead as a mythopoetic parable of the power of black (musical) poetics to transform the intellectual cultures of the metropolitan capitals of the vast imperial networks that connected the plantation complex, modern modes of the distribution of commodities and information, and the shipping and processing of raw materials. His evocation of the spacelessness, “utopic ubiquity,” characteristic of both black poetics and capitalist modernity, occurs in a dreamworld. In the dream space, the “utterly ignorant” poet is unaware how his poetry “gives laws to the public taste”—and it is only in the dream that the musician-listeners of the authoritative voice are aware of the world’s secret, that its “true rulers” are the ignorant laborers who produce the raw material (of agricultural labor, of cultural invention) for the whole panoply of imperial life. Capital is, perhaps, another dreamworld, where we persist in believing that the ongoing trajectory of such poetry is “merely cultural,” and that art is only a distraction from the labors of the everyday, when all the while other utopian non-places are continually elaborated and disseminated through waves and wires to become lodged between our ears and effect their own subtle, often all-too-subtle transformations. The specter of “odd bond[s]” and the persistence of odd forms of bondage in contemporary life suggest again the incomplete materializations of these transformations. The place(s) forecast by the long reach of the poetics of enforced labor are as yet “no place” but there is much for a certain materialism to



learn from the epochal, utopic search (i.e. the relational glue as elusive as Atlantis) contained in, for example, the forms of exploratory music.

### Evil Jazz

The “place” of Penguin’s retreat, in Mackey’s text, and the place of black culture’s transnational circularity as well, is thought of instead as “a certain rapport.” “Neither here nor wholly there.... more than one place at once” suggests a temporal and spatial parallax which continues to operate, the trajectories of black performance haunted by history, a parallax where 19<sup>th</sup> century minstrelsy and the 21<sup>st</sup> century postmodern move unpredictably from background to foreground. In transcriptions of jazz solos, when the licks move too fast to be captured as notes, when they are barely breathed or fingered but breathily intoned, or merely suggested in passing from this tone to that, those notes are said to be “ghosted.” Similarly ghosted are the persistent routes of cultural transmission, but what are the implications of the maintenance of these broken connections, this afterlife of minstrelsy’s circuits of mimicry, desire, pastiche, and affective affiliation?

Musician Kieran Hebden’s relation to his archive suggests the historical persistence of Kennard’s model of dissemination and its transmutation into new forms. Opposed to the currency and speed of the lines of flight characterizing the dissemination of the words of the Negro poets in Mackey’s parable is the explicit nostalgia and historicity appealed to by Hebden’s syncretic use of the “evil, dark” jazz of the 1970s. Like other samplers of hip hop, electronic, house, acid jazz, and myriad other genres, Hebden (who records as the band FourTet) creates a sonic archive in part from the vast non-place of virtual sound libraries, but the fabrication of his sonic identity is ultimately reliant on a deliberate break from the smooth space of electronic soundspaces. Crate-diggers and vinyl enthusiasts like Hebden are

the modern-day scribes who populate the “utmost bounds of Anglo-Saxondom,” sharing a certain affinity with the collectors, recorders, publishers, ethnographers, and folklorists who collectively sought and crafted our modern inheritance of “the blues” as a discrete cultural archive. The crate-diggers’ relation to the Negro poets of the recent past is perhaps more lateral, more rhizomatic than in Mackey’s dream parable of the nineteenth century. But there is something uncanny about the sounds of a particular period of the recent past, c. 1967 to c. 1975, forming the raw material for the syncretic experiments of a wide range of contemporary genres. (As hip hop scholars have pointed out, hip hop production is deeply informed by a nostalgia for this particular period.)

It is, however, the specific dichotomy of the jazz of the 1970s that interests me in Hebdan’s comments. The nostalgia that samplers hold for that period, he suggests, is dominated by the “laid-back” and “fusion” side of jazz, whereas he wanted to evoke the “evil dark” music of the period. Upon reading this, I knew immediately what he meant. In a different register, experimental rock musician Thurston Moore has in recent years become an advocate for preserving and promoting the more obscure and lesser-known developments of the jazz avant-garde. And the opposition also defines the way free jazz was received, especially in Europe, as an uncompromising blend of political radicalism and aesthetic experimentation (see in particular the work of Peter Brötzmann). For a certain kind of aesthete, there is something particularly compelling about the sheer fury and sonic assault of what is often called “energy music,” one trajectory of the jazz avant-garde in the period Anthony Braxton calls the “post-Ayler continuum.” “Evil,” however, also evokes Miles Davis and his seminal 1970 recording “Live/Evil,” an important transitional album documenting Miles’s gradual dismantling of certain jazz idioms in dialogue with funk—an

album that, for better or worse, is sometimes thought of as “fusion,” although it rarely is laid back.

More troubling, however, is the persistence of the dichotomy between fusion (relaxed, electric, commercial, unchallenging) and free (evil, dark, aggressive, challenging, angry, obscure). There is a subtle racialization within this dichotomy, some privileging of the authenticity of darkness and evil and anger: the aesthetes in allegiance to the free jazz movement have seeming access to an authentic affect, undiluted by commercial imperatives. This idea recapitulates a trope at the heart of jazz criticism: the hot and the sweet, the pure and the commercial. Free jazz idealists like Hebdan also find themselves in an unlikely alliance with critics like Ralph Ellison, and especially Stanley Crouch, for whom Miles Davis’s electric period was enforced by a capitulation to rank commercialism.<sup>12</sup> It is not so easy, I will propose, to separate the affects and the aesthetic imperatives of the “jazz” music of this period. Indeed, my research has struck me with the sheer staggering range of affects transmitted in the music by the 1970s, a vast amplification, elaboration, and experimentalist searching for the beyond of the inherited affective palette of jazz. Tracking the avant-garde and its elaboration of affective states through the 1960s and 1970s will occupy a significant portion of the later chapters of this dissertation.

Finally, there is Theodor W. Adorno’s seemingly misguided epithet that “the jazz machine will pound away forever.” For some readers this quotation will simply serve to reinforce the idea that Adorno got it wrong when it came to jazz. Adorno’s impression of a different kind of ubiquity to jazz almost sounds as if he thought we all would still be dancing mindlessly to Paul Whiteman tunes these many years after his death. But on the contrary, what his admittedly curmudgeonly comment points to instead is the expansive meaning of

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<sup>12</sup> Stanley Crouch, “On the Corner,” in *Considering Genius: Writings on Jazz* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006).

“jazz” in his writing; it suggests that we might substitute any number of words for jazz in the formulation. The pop machine still pounds away, the entertainment monopolies still control most people’s access to culture, music is still enthralled to distraction and regressive listening. It is tempting to take Adorno’s pithy dismissal as a comment about jazz as a genre, that it is machinic, fascist, mind-numbing—when instead it suggests jazz and popular music more generally are thoroughly enmeshed in the networks, administrative regimes, and systems of distribution that define their machinery of production. And from a certain critical point of view, the machine indeed still pounds away.

The epigraphs to this chapter therefore bracket, rather than illustrate, the work of jazz in the age of sound reproduction. Mackey’s dream fiction suggests that the economic and spiritual networks defining the jazz century predate the arrival of jazz. Hebdan’s bricologic approach to jazz history suggests the persistence of the tropes of jazz criticism into an era of digital syncretism. And Adorno’s lamentation of the capitalization of culture, with jazz as a synecdoche for the cultural machine as a whole, survives the separation and decline of jazz as a genre from the other trajectories of popular music. The three quotations also, taken together, combine several themes whose recurrence circulate through the argument of the dissertation and, indeed, come to define one perspectival approach to narrating the history of black music. Fugitivity, flight, entropic but determined movement and the search for atopic or utopic (non)spatiality are mirrored in the economic dissemination of the captured (by)products of artistic practice. Which is to say that the circulation of postmodern, virtual commodities occupies a historical trajectory whose genealogy includes the slave ship, plantation discipline, and the spectacular staging of racial difference—continuity, the persistence of the same forms of domination, does not begin to define this historically fabricated non-space in which we live, but something more like an

unfolding of the contradictions inherent in the commoditization of human bondage, a dialectic of the shared human production of racial difference—which by now we know very well “means” nothing so thoroughly embodied or inherent as a genetic code but instead is a code word, a floating signifier, for the processes by which a whole panoply of human differences—embodied movement, linguistic and social patterns and habits, sexuality, intelligence and its recognition, citizenship and other human rights, access to the recognition of others in everyday or institutional life, access to material supports such as wealth and real property, and so on—are themselves racialized, come to stand in for, signify racial categories and racialized bodies, and how, in the synecdochic reversal characteristic of the still peculiar racial logics that inhere in our world, racial categories themselves come to signify the whole panoply of human difference.

As a historical formation, jazz enters into this racio-ideological circularity as both cut and suture. Jazz cuts the circle, disrupting “in the break” (Moten) the flow of racialization. At the same time, jazz also sutures it, reconnecting the circularity. Although it might be tempting to think about this as the difference between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects, it doesn’t get to the heart of the issue. We might think about the doubleness at the heart of jazz as the ambiguity contained in the phrase “spectacle of virtuosity.” The spectacular virtuosity and artifice of jazz modernism since 1920 arrests the flow of assumptions about untutored black vitality and folk continuity. Think in particular of the pianistic styles of James P. Johnson, Art Tatum, Earl Hines, and other early modern jazz artists: effervescent runs turn the heads of distracted drinkers, a startling hesitant rhythmic hiccup disrupts the foot-tapping aficionado, the sheer brilliance on display captivates, enthralls, and alters, even if fleetingly, the distribution of the sensible that contains the low, licentious, and disreputable jazz. And yet such virtuosity is on display; it too can be part of

the spectacle, and indeed has historically been captured as genius and returned to the circle of romantic primitivism and beliefs of black natural musicality. What is lost is the work, the aesthetic work of estrangement and invention, and the labor that virtuosity never ceases requiring. In the postwar period, even the imperial U.S. state recruited virtuosity for its hegemonizing projects. Combining colorblind liberalism and modern aesthetics, state and liberal media discourses proposed that jazz was a music of black origin and universal validity that advertised the success of American democracy and its inevitable triumph over “primitive” racial prejudices.<sup>13</sup> Within the postwar ideological context that official hegemonic project, which was integrally aligned with jazz criticism’s efforts to legitimize jazz modernism, deliberately short-circuited the primitivist classifying and racializing impulses of earlier jazz projects, particularly those of European modernist intellectuals who wanted to recruit jazz as the bearer of natural vitality that could renew a spiritually exhausted modernity. Jazz was also deeply connected to a series of social movements that attempted to introduce profound and lasting ruptures in the circuit of raciological thought, and in some ways acted as a reservoir for mnemonic connections between the Popular Front and the modern black freedom movement. In other words, jazz was crucial to conflicting hegemonic projects. We understand, however, from Benjamin, Mackey and others that the global circuitry of the production of raciological difference and the transmission of cultural artifacts is part and parcel of the dreamworld of mass culture; jazz was particularly well suited for creative interventions into the shape of that dream world. Benjamin’s theory of mass culture was unique at the time of its articulation because he not only showed how the mass production of commodities created a phantasmagoria that trapped consumers in false

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<sup>13</sup> For an account of how colorblind liberalism, modernist aesthetics, and blackness were coordinated by U.S. policymakers and diplomats, see the important study by Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

consciousness, but also showed how that dreamworld often encased the resources needed for its revolutionary overcoming. Jazz, and other forms of music that limn the divide between experimental and popular, are keyed into the nervous system of the dreamworld of consumer culture; music sustains its rhythms, but is also uniquely situated to disrupt and deform those rhythms and ultimately call into question the structure of the dreamworld itself.<sup>14</sup>

### Jazz Masters of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In his influential history of the phonograph, Evan Eisenberg proposed, “[R]ecords not only disseminated jazz, but inseminated it—that in some ways they created what we now call jazz.”<sup>15</sup> This hyperbolic endorsement of a certain technological causation, or mechanical impregnation, is, perhaps, mildly tongue in cheek, meant to puncture the pretensions of a romantic view of (pure, authentic, or real) jazz—one in which the true jazz, informal live performance, is only secondarily captured by the technological apparatus of recording equipment. Jazz as we know it, Eisenberg suggests, was at least partially created in the interstices of an economic restructuring of the production and distribution of recorded commodities—improvising in the studio was less a snapshot of the authentic practice of the “jazzers” than it was a way to escape paying royalties to the holders of song copyrights. That is an important part of the story, but only part. This chapter shares the assumption that the intellectual and cultural history of “jazz”—as a genre, a set of musical practices, a style, a

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (London: Routledge, 1991) is a pioneering effort to think the material, the affective, and the symbolic together in situated ethnographic writing that crafts an immanent critique of the “nervous system” of capitalist totality. I have been influenced as well by Taussig’s readings of Benjamin in this work and elsewhere.

<sup>15</sup> Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records, and Culture From Aristotle to Zappa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 118. The argument is elaborated 118-123.

culture, an ideology, and, ultimately, a terrain of struggle—is coeval with the history of recording technology, and more broadly, the history of the capitalist production of sound objects as commodities. It argues, however, that the work jazz did over the course of the mid-twentieth century was ultimately too contradictory, too shot through with antagonism, to sustain any unitary understanding of “what we call jazz.” Understood historically, jazz was a hegemonic terrain, a discursive object caught in a series of contests over the rules of the game, and perhaps a quintessential floating signifier of the century’s cultural history. Jazz, as I will repeat through this chapter, was not a thing.

Which is not to say it was nothing. But the ideological baggage jazz had to carry ultimately proved too much to bear—there was an excess that could not be contained: jazz was too dangerous, too immoral, too sexual, too intoxicating, too anti-bourgeois, too bourgeois, too black, too European, too democratic, too authoritarian, too improvisational, too scripted, too mechanical, too intellectual, and too natural to survive. What J. A. Rogers called jazz’s “marvel of paradox” and what Eric Porter has more recently described as its “critical ecumenism” both had a dark side: jazz could be deployed in a variety of contexts, could be used, so to speak, for private gain or at cross-purposes.<sup>16</sup> At some elusive time in the late 1960s or 1970s, when the death of jazz became a general fear, what was lost was not a musical tradition but the potency of the signifier itself. Serial attempts to revive it notwithstanding, the magic was gone.

Good riddance? Well, the idea that jazz is dead is also ideological. But as the next section of this chapter will document, it was pronounced by dozens of authors in as many popular publications; although “the death of jazz” is a trope that is nearly as old as the name jazz itself, these pronouncements were concentrated between 1967 and 1974, and they were

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<sup>16</sup> J. A. Rogers, “Jazz at Home,” in *The New Negro*, Ed., Alain LeRoy Locke (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 216-224. Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*



almost exclusively looking back to an uncertain moment in the recent past. This, I suggest, is a historical riddle: why did jazz seem to perish for observers in the 1970s (and why did other actors find it necessary to resurrect jazz in its “classical” or “conservative” form in the 1980s)? The usual alibis are important to note, but insufficient as explanation: the explosive rise in the dissemination and cultural importance of rock music, and the related migration of the “youth market” towards rock as the hegemonic cultural form (and away from folk and jazz); the relatively less popular, more forbidding aesthetics of the “avant-garde” itself; beyond the avant-garde, a general feeling of stagnation or repetition in jazz aesthetics; the severing of an earlier relationship between the civil rights movement and modern jazz as both black radical activists and mass black audiences turned to R&B and funk; most importantly, and too rarely noted, the ongoing destruction of the built environment that had nurtured “jazz as we know it” through so-called “urban renewal” and the withdrawal of government and finance capital from inner cities.

I prefer to analyze the discursive articulations of a certain *end* of jazz before and after 1968 as symptomatic of an ideological transformation, rather than, for instance, a purely musicological development or a shift in generational mass tastes. That is because an accurate reading of the historical record, I believe, points away from any attempt systematically to define jazz as a musical object, or as a genre that transhistorically obeys certain rules. Instead, I would propose we analyze jazz as one of the twentieth century’s important *floating signifiers* and *master signifiers*. It will be useful to introduce a brief definition of these terms here.

Loosely adapted from Claude Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of Marcel Mauss (and subsequently recited by Jacques Derrida’s seminal “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”), the concept of a floating signifier refers to a word without a referent, or whose referent is always slipping away from signification—a word whose meaning is polyvalent and

subject to constant reiteration, repurposing, to being supplemented, and to the play of political and poetic forces. Jazz was originally, in one reading, onomatopoeic, and in another it is slang for the sexual act, or for sexual fluid—it was certainly used by many early musicians and writers as a verb for the creation of the named object itself: to jazz a piece of music was to make of it something jazz-like, to swing it, to rag it, or otherwise defamiliarize it in a way that was homily (if sometimes uncannily) recognizable.<sup>17</sup> Beyond the origins of the word itself, always already slipping away into an irretrievable past, the history of its use strongly contends for thinking of jazz as a sign that floats among possible significations. While we may construct, from the present, a notion of jazz that assembles traces of its past meanings in ways that are usable today, such a notion would have to abandon or excise a great deal of the term's historical usage (e.g. the deep connections between jazz and interwar primitivism, or the idea that pure jazz is fundamentally different from swing, bebop, etc.). As will be explored more fully in the sections and chapters to come, jazz did important and contradictory work to sustain, modulate, and deform the discourses of race into which it was thrown; and jazz, as a floating signifier, came to do various kinds of work in complex intersection with other signifiers of racial difference. It is important to note early on, as well, that jazz was never innocent, never free/autonomous from the racio-political forces it interacted with. The ideologies of jazz were deeply imbricated in raciological thought and systems of racial control, but they operated differently: jazz's currency was less the ideology of biological difference than the mysticism of spiritual transcendence. If jazz effected a kind of domination, it was in its constant imperative to enjoyment; if it offered liberation, it was

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<sup>17</sup> LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), "Swing: From Verb to Noun," in *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow, 1999) makes a case for the idea that the commodification of black music was deeply imbricated in this transformation from swing as a verb describing a way of making music to swing as an exchangeable commodity.

often in the languages of magic, transmigration, and desire. But that is getting ahead of the argument.

To say that jazz signified differently in different discursive articulations (Adorno's more pointed version: "jazz is not what it 'is' ... [but] what it is used for") and leave it at that, however, is to overlook the tremendously varied and historically contradictory work that jazz performed as a particularly potent floating signifier. That is why I think it is justified to consider jazz, at least prior to 1968, also as a *master signifier*. The latter term originated in the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, for whom the master signifier is that which halts the train of signification and establishes what he calls a *point de capiton*, a "quilting point" that sutures discourse and meaning and brings a certain "harmony" to the proceedings. That this harmony is unstable, based on a fundamental lack, that the power grab of the master signifier is always contingent and never *a priori* justified, is of course crucial to Lacan's theory. Around the arbitrary imposition of a master signifier coalesce the "free-floating" fears, anxieties, and desires of cultural discourse. It might seem trivial to note that "mastery" is a habitual trope in jazz discourse: the highest compliment, the most overused advertisement. Yet even this banal repetition is a starting point to analyze how jazz mastery as a trope is used to protect and defend the ineffability of the music and the supposed knowledge of its interpreters and critics. And, even as a verbal tic recurring through the history of jazz criticism and promotion, it reinforces the masculinity of the music at the cost of a fundamental repression of the feminine.<sup>18</sup> In black music studies, feminist scholars have

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<sup>18</sup> As Slavoj Žižek relates Lacanian doxa, "what the symbolic order precludes is the full harmonious presence of the couple of Master-Signifiers,  $S_1$ — $S_2$ , *yin-yang*, or any other two symmetrical 'fundamental principles.' The fact that 'there is no sexual relationship' means precisely that the secondary signifier (that of the Woman) is 'primordially repressed,' and *what we get in the place of this repression, what fills in its gap, is the multitude of 'returns of the repressed,' the series of 'ordinary' signifiers.*" Later in the same passage, Žižek clears up a possible misreading of the primordial repression as establishing a binary logic: "The difference between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  is thus not the difference of two opposed poles within the same field but, rather, the cut inherent to the one term, its noncoincidence with itself: the original couple is not that of two signifiers, but that of the signifier and its *reduplicatio*, that is to

done significant work over the last generation to recover the forgotten histories of black female blues musicians, their sexual politics, and their centrality to the early recording industry. Sherrie Tucker's brilliant study of women swing musicians demonstrates that the absence of women from jazz history is thoroughly ideological, not a historical absence to be lamented (as in so many works of jazz criticism) but a significant historical erasure. In later chapters I will have more to say about gender and the construction of jazz fields, discourses, and subjects, focusing both on key female musicians and on how masculinity was figured in the transformations of the 1960s and 1970s, but for now I merely want to point out that the invocation of jazz as a master signifier here is meant to offer a critique of, rather than reproduce, the often-cited "masculinism" of, and elision of women from, jazz history.

An example of the kind of work jazz could perform to quilt together discourses of race, class, gender, and cultural hierarchy can be found in an early articulation of the trope of "the death of jazz." I said before that this trope occurred with increasing frequency in the 1960s and was reminisced upon later as something particular to the mid- to late-1960s, but in fact the death of jazz was feared, welcomed, and commented upon throughout its history. The Bloomsbury aesthete and formalist Clive Bell, in *The New Republic* of September 1921, was one of the first to make elaborate predictions that jazz might fall into death.<sup>19</sup> For Bell, jazz's imminent demise was most welcome, as the music and its influence on artists was at best "irritating"—and at worst a revolt of "riff-raff" that threatened the achievements of civilization. Bell's fear and disdain were certainly driven by a casual but virulent racism, but it is worth exploring in detail the specific contours of the specter that jazz presented to an aesthete of Bell's stature and cast of mind.

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say, the minimal difference between a signifier and the place of its inscription, between one and zero." Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 38.

<sup>19</sup> Clive Bell, "Plus de Jazz," *New Republic*, September 21, 1921, 92-96.

For him, “[t]he Jazz movement is a ripple on a wave; the wave—the large movement which began at the end of the nineteenth century in a reaction against realism and scientific paganism—still goes forward.” It is difficult to date precisely the irruption of “jazz” into the common sense of the transatlantic intelligentsia: the first wave of phonograph recordings marketed heavily as jazz appeared in the spring of 1917, but it was not until 1919 that the word appeared, outside of advertisements, in newspaper prose.<sup>20</sup> In the 1910s, jazz and “jass” were often used interchangeably, and it wasn’t until the end of the decade that the former spelling was standard. The famous white band, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was among the first ensembles to record as jazz musicians, in 1917, and in a style that later historians have felt comfortable attaching the label of jazz, but the term itself was attached to a variety of musical performances. The vogue for jazz in the late 1910s was in part stimulated by the long-standing marketability of black vocal performances, from George W. Johnson to Bert Williams to the Fisk Jubilee Singers to a range of male singing quartets. Jazz historians have traditionally looked to early recordings as traces of earlier, unrecorded performances that have descended into myth (e.g. the mythological figure of Buddy Bolden, the lost exponent of the “true origins” of jazz), or for clues to the later evolution of the music from group improvisations on basic musical structures to musical structure as support to virtuosic solo improvisation. But beyond the specialist desire to trace musical continuities along the grain and across the groove of the recorded trace, it is important to keep in mind that interest in “jazz” in the 1910s and 1920s was a cultural movement outside of the genre categories later critics, historians, and ethnographers imposed.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> On the “Jazz Spring” see Tim Brooks *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), esp. 280.

<sup>21</sup> On the emergence of jazz records in 1917, see Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business: The First Four Hundred Years, Vol. III: 1900-1984* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29-31. Sanjek focuses on recordings by Victor and Columbia, the former being the first major label to make significant profits on jazz records. Also see Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures From Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of

To anxious aesthetes like Bell, jazz meant nothing so much as the popular—or rather, whatever sets of contradictory social forces can be grouped under that term: the young, the female, the uneducated, the bohemian, the homosexual, the black, the ethnic. Jazz, the taste for it, symbolized to some the entry into cultural life of previously excluded voices.<sup>22</sup> Listen to the terms Bell employs: “Jazz is very young: like short skirts, it suits thin, girlish legs.”<sup>23</sup> Jazz “jeers and grimaces” at the “grown-up” artistic intelligentsia it cannot fathom, as it is composed of “children and savages,” and “the stupid and vulgar.”<sup>24</sup> Later historians have reconstructed the “bourgeois” origins of many jazz musicians and their professional and entrepreneurial approach to the “jazz business,” but it is also important to reconstruct the fears of the popular, which were projected onto the stock characters of blackface minstrelsy and imperialist rhetoric as well as the spectacle of modern womanhood, that jazz engendered.

Another important caveat to an understanding of “what jazz was” amidst the end of the war, the first red scare, the “return to normalcy,” and the resumption of monopoly capitalism and increasing levels of consumption is that “jazz” was a broad label signifying the early transformation of sound recording into a major component of entertainment capitalism, or what Adorno and Horkheimer would later call “the culture industry.” What historian Jeffrey Jackson notes for the French context could apply across Europe and to a

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California Press, 2003), for an ethnographic study of the encounters between black musical practices and the recording industry. For the importance of ethnographic practices and intellectual history in constructing the categories of American music, particularly along the color line, see especially Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). For an excellent documentation of the early history of recording African American performers, see Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, especially Chapter 25. For a theoretically rich account of Bert Williams and transnational racial formation, see Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darky”: Bert Williams, Black-on-Black Minstrelsy and the African Diaspora*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> For an intellectual history of feminism, sexual and spiritual radicalism, and bohemian circles in Greenwich Village, see Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: H. Holt, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Bell, 93,

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-95.

lesser extent the U.S.: “The word *jazz* applied to any sound marked as something different,” and thus the word not only spread over a wide field of contemporary dance music, but also came to signify modernity qua urban industrial capitalism.<sup>25</sup> Conservatives like Bell were horrified by the threat to cultural elites represented by a system of mechanically reproduced artistic commodities—never named as such in his essay but omnipresent in its judgments. For example, for him the essence of jazz is “impudence which finds its technical equivalent in syncopation: impudence which rags.” In jazz, with its surprise, brevity, and superficiality, “there is a typically modern craving for small profits and quick returns.” Nineteenth century artists catered to “*la bonne compagnie*—the rich that is to say” he notes, but had the good sense to separate art from the sentimentality and superficiality of the fads of the well heeled.

What horrified cultural conservatives like Bell was that the new vogue for jazz pierced the fantasy of a decorous and stable class system in the arts. Where once artists might have exchanged flattery for patronage from the rich, they knew it was part of the game, that the fickle tastes of the rich had little bearing on the relatively autonomous development of high Culture. The emergence of jazz threw that class system (imaginary though it may have been) into the dustbin.<sup>26</sup> Artists now kept company with untutored black minstrels, which may have been troubling enough, but Bell complained that artists were succumbing to a dangerous fantasy when they supposed that these black jazzers, “besides

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<sup>25</sup> Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Levine has shown in his influential work *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) that the class-based cultural apparatus to which Bell appeals was only gradually constructed over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bell’s evocation of the timeless relations of status and patronage concealed the historicity and fragility of his own conceptions. (And ours, as Levine sounds a note of caution: “The cultural categories we live with can become vehicles of comprehension not mystification only insofar as we remember just how human and fragile, how recent and porous they have been and continue to be,” *Ibid*, 242.) Moreover, it is well known that for opponents of jazz in this period, the music and its racial and class connotations—including and especially the easy slippage into minstrel stereotypes—acted as a screen upon which the white and privileged projected their anxieties about the disruptions of time and space in urban modernity.

being the jolliest people on earth ... were the most sensitive and critically gifted .... the possessors of natural, uncorrupted taste.”<sup>27</sup>

Populist follies might be expected among the idle rich, but their repetition by respectable artists was worrisome. Moreover, the commercial success of jazz boded ill: “Naturally the movement was a success at the Ritz and in Grub Street, Mayfair.” For readers unversed in the symbolism of London cartography, Bell was saying that jazz and associated literary movements were popular among the rich leisure class, the hack publishing houses, and the denizens of the banking district. Jazz appealed to the rich, and to the commercial interests controlling the production of culture; speculating mildly, we might say, jazz signified here the encroaching extension of monopoly capitalism into the last remaining vestiges of an autonomous art world; its death could not come too soon.

It is secondarily the musical form itself that offended Bell—indeed, in his view jazz was essentially formless. Rather, it was the larger fad, and the threat it represented to critical judgment and authority, and to the elite reserve of aestheticism, that Bell rejected in jazz. The proper use of jazz was as a raw material for artistic production, as was shown by the individual artists who had made good use of it. Stravinsky, for example, “has been influenced much by nigger rhythms and nigger methods.” And the “unmistakably ... great” T. S. Eliot is another example “whose agonizing labors seem to have been eased somewhat by the comfortable ministrations of a black and grinning muse.”<sup>28</sup> This is certainly not the only, nor

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<sup>27</sup> Bell, “Plus de Jazz.”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 94. He continues: “Midwifery, to be sure, seems an odd occupation for a lady whom one pictures rather in the rôle of a flapper: but a mid-wife was what the poet needed and in that capacity she has served him. Apparently it is only by adopting a demurely irreverent attitude, by being primly indolent, and by playing the devil with the instrument of Shakespeare and Milton, that Mr. Eliot is able occasionally to deliver himself of one of those complicated and remarkable imaginings of his: apparently it is only in language, of an exquisite purity so far as material goes, but twisted and ragged out of easy recognition that these nurslings can be swathed.” A few things stand out in this extraordinary passage—the history of black domestic labor is essentially un-remarked, but its profound effects on white identities comes clear, even if through an almost unconscious slippage of address. Is it the midwife/flapper who is “demurely irreverent” and “primly indolent”—why the repetition?—who “play[s] the devil” with the “instrument” of language? What is this



the most celebrated instance of black people identified as the midwife of transatlantic culture, or in particular of modernism. The casualness of the racist figuration is striking: Bell's "grinning muse" is a sympathetic support for Eliot's art, a "ragged" resource to allow the history of language itself to be "ragged" as a light classical work might be by a New Orleans pianist. It seems that in its subterranean architecture, it was canonical white modernism in addition to the black modernisms of Alain Locke, Bessie Smith, or Langston Hughes that was informed, in Houston Baker's words, by a "deformation of mastery" and a "mastery of form" that took its cue from the vernacularism of black musical styling.<sup>29</sup>

"Only the riff-raff has been affected," Bell reassures us, "Italian futurism is the nearest approach to a pictorial expression of the Jazz spirit." If jazz is a kind of modernism, a kind of avant-garde, it is the kind that makes noise for the sake of cacophony, that tears down the old in religious fervor of the coming of the new, that glorifies the machine as the transcendence of humanity. Adorno echoes this sentiment through a haze of dialectical distortion, pronouncing in 1944 "the jazz machine will pound away for ever." Back at its moment of insemination, Clive Bell intones, "The movement bounced into the world somewhere around the year 1911. It was headed by a band and troupe of niggers, dancing." Note that historical gap between jazz's history as cultural movement and jazz's history as a recorded object: the pernicious appeal of black sounds and black bodies was doing its work, undermining all "intellect or culture" before jazz was a genre. Bell's extreme racism, difficult

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instrument—tongue, pen, phallus—and who owns it? It turns out that it is Eliot who plays the wet nurse: his genius is in how his language is marked by the feminine, and specifically by the sly indolence and silent irreverence of the domestic laborer. Violence done to the offspring, a verbal tongue-lashing done to the inheritance of literary English, a carnivalesque reversal of racialized positions of master and subservient, each of these "rags" the poem before it is even swaddled (in the clothing of privilege?). Modernism was constructed in a terroristic intimacy with blackness. Different elements combine in the ecstatic and fearful white appropriation of blackness: the laboring and nurturing (female) body as blank text; the wry intelligence masked as indolent stupidity; the playful mangling of language; the gleeful, grinning ignorance of established protocol—blackness which despite being wholly artifice, sly grin and ecstatic praise, black and white, all playing a game and wearing masks: blackness which is reified as archaic, natural humanity itself.

<sup>29</sup> Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

for a good postmodern “postracial” liberalism to hear, serves a specific purpose here: to lament the corrosion of privilege by the invasion of the masses, dancing in ludic absurdity to the beat of primitive drums, led by a “troupe of niggers”—it was not blackness per se but the black leadership of the cultural movement that threatened a revolution against Culture, and perhaps obliquely, against Capital.

Niggers can be admired artists without any gift more singular than high spirits: so why drag in the intellect? Besides, to bring intellect into art is to invite home a guest who is apt to be inquisitive and even impartial. Intellect in Jazz circles is treated rather as money was once in polite society—it is taken for granted. Nobility, Beauty and intellectual subtlety are alike ruled out: the first two are held up to ridicule, the last is simply abused. What Jazz wants are romps and fun and to make fun; that is why, as I have said, its original name Rag-time was the better. At its best, Jazz rags everything.<sup>30</sup>

The racist hysteria of this passage might serve to blind us to its construction of a pernicious set of intellectual oppositions that still operate, even if, to use Ralph Ellison’s phrase, “at the lower frequencies.” At one level, one might pose the history of black music as an elaborate, multilayered dialectic answer to this objection, an ongoing refutation of the opposition between thought and affect, intellect and embodiment, inquisitiveness and fun. Yet such a proposition risks losing track of the revolutionary force feared precisely in Bell’s fear of the rule of the uncultured:

[B]ecause to people who reflected for an instant it seemed highly improbable that fox-trotters and shimmy shakers were sensitive or interesting people, that Christie Minstrels were great musicians, or that pub-crawlers and demi-mondaines were poets, there sprang simultaneously into existence a respectable, intelligent and ill-tempered opposition which did, and continues to do, gross injustice to the genuine artists who have drawn inspiration, or sustenance at any rate, from Jazz.

At long last, Bell’s critique is a defense of jazz both from its admirers and rejecters, an attempt at cultural salvage, a mission to rescue the art jazz inspired from the social movement that threatened art itself. Along with Bell’s racism, is a set of class fears that can

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<sup>30</sup> Bell, 93.

be summed up thus: the victory of minstrelsy. He cautions the counterrevolutionary forces against unnecessary fervor in purging the art world of the vestiges of jazz, but naturalizes the opposition to the mainstreaming of the proletarian, quasi-lumpen, constituency for minstrelsy.<sup>31</sup> Another piece of the work jazz was doing by this period was a long-term transmutation of the constituencies and conventions of the peculiar American cultural formation of blackface minstrelsy. As Eric Lott says of James Kennard, what Bell feared was the insurrectionary implications of the mastery of the affects and gestures of white civilization by black music's "rude opera".

### A Brief History of the Death of Jazz

It is outside the purview of aesthetics today whether it is to become art's necrology; yet it must not play at delivering graveside sermons, certifying the end, savoring the past, and abdicating in favor of one sort of barbarism as recompense for its own monstrosity. Whether art is abolished, perishes, or despairingly hangs on, it is not mandated that the content [*Gebalt*] of past art perish.... Art and artworks are perishable, not simply because by their heteronomy they are dependent, but because right into the smallest detail of their anatomy, which sanctions the socially determined splitting off of spirit by the division of

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<sup>31</sup> This statement obliquely enters the debate about the class and race significations of minstrelsy, a debate that has generated a vast literature. Recent work on turn of the century black performers have transformed our understanding of the historical trajectory of minstrelsy. See in particular Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) and Louis Onuorah Chude-Sokei on Bert Williams, *The Last "Darky": Bert Williams, Black-On-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Jazz literature is ideologically invested in disavowing any connection between minstrelsy and jazz. There is much work to be done to understand the historical pathways among kinds of performance, but I want merely to suggest that just as minstrelsy is too complex to reduce to a catalogue of racist stereotypes (as it is often presented in jazz literature), so jazz has more going on than a refusal of those stereotypes: many are precisely deployed, with a modernist tinge. For Stanley Crouch, the minstrel stereotypes, particularly Zip Coon, are alive and well in contemporary black music (yet jazz is a sophisticated escape valve that must be conserved). My own view is that while there are many significant continuities among minstrelsy, black theatrical shows, vaudeville, and jazz, an important irruption occurs, and constantly recurs, that marks the entry of something new (call it jazz, or don't): what I call the virtuosic spectacle. The spectacle of instrumental or affective facility—not as a supplement but as the object of spectatorship—is the key to "jazz modernism," and marks a break from the routinized forms that preceded it.

labor, they are not only art but something foreign and opposed to it. Admixed with art's own concept is the ferment of its own abolition.

--Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*<sup>32</sup>

Putting aside for the moment the vexed question of the end(s) of art, a commonplace of aesthetic thought since at least Hegel, it is worth examining the specific set of discourses that accompanied lamentations and celebrations of the death of jazz. Before any consensus existed as to the artistic status of jazz music and dance, it was declared dead: a dead fad, a dead parasite, a dead rebellion that had threatened to counter-colonize the bodies of metropolitan youth. A central goal of this dissertation is to fill in the gap of “jazz historiography” between the mid 1960s and mid 1980s, and to do that we must understand the complex of reasons why jazz was believed to be dead during this period. Of course, this was most usually a “second-order” belief: commentators less often proclaimed the death of jazz than proclaimed its vitality against an unnamed critical or popular consensus that it had perished. Much of the existing historiography proceeds as if this rhetorical move were specific to the period after about 1967. For instance, John Gennari’s indispensable history of jazz criticism begins with a reminiscence of the author marveling at the contradiction between assertions of jazz death and the musical activity of the late 1970s “loft” scene in New York City. As we will see, this contradiction, the weight of the sociological presence of a living performance culture against the popular consensus that such performances were epigonal at best, haunted accounts of jazz after 1968.

There is something specific to be noted about what happened to jazz around 1968: something that cannot be assimilated into jazz’s progressive historical narratology, a break that remains a conceptual obstruction to jazz’s narratological destiny as the aesthetic

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<sup>32</sup> Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 4.

correlative to liberal democracy. However we define that specificity, however, the introduction of jazz necrology alone cannot bracket it. On the contrary, jazz death has been historically coterminous with its life as a globally disseminated art form. Taking Adorno's lead, it will be useful to, rather than declare for or against the "necrology" of jazz, instead examine "the smallest detail of [jazz's] anatomy," to identify that within jazz that is "foreign and opposed" to it—in other words, to identify how social antagonism is inscribed into the form of jazz, into its discourses, and into its inscribed history of recorded objects.

Jazz first died, or at least had its first public obituary, in the early days of 1920, in British India. A brief notice in *The India Times* pointed out that "[i]t has been asserted that the Jazz is dead."<sup>33</sup> Yet no sooner had it died that it was revived as an unnatural living dead, an exotic hybrid that took over bodies and public spaces like a virus. The "jazz" in the *Times* description is not music, but a dance, whose revival was instigated by young British men and women.

Their explanation was that it really is a jazz-fox-trot with Oriental variations or a fox-trot step to a tango melody. The music begins with an Oriental tom-tom theme, to which a fox-trot is danced. A portion of tango is then added, and the whole swells to a modern jazz refrain, sinking back to the original Oriental at the finish.

The actual dance is really like an awkward form of jazz waltz, with leaps, dips, and twirls, which are presumably the Oriental variations. The characteristic feature of the dance is however, the extraordinary effect produced in three of the steps, were both dancers either stand upon one leg and thrust the other in the air at an angle of 45deg., or each thrusts one leg behind in a species of crouching cup [?]. This crouching movement worked into the rhythm produces a crab-like progress round the floor which is neither elegant nor easy.

One thing is clear. Larger ball-rooms will be needed if the "super jazz" becomes, as its creators say it will, "the dance of the future," for its [sic] needs, above all else, plenty of room.<sup>34</sup>

It is worth lingering a moment in this potent imperial stew—an origin story for jazz that, like Wynton Marsalis's favorite metaphor of jazz as gumbo, and like André Hodeir's contrasting

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<sup>33</sup> "Super Jazz," *The Times of India*, Jan 13, 1920, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

civilizationist metaphor of jazz as a “monstrous grafting,” imagines jazz as a constructed entity, manufactured or brewed or bred into being as a self-conscious mélange of past and present, both a denizen of a romanticized, prehistoric past beyond the ken of civilization itself, and a harbinger of a future beyond. Jazz as golem, or Frankenstein’s monster, a zombification of the embodied movements and speech of the susceptible young: in this strange flash of history, like one of Walter Benjamin’s historical images, there is much that threatens to be forgotten in our present image of jazz as an intellectual art music. Benjamin’s exhortation that we see our present as intended in the forgotten image requires a certain dismantling or bracketing of the respectability—or, in Benjamin’s own terms, the aura of authenticity—that has become affixed to our historical understanding of what jazz is, what it signifies. This glimpse of the leisure time of imperial rule has much to teach about the global itinerary of early jazz: a suspiciously passé dance style in a British India witnessing the rapid coalescing of anticolonial nationalism, jazz had already traveled rapidly through the circuits of late colonial modernity, a globalized music *avant la lettre*.<sup>35</sup>

In June 1921 the London *Observer* included in its regular feature, “Sayings of the Week”—tidbits of social analysis from MPs, royals, and other members of the swell set (“Capital, in my view, should be let alone”—*Mr. T[homas] Wintringham, [Liberal] M.P.*; “The Labour leader, the professional politician, the academical Socialist are pests and parasites of the worst kind”—*Dean [William Ralph] Inge*; “In Africa the population is docile and the country fruitful: in Mesopotamia and the Middle East the country is arid and the population ferocious—*Mr. [Winston] Churchill*”)—the following dictum: “Jazz’ is practically dead—*H. Jordan*.”<sup>36</sup> The Washington Post quipped in early 1922 that, “The rumor that jazz is dead is

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<sup>35</sup> Compare Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> “Sayings of the Week,” *Observer*, Jun 12 1921, p. 10.

made credible by the fact that it has been so much in company with bootleg liquor of late.”<sup>37</sup> The satirist John Kendrick Bangs published a poem, “On the Death of Jazz,” in late 1921 that playfully announced the continued omnipresence of the music’s “jangled measures” and “raucous razz.” He even “[found] it in the capers/Of the Bolshevistic papers.” This mode of presentation, as rumor or joke, became relatively common in newspaper filler. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* pronounced in 1927 the corpse of jazz “STILL NOISY: The bishop who says that jazz is dead is going by his sense of smell rather than that of hearing.”<sup>38</sup>

If we read these rumors, jokes, and nervous denials repeated across metropolitan print culture through an imperial lens, it might be possible to discern something of the threat that jazz represented within late colonial modernity. Without it being thinkable, perhaps jazz sounded the death knell of imperialist hegemony? What kind of psychic compensation was made possible by the circulation of the news of its death? The potentials of such a reading are inviting, but are frustrated in part by the discordant confusion of the discursive record. The imprecision of the word “jazz” caused some perplexity—not only in its vaguely unsettling social implications, but particularly in its ritual fusion of music and dance. Indeed, one attack on jazz was carefully parsed so as to exclude its “terspichorean” reference; and some announcements of the death of jazz referred specifically to the passing of certain dance styles.<sup>39</sup>

A controversy erupted in the *New York Times* in 1927 over British musicologist Ernest Newman’s attack on jazz. He complained of being asked “to explain why, if jazz is a dead thing from the neck up that I said it was, I took so much trouble trying to kill it.”<sup>40</sup> It

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<sup>37</sup> “Natural Enough,” *Washington Post*, Feb 21 1922, p.11

<sup>38</sup> “Still Noisy,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 21 1927.

<sup>39</sup> Ernest Newman, “Summing Up Music’s Case Against Jazz,” *New York Times*, Mar 6, 1927, SM3. “Dancers Say Death of Jazz Has Come,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 16, 1928, p. 8. N.B. the latter story refers to the meeting of the International Dance Foundation in Paris.

<sup>40</sup> Newman, “Summing Up.”

was not the authority of the classical tradition that was threatened, in his view; indeed, jazzers were not smart enough to parody classics: “they are merely hearty grinning chaw-bacons.” The imperial dimensions of the “death of jazz” are unusually clear in Newman’s dismissal of the generic integrity of jazz: “There is not, and never can be, a specifically jazz technique of music, apart from orchestration. We might as well suppose there can be such a thing as Mohammedan mathematics, or Buddhist biology, or Peruvian psychology, as suppose that there can be, in the last resort, such a thing as jazz music as distinct from ordinary music.” Jazz was a contradiction, not a comfortable hybrid of disparate styles, but a threat to the Occidental preserve of reason and musical order. About George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, he wrote that it “reminds me of the gentleman in ‘Pickwick Papers’ who, having to write an essay on Chinese metaphysics, read up first ‘China’ and then ‘metaphysics’ in the encyclopedia and ‘combined the information.’” He admits jazz is rhythmically inventive, but protests that rhythms are childishly easy to invent. “Regarded in the abstract,” jazz rhythms “are new in the sense that they arrange the time-units in unaccustomed ways. But the jazz writers who are now trying to use these rhythms are not their masters but their slaves: they can exploit them musically only by embedding them in the most woeful melodic commonplaces and harmonic clichés.”

Against such rhetorical overturning of the stable U.S. racial order, the *New York Times* had earlier editorialized patriotically in favor of the classical adaptation of jazz to a higher cultural plan. The editorial board complained, “As if it were not enough to say that jazz is monotonous in its rhythms; that the jazz writers are illiterates; that there are no real ‘composers’ of jazz; that jazz is not an art but an industry; that jazz is dead or dying, Mr.



NEWMAN goes on to denounce most severely the jazzers of the classics.... Think of the classics waiting to be jazzed.”<sup>41</sup>

By the mid-1930s, jazz’s popularity became too dominant to refute, even as the emergent intellectuals of the new field of jazz criticism began their definitional battles over the relations among rag, jazz, and swing. The Baltimore *Afro-American* celebrated the overcoming of the discourse of jazz death as a confirmation of black people’s cultural influence: “Musical experts who recently predicted the death of jazz and the end of the so-called ‘Negro’ influence on music reckoned without the youngsters who love dancing.” With prescient, ironic, and vast understatement, the editors conclude, “Evidently our influence on music and dancing is not on the wane.”<sup>42</sup> Yet the 1930s also witnessed the first large-scale battles among Euro-American jazz writers over the true identity of jazz. And they were ushered in by a second wave of heralds of the death of jazz.

Moreover, for a number of radicals across the world, the hopes that jazz would prove a form for the radicalization of mass audiences were fading in the early 1930s, to the point where it was commonly expected that jazz would die a natural and quiet death. Presaging his later writings on jazz, Adorno himself wrote in 1932, “The end of jazz, long prophesied, has come.”<sup>43</sup> This comment presaged his own “Farewell to Jazz,” written on the occasion of a German radio station’s attempt to curry favor with the Nazi regime by banning “*Negerjazz*” from the airwaves. As Jonathan Wipplinger argues, Adorno’s welcoming of the disappearance of jazz recapitulated the terms of a Weimar-era debate about jazz and German identity, but in the service of a desire to keep the place of “light music” empty under the new

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<sup>41</sup> “An Affront to Jazz,” *New York Times*, Sep. 17, 1926, 20.

<sup>42</sup> “Everybody’s Truckin’,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Feb 16, 1936, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Wipplinger, “The Jazz Republic: Music, Race, and American Culture in Weimar Germany” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2006), 312. Wipplinger notes, “For [Siegfried] Kracauer as for many in the years between the depression and the Nazi takeover, jazz’s popularity was at best a quaint anachronism, at worst a sign of false consciousness.”

regime, to preserve a perceptible gap between emancipatory desire and its false or illusory satisfaction by the commodities of the culture industry.<sup>44</sup>

It was not only cultural radicals who lost faith in jazz amid the political economic tumult of the thirties, however. While one can track the periodic recurrence of the “death of jazz” as a discursive trope, its continual (re)emergence was often linked to periods of severe economic instability in the production of the music. In his panoramic history of the American recording business, Russell Sanjek notes that, after the stock market crash of 1929, in which the music industry temporarily all but collapsed, “The race market was the first to evaporate; only the hot dance bands—those of Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, King Oliver, all on Victor—and certain white Red Nichols units issued among the race disks managed to hold on for a time, principally due to large demand by college students.”<sup>45</sup> Note the early appearance of the “ironic” support of the economics of black music by a white proto-intelligentsia. What is important to note about the 1930s, which witnessed the eventual reconstruction of the recording industry precisely on the mass marketing of black music as swing, is that the economic precariousness of black “experimental” music—and Ellington, Henderson, Oliver, and Armstrong were nothing if not musically sophisticated innovators—was nothing new in the postwar period. Moreover, the problematic financial ground of black cultural nationalism is also apparent in this earlier period: cultural nationalism requires an economic infrastructure, and “leisure” purchases like records are difficult to sustain in hard times. Critic Gary Giddins notes that from the 1930s onward, “[f]or half a century, each generation mourned anew the passing of jazz because each idealized the particular jazz of its

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<sup>44</sup> See Ibid, 304-324 for a brilliant reading of “Farewell to Jazz” in the context of the Weimar-era reception of jazz in Germany. Wiplinger’s argument about Adorno’s strategic interventions, that they were concerned to disrupt the false utopia of jazz immediacy, desublimated desire, and collectivity that was central to the bourgeois primitivist construction of jazz, is a brilliant and original position in the debates on Adorno and jazz and has been generative for my own thinking about Adorno.

<sup>45</sup> Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music*, 72.

youth.”<sup>46</sup> As this section has tried to demonstrate, however, the mourning work of jazz as a trope obscures as much as it reveals: differing aesthetic and ideological projects, differing hopes and fears for the trajectory of jazz in relation to other modernisms, and differing relations to the material infrastructure of urban space, the recording industry, and the apparatus of commercial culture.

### The Death of Jazz and the Postwar World: Nightclubs and Catechistic Nostalgia

The trope of the death of jazz returned as a specter haunting promotional, trade, and critical discourse in the 1960s, but it was strangely reclaimed in the 1959 short film *The Cry of Jazz*, written and directed by Edward O. Bland and featuring the music of Sun Ra. The film was screened in Chicago at the Playboy Jazz Festival in August 1959.<sup>47</sup> When the film was screened in New York, there was a debate following featuring critical comments by novelist Ralph Ellison and jazz historian Marshall Stearns.<sup>48</sup> Bland’s film is an abstract and speculative “essay” on the spiritual reasons for jazz’s existence and the inevitability of its disintegration or transcendence. The film’s limited narrative structure is built around a cocktail party, a device suggestive of *cinéma vérité* serving as a vehicle for the correction of white misconceptions about jazz by the film’s narrator, Alex, who pronounces on the

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<sup>46</sup> Gary Giddins, “How Come Jazz Isn’t Dead?” in Eric Weisbard, *This is Pop: In search of the elusive at Experience Music Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 39-55, 40. Giddins concludes, “The notion that jazz is dead or could die in the foreseeable future is predicated on one of two ideas: it is a narrow musical style with fixed parameters, or it is a passing fashion that has had its day. A century of development puts paid to both,” *Ibid.*, 55. Giddins proposes that jazz’s current classicist minority status will persist indefinitely, due especially to jazz’s individualist and meritocratic assessment of talent: whether that talent is honed in schools or on streets and on bandstands doesn’t matter much. However, Giddins is sensitive to the equally persistent commercial marginality of contemporary jazz. In contrast to the 1950s and early 1960s, when jazz record sales reached their historical peak, and the 1970s, when “jazz” (or a mellowed studio version of it) was a ubiquitous presence in film and television, today jazz is more or less permanently restricted to less than five percent of the U.S. record market. Only “a dot-com billionaire jazz lover” could effectively address the situation in a climate when musicians “have virtually no access to the machinery of capitalism” (53).

<sup>47</sup> “Behind Scene Notes On Big Jazz Festival,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug 4 1959, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Tynan, “A Contrast in Black and White,” *Observer*, Mar 20 1960, p. 19.

meaning of jazz as a mouthpiece for Bland himself. The film uses montage to construct a relation between sound and image: Sun Ra's Arkestra plays over images of infrastructural decay and deprivation, scenes of black urban life, churches, and musicians. The film thus thematizes precisely what would be repressed in later, formalist and aestheticist, accounts of the death of jazz: the material contexts for the production of jazz as the spiritual expression of "Negro" life. Indeed, the viewer is delivered a capsule history of jazz as the ideological projection of black life from amidst the everyday realities of white racial terror. Early jazz was "all the Negro had"; after black migrants had "escaped the inhuman South for the more cleverly inhuman North," the tight discipline of swing worked to maintain their identities against the brutal mechanization of industrial and urban life; bebop was a revolt against the Uncle Tom role of the Negro entertainer that swing, in some sectors, had developed into; the cool style, with its "thin, soft" sound and elaborate arrangements was an attenuation of the "Negro elements" of jazz. Sun Ra's music is offered as a particular culmination and synthesis of this history: he "fuses the snakelike bebop melodies with colors of Duke Ellington and the experimental changes of Thelonious Monk."<sup>49</sup>

The routinization of images of urban decay and the degradation of housing stock in a media-saturated present should not blind us to the innovation at work here: symbolically, mass cultural images of jazz at midcentury were dominated by the (sub)urban pastoral and the specter of urban moral pathology. The 1960 release *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, filmed at the

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<sup>49</sup> Edward O. Bland, *The Cry of Jazz*, Quantum Leap, 2004 [1959], DVD. John Szwed notes that Sun Ra did not agree with Bland's assessment, but it was unclear whether he disagreed with the prophesy of jazz's death through transformation into a "new way of life" or with the whole historico-ideological interpretation of jazz as intimately connected with the material and spiritual realities of twentieth-century black life. As Szwed's biography made clear, Sun Ra had his own elaborate answers to the latter set of connections, more than likely incompatible with Bland's own rather schematic-functional account. Nevertheless Bland's "essayistic" argument in the film is interesting in its own right as an attempt to engage with the depoliticizing narratives of existing jazz discourse, and offers an interesting counterpoint to Sun Ra's own, relatively hermetic, intellectual stylization. See Szwed, *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 161-163, 163, and passim.

1958 Newport Jazz Festival, more or less concurrently with *The Cry of Jazz*, mixed images of musicians, well-heeled audience members relaxing on the grass, and yachting.<sup>50</sup> It is only the most famous example of the 1950s construction of jazz as a music of leisure and relaxation. The filmmaker, Bert Stern, was himself an advertising photographer, and the film shares that medium's framing of affective interiority. Jazz was increasingly being marketed as an accompaniment to a lifestyle, and the film celebrates both the contemporary fashions of that lifestyle and the nostalgia for an imagined past that underpinned it. As a late 1950s expression of what Fredric Jameson later called "nostalgia for the present," the version of the past that Stern's film celebrates is sanitized: it is a proleptic imagination of a possible, integrationist future, where black and white can co-exist without threatening the spatial buffers of white privilege. College students in Dixieland outfits cruise around Newport enacting a variety of (post)racial mimicry, generational reconciliation, and the synthetic knitting together of jazz past and present. For many jazz aficionados, the immediate ideological reading of the film might have suggested an intervention into the "discursive wars" of the 1940s. As Bernard Gendron suggests, the Dixieland revival of the 1940s was a crucial element in the construction of the "discursive formation" of jazz out of the aesthetic debates between "moldy figs and modernists."<sup>51</sup> In debating whether Dixieland represented an uncorrupted original strain of jazz or a primitive ur-form of the art music that was bebop, jazz writers were in the midst of constructing a jazz art discourse.

The pastoralism that jazz inhabited prior to, and in the midst of, the formation of this art discourse was racialized in ways that proved scandalous to jazz proponents. The Cotton Club, where Duke Ellington was the house musician from 1927 to 1931, was only

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<sup>50</sup> For an interpretation of the film and its reception, see Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 113-117.

<sup>51</sup> Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 121-157, esp. 125.

the most infamous example of the “plantation nostalgia” aesthetic that accompanied the consumption of jazz. Dancers, waiters, and musicians were expected to work in concert with a decor that celebrated the most pernicious myths of U.S. historiography: the plantation labor regime as a harmonious and organic social totality where the spectacle of black labor worked for the amusement of the white gaze. Shane Vogel comments that in the Cotton Club “[s]uch spectacularization allowed white patrons proximity to the sexuality and physicality of blackness that also unfolded on the cabaret stage, while at the same time effacing labor with entertainment and service with enjoyment.”<sup>52</sup>

Ralph Ellison, in his essay, “On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz” identified nostalgia and myth-making as crucial elements in the ideological work of jazz appreciation. The romantic myths of immediate creation that surrounded Charlie Parker transformed audience expectations of the jazz performance space. The nightclub—once the pre-eminent imagined location for middle-class transgressive leisure—was re-imagined as a space of obscure voyeuristic spectacle, where hip enthusiasts could listen in on the rapturous creations of inward-looking artists. Two things are important to note about this midcentury transformation: first, that despite ideological legitimation, it was not deliberate aesthetic choices but large-scale economic transformations that conditioned the shift; as Scott DeVeaux has noted, bebop musicians were professional swing musicians first, and many, like Dizzy Gillespie, ultimately hoped to hold larger bands together in emulation of Ellington, Basie, and other bandleaders of the 1930s and 1940s.

Second, again despite the promotional literature of the jazz discourses (including, for example, beat poetry), the shift was not primarily defined by the increased autonomy it offered working musicians—this was true in some contexts, but an emphasis on a narrative

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<sup>52</sup> Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 83.

of progressive artistic autonomy in an organic jazz art world tends to obscure the messier play of continuity and discontinuity in the ideological work done to frame and bracket musical performances. The well-known connection between black music and ideologies of romantic racialism itself has a genealogy that co-originate with the production of modern racial ideologies in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>53</sup> A narrative of liberalization is not enough to account for the complexities of the transformation that took place between 1945 and 1960, for the liberal narrative of progress projected onto the past material processes—put frankly, the enforcement of segregation and the destruction of the built environment of black communities—that were contemporary with the progressive expectation of the imminent overcoming of racism qua individual race prejudice.

It is important to observe that the ideal-typical postwar performance space, which is relied upon so often in the contemporary (post-1980) marketing of jazz as aural and visual nostalgia, was nowhere hegemonic. “Jazz” performance was far more varied, and often far more marginal and more in the background—indeed into the 1960s Adorno’s characterization of jazz as part of a continuity with other “light” music “in the background,” as a kind of barely visible and nearly inaudible signifier of class and privilege, or a colonization of the sensory experience of everyday life, was often widely applicable. From the perspective of production, working as a jazz musician entailed complex sets of negotiations among competing agents—audiences, promoters, the union, mafia enforcers, cops, and so on. The effacement of labor that Shane Vogel notes in reference to the plantation nostalgia of the Cotton Club was transmuted but in no way exorcised in the postwar romantic imaginaries of the beats and other consumers of post-Parker jazz.

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<sup>53</sup> See for example Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Several observations can follow from this disjuncture between the ideological non-place (one manifestation, perhaps, of Mackey's "utopic ubiquity") in which the imaginary of postwar jazz took place and the economically marginal and precarious workplace that emerges in jazz biography and social history. First, the contemporary (again, post-1980) jazz discourses construct and circulate around an object defined by a Cold War modernist space that never really existed. The economic critiques of the jazz business that animated 1960s and 1970s revolt and experiment were provoked by the catastrophic decline of work opportunities and performances spaces after 1960, but were never premised on a return to the nightclub regime but on a systematic critique of it (often as part of a symptomatic critique of U.S. capitalism as a whole). Neoliberalism and neo-conservative jazz ideologies combined to offer a partial return to the nightclub regime, however, in attenuated form: the nightclub as, once again, a space of safe, middle-class leisure, conspicuous consumption, and mild transgression—however, in the managed and hyper class-segregated spaces of postmodern sprawl, jazz clubs more often than not offer a nostalgia-fueled simulacrum, not of the jazz nightclubs of the "actual" past, practitioners of what Frank Kofsky called "cockroach capitalism," but of the imagined, usable past of the nostalgia for jazz's golden age.<sup>54</sup>

Second, attending to the complex circuits of economic exchange and material marginalization that accompanied the production of iconic jazz performance can inform a

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<sup>54</sup> The hegemonic/ideological field of "jazz" is not contained by the elite clubs and mass produced records. In local settings, "jazz" refers to a range of musics and social spaces, mostly bland accompaniment to staid bourgeois leisure. Pick up a newspaper in a medium-sized U.S. city and scan the listings for jazz: this thin variety is to a certain extent where the declension of "jazz" has led. Since the late 1980s jazz has meant, in most social situations, various forms of nostalgia for the erstwhile hegemony that in jazz studies goes by the name golden age. Adorno called it jazz's "monopoly." Jazz was deeply intertwined with the "monopoly capitalism" (or at least limited competition) of the U.S. recording industry, which although the ideological label jazz has drifted to the provincial or subcultural margins, persists in a roughly similar form to this day. In a sense, then, jazz now occupies the structural place, nostalgia, that in Adorno's time was taken by nineteenth century classical music—once a ubiquitous part of everyday life and a sign of general culture, it is now a discredited minority taste shared only by those who cannot move on or find the present too harsh and forbidding.



perspective that seeks to understand how musical performance and reception was tied to the racio-ideological (visual, spatial) spectacular dimension. Jazz discourses—including now the production of discourse on black music as social phenomenon across the twentieth and twenty first centuries—were and continue to be invested by primitivist ideologies in avowed and disavowed ways. The contemporary ethnographic mode of jazz discourse engaged in an ideological struggle over the meaning and historical formation of *race* in ethnological accounts of jazz's genealogical relationship with African American (folk/vernacular) culture. It is important to bracket the folk here because the clear lines of spatio-temporal delineation that serve to distinguish the concept of the folk from the traditional, from the popular, from the modern, are complicated by the specific dynamics of the intellectual histories of African American contexts and the wider black world. The ruse of pseudo-universality that characterized mid-century academic and intellectual discourses (including Adorno's) about the categorization of culture is belied by narratives of black world and African American history that set into sharp relief the ideological implications of the "master" narratives of Euro-American social development.

Third, discourses of jazz criticism were also imagined to have a crucial, functionalist role in the specific dynamics of the cultural economy, thus significantly attenuating their aesthetic range and connections to other fields—that is to say, jazz criticism was dominated by the trade press, particularly *Down Beat* magazine, and by the dual roles most critics played as both writers and promoters. Jazz discourse had the effect of enclosing jazz within a generic identity, whose content and barriers were debated but whose distinction from other generic neighborhoods was assumed. Celebrations of jazz have always already been only a parallax shift of perspective away from the policing of generic boundaries, the marking of distinctions between what was real jazz and what was inauthentic. There is no escaping the

jargon of authenticity when it comes to jazz because it is an inaugural, structural feature of the discourse.

Although in general advocacy, boosterism, and aesthetic denunciation—the attempt to shape conventional aesthetic parameters—are germane to the critical discourses of any art, the particular ideological situation of jazz is complicated by the contradiction, in the postwar period, created by the elite appropriation of the discursive legitimation of jazz and black culture and the continued, if anything intensified, battle of the racialization of public space, public accommodations, and public conduct that implicated U.S. economy, policy, and culture. The jazz space was a contradictory ideological marker of “interracial” (or colorblind) liberalism, multicultural racial equality (i.e. pluralism), and black liberation. This is not to say that the transformations of the signification and performance of jazz in the 1960s and 1970s can be seen as a synecdoche for the trajectory of the black liberation movement as a whole, and its cooptation, dismissal, and abandonment by U.S. liberalism. In fact, by 1966 jazz was both a marginalized economic-aesthetic praxis and a marginalized signifier within the hegemonic self-understanding of racial liberalism. Even more important, the U.S. exceptionalist narrative within which the transformation of jazz is said to take place is an inadequate container for understanding the challenge black radical improvised musical formations had to the intellectual self-understanding of modernity at mid-century.

It appears again that jazz plays a contradictory role: the exceptionalist narrative referred to above is deeply encoded, in some ways (and some performances) finely woven into the fabric of jazz discourses, and for Timothy Brennan’s critique, for example, into its rhythms as well.<sup>55</sup> Yet counter-theorizations exist as jazz as a metonymic for black cultural assertion within the diasporic networks of constructed solidarity, tactical debate, and creative

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<sup>55</sup> Timothy Brennan, *Secular Devotion: Afro-Latin Music and Imperial Jazz* (London: Verso, 2008).

mistranslation—the transnational “hinge” dividing and suturing identities that Brent Hayes Edwards sees as inherent in diaspora, but also in modern black identity as a quintessential diasporic or outer-national formation.<sup>56</sup>

Thus the question remains, how to interpret the late sixties and seventies discourse that saw the return of the trope of the death of jazz, not as a natural reaction to shifting market forces but as contradictory ideological work? Indeed, the re-emergence of the trope was closely tied to the media’s increasing tendency of tracking music as a distinct, exploitable, and definable market. Like the now ubiquitous market for “youth culture,” the market in music was an economic indicator that had to be learned over time. By the late 1960s, however, the enormous profits to be made in the nexus of radio promotion, large festivals, and especially record saturation had been long recognized, and fetishized, in both trade and mainstream journalism that tried to capture cultural “trends.” Indeed, a crucial shift occurred in the course of the mid 1960s: declarations of jazz death moved off the terrain of aesthetics and rested firmly on the ground of the (imagined) market. Whether expressed as excessive protestations of the availability of jazz, laments about its crumbling performance infrastructure, castigations of a numbed and indifferent audience, or desperate pleas for commercial “viability,” the idea that jazz might only live in partnership with capital and at the mercies of market forces became dominant in this period and remains so.

In the fall of 1967, the *New York Times* quoted one anonymous music industry insider about the decline in attendance at jazz festivals: “They’re going to have to more and more merge jazz and pop, or jazz is dead.”<sup>57</sup> Jazz critic Leonard Feather took up the discourse of

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<sup>56</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. intro.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Windeler, “Coast Jazz Fete Draws 8,000 Fans,” Oct 9 1967, 56.

jazz's death in late 1967, refuting those "Cassandra[s] trying to build a case for jazz."<sup>58</sup> This response to the feeling of unease growing within and around jazz communities in the second half of 1967 represents a typical and important mode of disavowal—that of taking claims of jazz's death as a literal, or ethno-sociological account of performance cultures. Feather refuted claims of jazz death not through aesthetic disputation or economic analysis but by surveying the field of live popular music available in the Los Angeles area in a given week. This is a disavowal both because it literally disavows the belief in jazz's imminent death—only unnamed Cassandras, hysterics out of touch with the reality of jazz in the streets and the clubs, would make such a pronouncement—and because it fetishizes the claim to authenticity of the stance of the jazz critic himself. Feather can attest to the quality and availability of the music due to his insider status; anyone who claims that jazz is disappearing has not sufficiently looked for it; and Feather, adopting the quintessential roles of the jazz critic, casts himself as both neutral arbiter of talent and quality, and as booster and advertiser of the scene itself. Jazz critics can only celebrate and sift quality—if jazz loses its audience, it can only be attributed to the philistinism of mass cultural choices, not to any deficit in the performance cultures, or in the role of critics as mediators among musicians, producers, and the public.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Leonard Feather, "Plenty of Jazzy Music in the Basin," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 20 1967, p. C21. For Feather's use of a similar formulation and reference to Cassandras, see Feather, "Wild Bill Defies the Dixie Dogma," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 28 1966, p. B31. Shortly before the article about the Los Angeles scene Feather had quoted George Wein in the same ethnographic vein as an observer of the vitality of the performance culture. Speaking of the Berliner Jazztage, Wein noted, "If anyone thinks jazz is dead, they only have to come over here and find out what's really happening." See Feather, "Wandering Minstrels of Jazz Receive Widest of Welcomes in West Berlin," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 10 1967, p. D1.

<sup>59</sup> For more on jazz criticism generally, and Feather in particular, see John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot Blowin' Cool*. My characterization of his construction of his role is derived from a reading of examples of his criticism, as well as accounts by Gennari and by Scott DeVeaus, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition" in *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (Autumn, 1991): 525-560. Note in particular how the figure of the jazz critic as mediator among conflicting interests corresponds in some ways with the model of social relations developed by the so-called "consensus historians," especially Richard Hofstadter, *Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955). Feather, like Hofstadter's progressives, might be said to be driven by status anxiety to mediate the social peace between labor and capital. For another example, a profile of the legendary record producer

Around the same time as Feather's worry about the "Cassandras" hailing the death of jazz, one of those who welcomed it was the African American composer George Russell, who had revolutionized modern jazz with his *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* and the concept of modal harmonies. According to him, "As far as the word is concerned, I think it may be just as well that jazz is dead." Articulating a gap between musical practice and generic naming makes for a context far removed from protecting tradition from the corrosive effects of market populism. For Russell, as for so many other musicians, the enchaining power of the jazz discourse had become a limit to musical creativity and a racialized generic preserve that enforced economic marginality. Far better for jazz to die, so that music can carry on. As Russell wrote in the notes to his 1968 composition, *Electronic Sonata For Souls Loved By Nature*:

The essential concepts which inspired the creation of the *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature* lay in philosophical and socio/musical areas. Its socio/musical objective was to create a pan-stylistic electronic tape; a tape consisting of fragments of many different styles of music, avant-garde jazz, ragas, blues, rock, serial music etc. treated electronically. And to have this tape serve as a palate upon which non-electronic musical statements of a pan-stylistic nature could be projected. The wedding of non-electronic pan-stylism to electronic pan-stylism was meant to convey the cultural implosion occurring among the earth's population, their coming together. Also it is meant to suggest that man, in the face of encroaching technology, must confront technology and attempt to humanize it.

The deafening power of the imperial discourse of jazz, and its nervous necrology, would consign an experiment like Russell's to a threatening margin, a dangerous in-between where experimentalism colluded with populism in an Oedipal murder of something called "jazz." But the work of the latter name was, as Russell recognized in 1968, inescapably bound up with an unpredictable network of global processes that could not be reversed. What was lost

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Tom Wilson has him casually remarking that jazz is dead, that it is rock that absorbs new musical influences in the way jazz had before. It is remarkable that this is the man who, through his own Transition label, recorded important albums by Cecil Taylor and Sun Ra. Ann Geracimos, "A Record Producer is a Psychoanalyst With Rhythm," *New York Times*, Sep. 29, 1968, p. SM32.

when jazz died were its imperial naming rights, its cartographic disciplining of the music's style.<sup>60</sup>

### Benjamin's "Work of Art" and the Mythic Political Economy of Jazz

Music seems to have settled into these spaces only with their decline, only as the orchestras began to seem old-fashioned in comparison to the new mechanical music. So that, in fact, these orchestras would just as soon have taken refuge there. (The "theatrophone" in the arcades was, in certain respects, the forerunner of the gramophone.) Nevertheless, there was music that conformed to the spirit of the arcades—a panoramic music, such as can be heard today only in old-fashioned genteel concerts like those of the casino orchestra in Monte Carlo: the panoramic compositions of [Félicien] Davd, for example—*Le Désert*, *Christoph Colomb*, *Herculanum*. When, in the 1860s (?), an Arab political delegation came to Paris, the city was very proud to be able to mount a performance of *Le Désert* for them in the great Théâtre de l'Opéra (?).<sup>61</sup>

In jazz, noise is emancipated. Jazz appears at a moment when, increasingly, noise is eliminated from the process of production, of traffic, and of commerce. Likewise in radio.<sup>62</sup>

—Walter Benjamin

In Walter Benjamin's kaleidoscopic, unfinished masterpiece *The Arcades Project*, there is not much music.<sup>63</sup> Live music, in the quotation above, is suspiciously rendered archaic by records and the radio, driven into the arcades and then lost to nostalgia. The "panoramic" and "old-fashioned genteel" music Benjamin hears as evoking the fading dreamworld of the arcades is represented by Félicien David, who other mentions in the project make clear is used by Benjamin as a symbol for the aesthetics of the Saint-Simonian movement. So the music of the arcades is a dust-worn utopianism, if not a strange manifestation of Orientalist fascination with *Le Désert* in the aftermath of Napoleon's Egypt campaign. Likewise for jazz: its emancipation of noise is also archaic, a recovery of the noisy streets lost to

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<sup>60</sup> Russell quoted in Michael Zwerin, "Musical Revolution," *New York Times*, Oct 22, 1967, 336. Liner notes to *Electronic Sonata* quoted by Duncan Heining, *George Russell: The Story of an American Composer*, (Scarecrow, 2010), 294. In addition to Heining's biography, for information on Russell see Eric Porter and Ingrid Monson.

<sup>61</sup> Benjamin, "The Collector," *Arcades Project*, [H1, 5], 204.

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin, "First Sketches," *Arcades Project*, [O°, 61], 862.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing*, 412-13n71.

mechanization. It is interesting to speculate on what Benjamin might have done with the fragment on jazz—it anticipates, and perhaps inspired, Jacques Attali’s later thinking about noise’s relationship to political community, and it may have been a subtle rejoinder to Adorno’s argument that for all its noisiness, jazz was ultimately disciplined into the mechanical rhythms of the culture industry. What would Benjamin have done with a recording like George Russell’s *Electronic Sonata*? There are fewer musical compositions that are more “panoramic”—not in the sense, perhaps, of a genteel landscape, but of a revolutionary movement of stylistic hybridity overturning sonic expectations. Russell’s composition is structured into fourteen “events” that merge into one another seamlessly but disorientingly, a jazz groove fading into large electronic blocks of sound, ethereal reverb floating back against another lethargic, even elegiac, blues. Even the famous hum, the background noise of radio and recording, that Adorno made so much of, is thematized, made into artifice by Russell’s looping of tape and its justification with avant-garde instrumental practices: an electronic organ hum hangs in the background through many of the stylistic shifts of the first part, and a grainy tape hum is made into music in the second half. The music is panoramic in a further sense, meant programmatically to encapsulate the evolution of life on earth, suspending the temporal development of (racialized) styles to inscribe a transcultural human creativity. Finally, its creation stretched the aesthetic boundaries of performance in an age of sound reproduction: the recording one can listen to now was recorded in 1969 at a live performance, but the electronics were pre-recorded in Norway, and the “African voices” that occur occasionally were recorded in 1967 in North Uganda; for all that, the recording bears the year “1968” in its very title.

In any case, Benjamin does not leave us much guidance to think about music and the dreamworlds of mass culture; it doesn’t appear music is what he is interested in thinking

about, which perhaps suggests that the “mechanical reproduction” problematic passed down from his “work of art” essay can be revised in thinking about sound in particular. In the 1939 version (revised from 1936 on) of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” Benjamin only makes a few allusions to sound, but its absence arguably structures other aspects of the argument. Reproduction, he famously writes, removes the “here and now” of an artwork, without which its history is untraceable. The concept of “authenticity” is grounded in the history of the work’s changes in physical structure, and its transfer of ownership. The well-known elusiveness of the musical “work,” however, complicate this picture: classicist musicology identified the work as the score, which can physically deteriorate and change hands, but if the work is instead thought as a performance, then its authenticity is literally elusive, escaping into thin air. The “here and now” of a live recording, for example, is both imperfectly inscribed by a recording (each musical “event” is captured more or less precisely) and finally lost forever to its temporal ephemerality. While music publishing and copyright laws have imperfectly fixed questions of the ownership of a composition—not, it should be said, in the *score*, but in the messy melodic-harmonic conjunctions that make a *song* (recognizable)—the conceptual situation remains quite a bit more complicated. Perhaps in an effort to acknowledge this, Benjamin makes a first reference to sound/music, saying that an example of how a reproduction can “place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain” such as the enjoyment of a choral work on a gramophone record in a private room. Benjamin identifies in passing the “original” as “performed in an auditorium or in the open air,” but if that is so then the original has no authenticity, since it has neither physical form nor ownership. Does this mean that the concept of authenticity does not apply to music? (If so, it might go some ways towards explaining the importance of myth and legend in reintroducing authenticity to



musical performance in, say, jazz criticism: the legend of the authentic, unrecorded event in jazz writing, pointed out by Jed Rasula, may be an anxious response to the necessary absence of authenticity in music qua performance.)<sup>64</sup>

The question of the ritual, cultic, or magical properties of the artwork is also complicated by the case of music. Benjamin suggests that technical reproduction “emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual,” thus allowing a wider space for their exhibition. For example, “although a Mass may have been no less suited to public presentation than a symphony, the symphony came into being at a time when the possibility of such presentation promised to be greater.” There is a dialectic established between cult value and presentation value, and repressed cult value returns in the avant-garde. But is a symphony performance as independent of ritual as the example suggests? Musicologist Christopher Small opens his widely influential book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* with a description of entering a concert hall that famously points out the obscure behavioral rules and ritual conventions that attend the symphony: the classical symphony and the opera were venues where the bourgeoisie represented itself to itself, where it performed the cultic rituals of class belonging. The elements of magic and the making explicit of ritual elements certainly characterize avant-garde practice in jazz, but it is an open question to what extent a disenchantment through recordings ever in fact took place—the recordings themselves quickly took on magical properties in narratives of

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<sup>64</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [Third Version],” in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds., Edmund Jephcott, trans., *Selected Writings Vol. 4, 1938-1949*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003), 251-283, 253-254. Note, however, that Benjamin later remarks that “authenticity” or the “authority of the object” is jeopardized when the value of “historical testimony” is put in question by the reproduction’s negation of “physical duration” as a guarantee of history. This would shed some light on jazz criticism and particularly the writing of liner notes, which often repeat the anxiety of, for example, the testimonies of abolitionists that usually prefaced antebellum slave narratives. When conventions no longer work to link historical testimony to the authority of a text or a record, that testimony tends to assert its authority in a more shrill or brittle tone.

encounters with jazz, and rituals of live performance and audience behavior are notoriously arcane in jazz performance.<sup>65</sup>

A final reference to sound occurs in Benjamin's discussion of Dada, which he says attempted to break with commercial use-value and promote "contemplative immersion" by degrading the material into uselessness. "From an alluring visual composition or an enchanting fabric of sound," Benjamin writes, "the Dadaists turned the artwork into a missile." It is worth pausing a moment to take in the resonance of Benjamin's phrasing in German: what is rendered by the wonderful "enchanting fabrics of sound" is *überredenden Klanggebilde*, which could also indicate persuasive, coaxing, or enticing shapes, forms, structures, objects, or figments. Therefore the sense Benjamin conveys is that music, absent mechanical reproduction, is rich, evocative, and personal, and composed of intricate structures that are thought of in terms of highly visual metaphors. The Dada event marks a rupture with this enchantment and makes sound into a weapon. Dada also, of course, turned meaningful language into meaningless (or musical, or noisy) sound. The "word salad" compositions were integrated into a performance culture that included, among other things, "primitive" languages improvised out of nonsense.<sup>66</sup>

These moments from Benjamin's essay do not provide a reading of his theory, but instead sketch ways thinking about sound and music might traverse, rather than adopt, the problematics of aura, authenticity, and the revolutionary, or at least anti-fascist, possibilities of film.<sup>67</sup> On the latter topic, there are some interesting changes between the second and

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 256-57. Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan, 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Benjamin "Work of Art [Third Version]," in *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940* ed. Eiland and Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 266-67.

<sup>67</sup> In an insertion made between 1936 and 1939 Benjamin inserts a discussion of Freud's *On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, in which he notes how a "deepening of apperception throughout the entire spectrum of optical—and not also auditory—impressions has been accomplished by film," which he compares to the Freudian apperception of the unconscious. Ibid., 265. The editors remark that it was *The Jazz Singer* (1927) that

third versions of the essay that suggest that Benjamin had changed his position on film and revolution. These changes have to do particularly with the question of bourgeois vs. proletarian control of the means of production of film. In the 1936 version Benjamin stated unequivocally that his hopes for film entirely depended on a proletarian seizure of the machinery of cultural production: “the expropriation of film capital is an urgent demand for the proletariat.”<sup>68</sup> This was because, as he wrote twice into the draft, in two different registers, the current relations of production turned the revolutionary medium of film into a reactionary instrument.<sup>69</sup> The later version is more circumspect: although it makes roughly the same point, its language about the political economic consequences of his theory (i.e. that only “expropriation” could guarantee the fruitful use of new media possibilities) is considerably softened. Perhaps if the blunter language could have been left in, it would have avoided some considerable misunderstandings of the essay’s politics.

It is mostly pure speculation to wonder what led to these changes. Benjamin revised the essay in dialogue with Adorno and others, while occupying a precarious material and political position (that would indeed prove fatal in 1940), trying to find outlets to publish, trying to scrape together a living. In his desperate need for gigs, his attachment to ambitious projects beyond what his contemporaries would accept, in his sometimes self-destructive commitment to intellectual honesty and comprehension, his ambiguity, and his precarious economic status, Benjamin is the jazz musician of radical intellectuals. That Benjamin comes

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introduced sound to film, but one wonders if this film was part of Benjamin’s thinking here. In any case, the later summary of the comparison between psychoanalysis and art mentions the optical and the instinctual, but forgets the inclusion of the auditory—a dimension that is of course absolutely crucial to psychoanalysis. See Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [Second Version],” in Eiland and Jennings, eds., Jephcott and Eiland, trans., *Selected Writings Vol. 3, 1935-38*, 115.

<sup>69</sup> “Film capital uses the revolutionary opportunities implied by this control for counterrevolutionary purposes” and “[T]he same is true of film capital in particular as of fascism in general: a compelling urge toward new social opportunities is being clandestinely exploited in the interests of a property owning minority.” *Ibid.*, 113, 115.

down to us as the utopian optimist who balances Adorno's pessimism does not take into account the political economic contexts for the articulation of Benjamin's theory.

Adorno and Benjamin's intellectual partnership in the 1930s is more a duet than a debate. Both struggled to make sense of the rapidly changing material infrastructure of cultural production, and how despite the industrial manufacturing of culture, the world remained enchanted, both by utopian dreams and their unfulfilling realization in commodity culture. If we turn to a radically different context and a radically different text, musician Sidney Bechet's 1960 autobiography *Treat It Gentle*, we find Bechet wrestling with a similar set of questions, though in a different language. But how different were these contexts? Bechet, like Benjamin, spent time living precariously in Paris and was eventually deported after a shoot-out—their lived contexts were different, but by degrees. Bechet returned to France in the late 1940s and lived the rest of his life in Europe until his death in 1959.

In *Disturbing the Peace*, Bryan Wagner reads *Treat It Gentle* as engaging the mythic origins of jazz by spinning a fabulist's counter-myth that reads the outlaw figure Bras-Coupé back into jazz history. Wagner notes that the identification of Congo Square as the New Orleans birthplace of jazz misreads as factual an archive of ethnographic copying represented as fact; actually, the gatherings at Congo Square were ended decades before jazz performance can be located in New Orleans. Bound up with the story of jazz, however, is the story of Bras-Coupé, a man who resisted police harassment, became an outlaw, and lost his arm in a shoot-out with police. Rumors of the outlaw's dancing at Congo Square are belied by the temporal gap noted above, but Bechet not only identifies Bras-Coupé as his own grandfather, Omar, but says that jazz was his invention. Wagner notes this as factually untrue, but more importantly argues that in constructing the narrative Bechet uses literary techniques to make an ideological argument that the music is inseparable from the social

contexts of its creation—namely the contexts of slavery and postemancipation societies and the policing apparatus that enframed them.

Turning to the other end of Bechet's story we can see a similar intervention into postwar jazz discourses and mythologies. Upon returning briefly to the U.S. in 1949, Bechet encounters the revival of interest in the traditional jazz style for which he was famous:

I found America had gone Jazz crazy all at once. I came back, and it was just like watching some child who's thrown his toy away and seen somebody else pick it up and now he wants it real bad. America had just about forgotten there *was* Jazz until Europe went all crazy for it and all at once it just *had* to have it. Everywhere I went it was a-Jazz-a-this, a-Jazz-a-that. All the damn' jockeys on the radios was playing Jazz numbers, answering all kinds of requests, making all kinds of expert explanations all wrong. Everybody was excited, but no Jazz musicianer had a job except to make records. In a way of speaking, Jazz music had no part of it outside of making the records that were playing every day on the radio.<sup>70</sup>

This passage, I suggest, is only secondarily about authenticity. Indeed, it does claim "Jazz" as a music distinct from swing and bebop, and when he refers to his fellow musicians who have trouble finding work outside of recording, he means fellow traditionalists like himself. But this is not merely an intervention into the stylistic disputes of the day, but a knowing critique of a fickle and temperamental national culture, figured as a spoiled child. We are already in the realm of (counter)myth, where the real Jazz is unloved even as it is desperately desired, where cultural desire does not translate into jobs, and where the contradiction between cultural prestige, on the one hand, and deep appreciation or remuneration, on the other, is outlined with force. In the context of the postwar traditional revival, promoters were setting up "contests" between New Orleans style musicians and bebop. Invited to participate in one, Bechet was dismayed to see the promoters choosing the musicians and the numbers. In an earlier contest he had chosen his band and was pleased. Now, the musicians he named were rejected over and over again:

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<sup>70</sup> Sidney Bechet, *Treat it Gentle: An Autobiography*, (Da Capo, 1978), 192.

I wanted these men with me if we were to play right, but all these promoters had to say was *budget*. Every one of these men, they wanted a decent salary, but what they were asking was nothing you'd have to build a real tall ladder to reach. They didn't want any million dollars. But all I hear is *budget*. *Budget*, that got to be the biggest and oftenest damn' word I ever did hear in those days.<sup>71</sup>

The subsequent pages are filled with coy parables of the racial significations of the *budget* for jazz. He twice tells the reader that he refused the contest gig because he had a booking in Chicago that would sustain him, and goes into some detail about his financial arrangements. Returning to France, he recalls his love for that country's proximity to Africa, which makes Bechet feel the bonds of kinship to Omar and "all my family": "So I started to record some lovely Creole tunes that I remembered from when I was young and some I made myself out of the same remembering." Work in England was complicated by union restrictions, but a journey to Algiers leads both to his marriage and to a triumphant turn as King of the Zulus in New Orleans. Bechet goes into some detail about a ballet for which he wrote the music, *La nuit est une sorcière* (The Night is a Witch), describing in detail the plot about a man enchanted by his dreams and manipulated to kill his entire household. His description of the plot's denouement is a strange echo of the fearful narrative of minstrelsy's reversal of conditions that opened this chapter: "And every time he kills somebody a spirit, which is his servant, a Negro boy that dances, is the one that makes him do these things in his sleep. And he thinks this servant is really his servant, but it is this servant who is making him do all that—because finally when he has no one else to kill he tries to do the tricks and he sees that he cannot do them any more. So the coloured boy does everything for him and he walks into space to do away with himself."<sup>72</sup>

These anecdotes all lead to Bechet's articulation, in a lyrical and compelling several pages, of his philosophy of the music: that nothing is outside of it, that all of life is part of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 194-198.

the music, that it is a way of narrating and remembering, that “it was Omar started the song,” that it articulates the desires of “my people” for a place to be human and free of imposition, to feel pride, that a definition of black music is as elusive as a definition of nationality, that the music is already its own explanation, that “[t]he music gives you its own understanding of itself.” This is not to say that the story of the music has been told—for Bechet there is a history to its articulation and a future waiting to be fulfilled. He writes,

A man, he’s got all kinds of things in him and the music wants to talk to all of him. The music is everything that it wants to say to a man. Some of it came up from jokes and some of it came up from sorrow, but all of it has a man’s feelings in it. How that came about, that’s my real story. The music has come a long way, and it’s time for it now to come out from around a corner; it’s got to come up and cross the street. If I could believe it would do that, I wouldn’t worry.... But that’s not yet. It won’t happen yet. It has a way to go, and I’m not ready to say what that way is. All I say is, it’s my people. The worry has to be gotten out of them and *then* it will be gotten out of the music.

Bechet is careful to distinguish his project of taking the worry out from a progressive modernism that would fuse jazz with symphonic music. Rather than waiting to be written, the music is waiting to be *heard*, in Bechet’s view, waiting because of another mythic term, “conditions,” which like “budget” is meant to frame and bracket the extramusical constraints (call them police) that keep the music from being fully realized.

Bechet offers two examples: Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake’s famous show *Shuffle Along*, which “had to be done on what you call a limited budget,” but which, in Bechet’s view could be put on again to full effect; Bechet also cites his own effort in the early 1920s to put on his *Voice of the Slaves*: “I’d written a play and I had the music to it, a lot of singing and melody. It had a story too, but nothing complicated, nothing so involved that you couldn’t see it for what it was, just a show with music” (call it a “rude opera”).

I called it *Voice of the Slaves*. I’ve got it with me still. Well, back there in England I took it to this director and he told me, “It’s very beautiful. I’d like to put it on but I don’t think the public is interested enough in colored people to put out the kind of money it needs for getting produced. That’s what he said. I’m not trying to say the

white-man-this and conditions-that and change-how: I'm just telling you the story, how the fact of it was, and I'm not saying what interpreting you can find to put around the fact, because I don't know myself for sure.... I'm trying to say there's so much Negro music *waiting*. It hasn't been heard yet. *Conditions* haven't been right. (207)

Bechet's rhetorical hesitation, like the trickster's limp, may set one off guard. He tells us he will not invoke (political) conditions but shortly identifies (mythic-historical) *conditions* as the reason for the music's unhearing. And the vague, hesitant, cautious invocation of "conditions" may not strike one as particularly radical—indeed Bechet seems to dodge and feint away from confrontation over the "white-man-this" and "change-how" of the extramusical, political economic conditions. Make no mistake, however, Bechet is not making a myth of the political economy of jazz production. He is, instead, intervening into an already mythological jazz discourse that read political economy out of the frame, creatively redistributing the sensible so that "the music" and its (his)story takes in its outside, the conditions that silence the music even at its point of articulation.

Bechet's text, written in the last years of his life and published in 1960 after his death, in this sense prefigures a trio of important texts that exploded "conditions" into a full-blown revolutionary critique of "the jazz business" in the 1960s, all variously voiced by musicians. A. B. Spellman's *Four Lives in the Bebop Business* (1965) framed the narratives of Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Herbie Nichols, and Jackie McLean in their own words, describing how each struggled with the conditions of poverty while struggling to earn livings as musicians. LeRoi Jones's (Amiri Baraka's) *Black Music* (1967) was a series of essays that together attempted to craft a critical-poetic language that could speak in the language of the music, but could also constantly refract the material conditions of the music's performance and the musicians' lives: Baraka notes struggles over work, debates with club owners, the admission prices of various venues, and offers a vivid picture of the material-spiritual built



environment of jazz performance, while quoting and promoting the proponents of the avant-garde. Art Taylor's indispensable *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews* (1977) opened to the reader the world of musicians' discourse among themselves: the fierce debates over avant-garde aesthetics, the meaning and usefulness of the word "jazz," the connections between music and the struggle against white supremacy, and the shared struggle in a time of severe and worsening political economic "conditions."

In these works, musicians' discourse, addressed to writers, to a jazz public sphere, and among themselves, takes up a mythic construction of the political economic constraints of the music making apparatus (club, record company, etc) that Bechet condenses into "budget." The way Bechet uses it reenchants this prosaic word to indicate, in a kind of hazy way, the way in which extramusical constraints are a part of the music. This is associated with Bechet's notion that music and the social life are coterminous. (By the way, this synonymy of art and life was a programmatic goal of the historical avant-garde movements of the interwar period, and Bechet's reflection suggests that in certain ways the jazz tradition had always already encoded an aesthetic philosophy that was in some ways more advanced than the European avant-garde.) This in turn is linked to Benjamin's notion of modernity as a reenchantment of the world. Perhaps this perspective can also add to our understanding of the most famous and well-trodden controversy over the politics of black music in this period, the so-called Ellison-Baraka debate, occasioned by Ellison's negative review of LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* (1963). Although their disagreement was expressed in terms of "the burden of sociology" or the beboppers as "the least political of men," on the one hand, and black music as an expression of revolt on the other hand, Bechet and others help to frame political-economic frameworks not only as external sociological impediments to creativity, or

as the target of musicians' creative fury, but also as the machinery that constituted the dreamworld into which musicians played.

## Chapter Three

### Outside What?

#### Adorno, Jazz, and Postwar Black Modernism

What object does the word jazz name? Enthusiasts and aficionados of *the music* know that as soon as one cites an example of jazz, that example is explicitly and implicitly inserted into a chaotic field of disciplinary dispute and boundary marking. There is a distinct enjoyment to the intellectualization of taste, a second-level enjoyment as it were, an enjoyment of the vagaries and variety of enjoyment, that animates critical dispute. When a writer like André Hodeir cites “Concerto for Cootie” as an object of analysis, spending a chapter on its formal explication, his citation also invokes an entire discursive field: the author’s own notorious attack on Ellington’s later work, and the debates that surrounded Ellington’s symphonic “tone parallel of the history of the American Negro,” *Black, Brown, and Beige*, but also an entire teleological view of the development of jazz that “Concerto for Cootie” contains in embryonic miniature. According to Hodeir, musical works can age and develop, and they can stagnate and die. Some works suffer from repeated listening; others reward it. “Judging from my own experience,” he writes, “there can be no doubt that the test of time has favored Ellington’s *Concerto for Cootie*—more, perhaps, than any other work, and this is a sure sign of merit.”<sup>1</sup> Just so: the essence of jazz criticism, if not jazz itself, is contained in this circular argument. Merits and demerits litter the field of cultural

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<sup>1</sup> André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* trans. David Noakes (New York: Grove Press, 1956), 77.

production, all judged from experience, and therefore, in a sense, not judged at all. Our (historical) judgments of the relevant assertions also operate from a transhistorical weighing of comparable and divergent experiences: does my experience of listening to “Concerto for Cootie” confirm Hodeir’s critical judgment? Is that experience qualitatively different from my experience of listening to, for example, *Black, Brown, and Beige*, or for that matter Albert Ayler’s *Spiritual Unity*? Is *Spiritual Unity* a work that endures repeated listening, comparison with other works past and present, and the more than forty-five years since its recording? Or is it a work that illuminates its own historical moment, and nothing more? Either judgment would confirm its historical interest, but perhaps that interest remains “merely historical”? Perhaps so, perhaps not, but either way: so what? Insofar as my judgment remains the source and object of the discussion, we remain trapped within the solipsism of enjoyment.<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps the solipsism of aesthetic judgment that we feel and fear when thinking about artistic media is not that dissimilar from the conditions facing the historical analysis of discourse in general? After Foucault, discourse analysis has attempted to put aside judgments of merit, truth, and universality in favor of an excavation of the regularities of discursive production, the apparatuses that produce and order statements, and so on.<sup>3</sup> If we posit the object of jazz history as the discursive regularities of jazz writing, we are limited to the genealogical excavation of the emergence of various kinds of statements about jazz, the regularity and repetition of images, tropes, metaphors, and styles. The music is no longer an elusive object, a “marvel of paradox,” or a hybrid but definable combination of musical styles, but an absent cause, an extradiscursive stimulus that provokes the incessant

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Ayler Trio, *Spiritual Unity*, ESP Disk 1002, 1964, 33 1/3 rpm.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* trans A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

production of discourse.<sup>4</sup> But this self-enclosure of writing is unsatisfying. In jazz history, there is a drive to capture that extradiscursive object within the folds of discourse, to give shape and definition to the ineffable other of discourse, a need to *return (again) to the music*, to listen more or listen better, to have better, and more open, ears. Jazz writing always wants to transcend itself, to transcend its own transparent inadequacy when compared to *the music*, which means that it wants to, but cannot, *repeat* the affective, sensual experience of listening and get “outside” of language. Because both the outside of language and the inside of musical performance are inaccessible to writing, there is a citationality at the heart of jazz writing, a potentially endless movement from recording to recording, a manic drive to keep up with and stay in the music. But if jazz writing is citational, perpetually deferring the final word, what object is cited? No doubt the object of a record review or a discography is the material thing, the commodity as manufactured object, but jazz writing (as Jed Rasula has pointed out) cannot stop at cataloguing the already inscribed musical history contained in recordings.<sup>5</sup> So the object constructed by jazz discourse is performance, the experience of performance, which can be visual, but unusually in cultural analysis the visual component of jazz is at most an accompaniment to the sonic. Whether it is a recording or a live performance that is cited, it is the auditory experience of the writer that forms the object-stimulus of discursive production.

This chapter suggests some frames for thinking about musical analysis, and about various ways of thinking the “outside.” What happened when jazz went “out” in the postwar period? What was it departing: tradition, tonality, popularity, vernacularity? To think this through, the chapter will turn to an extended engagement with Theodor Adorno’s attack on

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase “marvel of paradox” opens J. A. Rogers’s seminal essay in the 1926 *New Negro* anthology, “Jazz at Home” in *The New Negro* ed. Alain Locke (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 216-224, 216.

<sup>5</sup> Jed Rasula, “The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History” in *Jazz Among the Discourses* ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 134-162. See the discussion of Rasula’s essay in Chapter One.

jazz in the 1930s. The attempt to rescue some truncated version of “real” jazz from the false commercialism that Adorno attacked, I suggest, reproduces a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion in the marrow of jazz discourse. Adorno, however, famously thought that there was no way out, no way to get outside the commodity from a place within it. The only remaining strategy was to preserve the tattered remnants of individuality and attempt to keep it from falling into the black hole of commodity fetishism. Jazz’s very commodity structure was a relentless machine, gathering up psychic and libidinal investments and incorporating them into a capitalist culture that was hell bent on making sure there was no outside left on the planet’s surface or the mind’s interior. Finally, Adorno himself contrarily (and perhaps in reaction to the impasses of his culture critique) developed an aesthetic theory of the artwork in which the outside, the experience of social antagonism, was replicated within the very structure of art. Following this other logic of going out, I propose we hear the various emergences of a jazz avant-garde as a meditation on the extramusical, the outside of performance, that took the form of allegory.

### The Narrative of the Outside

After 1959, or after 1964, or after 1967, or after 1970, after Ornette Coleman’s arrival in New York, or after Albert Ayler’s first albums for ESP, or after the untimely deaths of John Coltrane and Albert Ayler had revealed the truncated mystery of their musical inheritance, that music called jazz but increasingly during this time and its long afterlives called simply “the music,” was utterly changed forever. Whatever the content of that “outside” that was the subject of Coleman, Coltrane, and Ayler’s explorations—and opinions differed wildly on the precise qualities of that content, and still do—some invisible

barriers, discursively produced but nevertheless socio-economically limiting, had been blown open, cut through, or tunneled under.<sup>6</sup>

As the story goes, each of the three musicians mentioned here traced a movement from the harmonic structure of jazz modernism to an outside beyond musical structure and into the pure metaphysics of sound. (One could say, only partly tongue in cheek, that it was in improvised music's fetishization of sound that both the metaphysics of presence and the sovereign subject took refuge amidst the theoretical and social deconstruction of the post-1960s era.) Coleman arrived on the New York scene with a quartet (Billy Higgins, Charlie Haden, Don Cherry) that had already worked out a way of playing outside the harmonic structure of bebop: a system that privileged the in(ter)dependent interplay between bass and drums, and where improvisations were governed by a logic that linked each phrase to the one preceding it, and not to an overarching harmonic framework, a logic Ekkehard Jost calls

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<sup>6</sup> For rhetorical effect, this paragraph names Coleman, Coltrane, and Ayler—although it could easily name another trinity, for example the holy trinity of Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, and Ayler as father, son and holy ghost. These choices of musicians to identify the change in the music are not exactly arbitrary, but always partial. For another example: an honest accounting of the musico-formal transformations, not to mention the poetic and ritual incursions into the commodified form of “jazz” performance, could not fail to focus on Cecil Taylor. This account also follows the truncated historiography produced by jazz journalism's focus on the aesthetic scandal the “avant-garde” presented for the trade press. Not much of the pure innovation, or pure dadaistic nonsense, attributed to Coleman and Coltrane, for example, survives a thorough investigation of what they drew from their own contemporaries, in particular the Arkestras of Sun Ra and Charles Mingus's Jazz Workshop. On Mingus see in particular Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. 147-206. Coltrane for instance was insistent on the inspiration he drew from saxophonists Pat Patrick and in particular John Gilmore, both mainstays of the Arkestra. Coltrane attributed his ability to “play chords” on the officially monoaural but actually polyphonic tenor saxophone to his tenure with Thelonious Monk—chords which shortly after that tenure he would systematically break down in the so-called “sheets of sound” recordings of 1959's *Giant Steps*. My point is not to systematize the lines of “influence” or make claims about who innovated what technique, what sound, or what pattern of distortion into the history of the jazz commodity. Rather, in this paragraph I want to present a problematic narrative, or rather a narrative as a problematic: if jazz went out, what did it depart? And what was left, and into what extrageneric or even extramusical space did it foray? I propose to question the received narratives of the dialectic of jazz's inside and outside, so formative for how musicians and critics align themselves with an implicit politics of form, but also for those for whom “jazz” is a forbiddingly mysterious and isolated bit of cultural arcana, or nostalgia. As the argument progresses, I will have occasion to suggest the conceptual benefits of expanding a cultural history of jazz beyond assembling a pantheon, which for example Albert Murray suggests, to include a variety of musicians who are more minoritarian from the canonical point of view—not to construct a new, more inclusive canon, but to stretch outside of the ideologies—genius, heroism, and masculinity—that make canon-making so central to jazz discourse.

“motivic free association.”<sup>7</sup> A kind of automatic writing technique in music, Coleman’s meandering, occasionally hypnotic early improvisations have now entered the basic conceptual language of jazz but at the time sharply divided listeners. Reading the frenzied discourse surrounding his early recordings and live performances, it seems that in 1959 one could hear in them the imminent end of Western civilization itself: in an ineffable way, and not through any programmatic announcements, Coleman’s music evoked the ongoing collapse of the political structures of the colonial world, and promised more lovely disorder to come, this time in the heart of the metropole.<sup>8</sup>

Coltrane dismantled harmonic structure through an elaboration of every conceivable harmonic possibility in a dense, baroque harmonic framework (“Giant Steps,” “Countdown”); a dialectical reversal found him in subsequent performances instead exploring the endless permutations of even the simplest blues and popular song structures, spinning marathon improvisations out of the deep space above a constant pedal point (“Chasin’ the Trane,” “My Favorite Things”); by the time of *Ascension* (1965) Coltrane and his growing cadre of collaborators had imbricated a dense and unpredictable matrix of sounds that eschewed the logical unfolding, however baroque, of his late modern recordings: a reverent spiritualism combined with a searching drive for a universality of sound beyond cultural or historical framework characterized his last work.

Ayler, on the other hand, began with a sound, a sound that could be no one’s but his own, an immediately identifiable, shattering sound, what Amiri Baraka in 1966 called “the dynamite sound of the time.” Baraka heard in Ayler’s sound an antidote to the corrosive

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<sup>7</sup> Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo, 1994), 50-51.

<sup>8</sup> It is not my intention to reify a distinction between colony and metropole here, but rather to evoke the timbre of the discourse around Coleman’s music, to hear in its hysterical worries about Coleman’s undisciplined “plastic” tone (he famously played a plastic saxophone, often walking around New York’s Lower East Side around Cooper Square while practicing) and his failure to adopt to Western tonality, his playing “out of tune,” to hear in musical denunciations an extramusical anxiety about the aesthetic tenets of European hegemony.



effects of white intellectualism and the commodification of black music; Ayler's records are a kind of exorcism of American history, bypassing the popular song's hegemony over jazz to access the ghostly undercurrents of traumatic memory. Ayler "wants to play past note and get, then, purely into sound. Into the basic element, the clear emotional thing, freed absolutely from anti-emotional concept." It would be a mistake, however, to see this quest for sonic purity in terms of the search for a sound *of* purity; Ayler's sound was reedy, gruff, splintered, multiphonic, and multiple—which was why Baraka insisted on it as the excavation of the American history of an African sound, a distorted, ingrained timbre casting through a history of rags, marches, and sanctified hymns. Ayler was a sojourner in Europe in the early 1960s, a fellow traveler of a large cohort of expatriate and traveling experimental musicians. His was an exilic sound, first presented to the world of sound commodities as a foil against a trio of (occasionally bewildered) Scandinavian musicians in *My Name is Albert Ayler* (1963), but developed not in literal exile but in the exilic stance of an eccentric individualist abutting the rigid order of a military band (Ayler played in U.S. army bands in the 1950s). Nor, however, was Ayler's sonic subjectivity in any way solipsistic: as Baraka records in his *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* one of Ayler's favorite critiques was of someone who thought "it was about *him*." At the same time, however, a questing narrative of sonic purity still has to come to grips with Ayler's late recordings, like *New Grass* (1968), which with its populist gestures, sentimental lyricism, and rock rhythms (all combined with a programmatic spiritualism and a general *weirdness* that makes it fundamentally unlike other attempts to craft a jazz populism) disrupts any unidimensional modernist trajectory.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow, 1967), 126. Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (New York: Freundlich, 1983), 194. Albert Ayler, *My Name is Albert Ayler*, Recorded January 14, 1963, Debut/Fontana DEB-140, 1964, 33 1/3 rpm. Ayler, *New Grass*, Recorded September 5 and 6, 1968, Impulse! AS-9175, 1969, 33 1/3 rpm.

The narrative of one or a few genius figures (all men) who singularly transcended the limitations of jazz form in the 1960s, propelling the genre “out” of its inherited boundaries—and there are few narratives in post-1960 jazz discourse that are more canonical—present us with a crucial set of questions. When jazz musicians, critics, aficionados, and historians speak of an inside and an outside approach, what constitutes the container to which they refer? What kind of *beyond* is outside the jazz tradition? What is out there, after the change of the century has blotted out jazz’s silhouette to the extent that it becomes an empty signifier, a New Thing? Have we traveled into interstellar space, or been transported onto an Other plane of there, or are we simply out to lunch? When a genre incorporates its own outside, its own subversion, what continues to constitute it as a genre? (And is “the music’s” claim to the constant availability of its own outside an example of subversion, the kind of transgression that secretly constitutes the explicit law, or in psychoanalytic terms the perverse direct positing of the obscene underside of the superego enjoyment of prohibition? Or is it a radical escape to an outside of genre itself? Or the construction of an imaginary from the inside of a cultural commodity?)

To a great extent, jazz studies as an academic subdiscipline was founded on an approach modeled on the unmasking of the partiality, historicity, and political construction of notions of tradition and narrative continuity. Yet it is precisely the failure of attempts to establish narrative closure around the move “outside” that can be read symptomatically in contemporary discourse around jazz and improvised music, in both its neoclassical and “postmodern” versions. The neoclassical response to the 1960s and 1970s aesthetic movements can be caricatured, with some justification, as total rejection, even deafness—as many astute critics have pointed out, the narratives shaped by the three great intellectuals of jazz neo-classicism, Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch, and Wynton Marsalis, more or less

ignored musical developments between 1963 or so and Marsalis's reclamation of a singular jazz "tradition." Yet the seemingly more reasonable position that the outside—the music that used to be called avant-garde—can be approached as yet another historical manifestation of the jazz impulse, that it can be revered as part of the tradition, and placed in the toolbox along with playing the changes and other musical techniques, is no less an example of the jazz neoclassical aesthetic and its fundamental reliance on nostalgia.

The postmodernist opposition to jazz neoclassicism follows on Derek Bailey's recasting of jazz in his seminal book *Improvisation* (1978) as a closed narrative, a particularistic source material, one among many, for the universalized global field of free improvisation.<sup>10</sup> In this view the (constitutive?) outside of jazz is cast as a technique in the toolbox of the creative improviser rather than as a tradition to be deferred to. Jazz is constructed as a closed, provincialized narrative—jazz had to stretch into its beyond to help constitute the truly universal field of improvised music. The problem with this narrative is that it proposes jazz musicians can either be museum curators or purveyors of nostalgia as the music becomes a kind of folklore, but they cannot innovate within the jazz idiomatic language itself. The danger of treating global musics as raw material, only truly universalized when they are mixed together or distilled by the metropolitan improviser, is a recapitulated neo-colonial relationship between the metropolitan (post)modern creative artist and the ethnic, particularized folk material. Such a view obfuscates both the continuing patterns of racial contradiction within the field of improvised music itself and the history of jazz not as folk or ethnic idiom but as Black Classical Music, to use Rahsaan Roland Kirk's term. That is, the contradiction that jazz presented inside the conceptual space of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial modernity was that of a black (diaspora) universality, a blackness that was not ethnic

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<sup>10</sup> Derek Bailey, *Improvisation* (New York: Da Capo, 1993), esp. 48-58.

particularity but the universal motivic force of global culture (as disseminated along the under- and counter-currents of U.S. global hegemony and capitalist integration).

Insofar as it was U.S. blackness that jazz supposedly represented inside the halls of high culture (which is itself a questionable and highly constructed interpretation of the multinational transethnic formation of jazz itself), the principal contradiction in the mid-century conceptual space was between jazz as a signifier of racial democracy, however limited, and jazz as a signifier of black anti-colonial solidarity, the shared struggle against white supremacy globally and within the U.S. state's particular construction around the legalism of the black-white dichotomy. The problem with the narrative of post-jazz postmodernism is that it abandons this contradiction at the historical moment when it was most explosive: the moment when the universal viability of black modernist experimentation was asserted most forcefully in public sphere debates on U.S. black culture (between c. 1967 and c. 1975) is the period that, for the postmodern jazz narrative, improvisational freedom was "emancipated" from the particularistic jazz tradition.

What is at stake in the period conventionally named "Black Power," I would suggest, is at least in part the deprovincializing of U.S. political culture, and American exceptionalist pluralism in particular. The "jazz debates" of the 1960s are fascinating partly because of how they dramatize the collapsing hegemony of that pluralistic framework, where U.S. apartheid legal and social conditions (appearing in that discourse under the regional moniker "Jim Crowism") were constructed as a regrettable aberration from the inclusive group politics of U.S. urban industrial civilization, but where the imperialist framework of racial tutelage still operated (at an almost unconscious level) within liberal culture. Black Power from this point of view was a refusal of liberalism's racial tutelage through an assertion of the autonomous viability of black cultural practices. Thus without for the moment unpacking the various

contradictory claims of Black Power advocates, we can see that the transformation between the late 1950s and early 1970s involved not only the constricted fiction of “race relations” but the center of U.S. (imperial) political culture. The shifting parameters of the jazz debate, as liberals lost the authority to speak and to claim jazz as a symbol of U.S. democracy as it could be, is interesting as a symptom (even an exceptional example) of the ideological contradictions within the U.S.’s version of a “1968” crisis of political authority.

Thus the first question that confronts a critical history of the jazz avant-garde: what historico-ideological contradictions does aesthetic radicalism confront, and how does it track (or, in some cases, derail) those contradictions in a process of world-historical transformation? To begin to explore that question, it is necessary to deepen our consideration of the “object” of jazz history by turning to an analysis of the commodity form. It is a central contention of this dissertation that the centrifugal movement in musical performance—that which drove performance “outside.” in the jazz terminology that has developed in the wake of the (post)modernist distortion of centrifugal and centripetal forces of aesthetic evaluation—was in part a transformation not only of the aesthetic form of the musical performance, but at the same time an immanent transformation of the commodity form itself as the container for aesthetic information. The jazz avant-garde, I argue, was an attempt to disrupt the social metabolism governing commodity circulation on the specific hegemonic terrain of art (cultural production).<sup>11</sup> In order to theorize and historicize the avant-garde in the context of commodity fetishism, I turn now to a discussion of the problematic legacy of Theodor W. Adorno’s analysis of jazz.

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<sup>11</sup> Marx writes about commodity circulation as a metabolic process in *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy* trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 198.

### Assimilating Adorno to the Post-1960s “Jazz Regime”

Adorno’s jazz writings had a peculiar intellectual trajectory in the twentieth century. His first piece on jazz, “Farewell to Jazz,” was written from England in 1933, a calculated response to the emergence of a Nazi anti-jazz discourse. As Jonathan Wipplinger notes, Adorno’s celebration of jazz’s imminent disappearance was already in the early 1930s strangely belated: while jazz had been in vogue at the height of the Weimar Republic, by 1930 its appeal among German intellectuals had waned significantly<sup>12</sup> Adorno’s deepest intellectual engagement with jazz took place several years later, at a moment when swing had revived the recording industry after the fallow years of the post-1929 economic crisis. “*Über Jazz*” translated in English into “On Jazz,” was, to Adorno, a systematic diagnosis of jazz as a cultural phenomenon, a settling of accounts with a globally dominant form of “light music” that would forever close the book on whether jazz could be recruited as an oppositional music. Adorno’s answer was categorical: not by a long shot; indeed, jazz was a dangerous music that dressed up the psychic orientation of fascism in superficially subversive garb. His letters to Benjamin during the period of the essay’s composition suggest that he viewed the essay as a major statement in cultural analysis and philosophical method, that it was the dialectical counterpart to Benjamin’s muted celebration of mechanical reproduction’s revolutionary potential, particularly with regard to film, in the “Work of Art” essay. Nevertheless, Adorno chose, for reasons having to do with his precarious position in German letters under the Nazis, to publish the essay under an evocative pseudonym, “Hektor Rotweiller.” After “*Über Jazz*” was published in 1936, having escaped the European conflagration in 1938, Adorno found himself in the United States, first as a researcher for the “Radio Project” under Vienna-born positivist social scientist Paul Lazarsfeld, and then in

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Otto Wipplinger, “The Jazz Republic: Music, Race, and American Culture in Weimar Germany,” (PhD diss, University of Michigan, 2006), 311-312.

Los Angeles. He clashed repeatedly with Lazarsfeld over method, but dutifully undertook a survey-based research project on tastes among jazz fans; he reviewed new work on jazz history by Wilder Hobson and Marshall Stearns; and together with Max Horkheimer wrote the famous *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, whose chapter on the culture industry was significantly informed by the critique of jazz. Adorno returned to Frankfurt in 1949 with a new, first hand appreciation of the lures and dangers of commodity capitalism, as it existed in the United States. In 1953, Adorno wrote his last substantial engagement with jazz, a heavily revised but renewed commitment to the necessity of its critique and ultimate rejection, “Perennial Fashion—Jazz”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Farewell to Jazz” and “On Jazz” in *Essays on Music* ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 496-500, 470-495. Other essays by Adorno in Leppert’s collection provide an intellectual context for understanding Adorno’s critique of music in relation to technology, the serious/popular dichotomy, and mass culture. See “On the Social Situation of Music” (391-436), “On Popular Music” (437-469) and especially “On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” (288-317). It was impossible for Adorno to publish in Germany under his own name after 1933, and when he was writing “*Über Jazz*” there had been a four-year gap since he had published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, the Frankfurt School’s house journal. Adorno’s pithy explanation of the pseudonym: “the Rottweiler was a typical butcher’s dog and was almost always called Hektor. It was a fearsome beast and so no Nazi will ever suspect that it might hide the identity of a non-Aryan writer.” See Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005), 180. As numerous commentators have pointed out, the name also perhaps underwrote Adorno’s rhetorical ferocity in denouncing jazz and, like the earlier “Farewell to Jazz” that ironically celebrated a radio station’s banning of “*Negerjazz*,” aligned him with the fascists, at least in tone, to a degree that makes some readers uncomfortable. All of this was strategic, of course, and what it reveals more than anything is Adorno’s deep underestimation of the Nazi threat: all the clowning around with names and irony maybe points to Adorno’s persistent belief that the Nazis were themselves clowns, idiots who could not see through a transparent pseudonym in their obsession with racial “appearance” (*Schein*) or the “sham” of German purification. Müller-Doohm quotes Peter von Haselberg’s record of conversations with Adorno during this period: “after *cleaning out* the attics there would doubtless be a propaganda campaign against the rats and then the slogan: *Down with rust*. Moreover, the economy was in too precarious a state for the government to launch any drastic initiatives, if only because of the effect on opinion abroad and the withdrawal of credits. *That is exact imagination*, he concluded.” Ibid. When Adorno analyzes jazz in terms of “the clown” (see below), that figure might be kept in mind as a palimpsest of Nazi stupidity and the mutilated psyches of fascist rule. Although it is important not to discount the political valences of ridicule, Adorno clearly underestimated the terror such ridiculous stupidity could wreak, and although it is outside the bounds of this project to track fully the shifts in Adorno’s thinking into the postwar period, that failure to see the catastrophe coming, a failure which the loss of Benjamin as intellectual companion symbolized, haunted Adorno’s philosophical project, and perhaps informed his renewed attack on jazz in the 1953 essay “Perennial Fashion.” Although Adorno certainly changed his mind about some things during his sojourn in the U.S.—especially regarding the African American provenance of jazz (see Wipplinger, “Jazz Republic,” 308)—he doubled down on his critique of jazz *in part* because of his fidelity to a belief that, however catastrophic the Nazi rule was, its end did not stop the catastrophe but implanted it ever deeper. The postwar rule of the commodity, which for Adorno came to be symbolized by the United States, was for him a generalization of fascism’s psychic mutilation to capitalism qua global community. That is why a rejection of Adorno based on his misunderstanding of U.S. (and even African American) culture is beside the point. First of all, he was a United

In the 1980s and since, Adorno's jazz writings have come under intense scholarly scrutiny (an English translation of "Über Jazz" by Jamie Owen Daniel was published as "On Jazz" in *Discourse* in 1989, which occasioned much debate).<sup>14</sup> The reception of Adorno's jazz writings in the Anglo-American academy in the last twenty-five years can, I think, be understood historically in the context of changing views among the intelligentsia about jazz and the legacy of cultural hierarchy. Whereas Adorno's jazz writings were difficult for 1930s audiences, perhaps, precisely for the intellectual attention and philosophical rigor they lavished on the popular music of jazz, in the 1980s and 1990s, Adorno's psychoanalytic critique of and clear distaste for jazz was unpalatable and indeed well nigh unthinkable for a generation of intellectuals who came of age in the tumult of 1968, or amid nostalgia for it. For the purposes of this project, what is so fascinating about the trajectory of the reception of Adorno's critique of jazz is what it reveals symptomologically about the changing hegemonic signification of jazz. What had changed in the hegemonic field, the war of position that has been waged over jazz since the First World War, was intimately tied to a revolution in thinking about race. Adorno's rigorously anti-racialist stance was difficult to hear in the conjuncture of the cultural studies of the 80s and 90s perhaps in part because a new hegemonic understanding of race—community, nation, culture, etc.—as resistance

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States citizen for a time and lived there continuously from 1938 to 1949. His understanding of the U.S. was prismatic and oppositional, furiously hostile to what he regarded as the reification of the mind that took place under commodity culture, but it was also dialectical and as relatively comprehensive as one could expect from an exiled philosopher. It was not something idealistic and illusory like American character or personality that Adorno opposed but the relatively advanced process of psychic mutilation of commodity imperialism that was evident there, and that foretold the world's coming fate. Just as Adorno was out of joint with his contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s, rejecting absolutely and rigorously any appeal to "pure immediacy" (via racialist primitivism or fetishization of jazz), his thought cannot be assimilated to 1950s and 1960s opposition to "American imperialism" on cultural grounds: it was the universalization of capital he opposed, and believed he saw in the U.S. an advanced case of a world condition. See especially Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From a Damaged Life* trans. E. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974). For an excellent study of the Frankfurt School's work in the U.S. and its relationship to American intellectual history contexts, see Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). Also helpful is David Jenemann, *Adorno in America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Jamie Owen Daniel, "Introduction to Adorno's 'On Jazz,'" and Theodor W. Adorno, "On Jazz" trans. Jamie Owen Daniel, *Discourse* 12:1 (Fall/Winter 1989-90): 39-69.



made Adorno's 1930s challenge to the black provenance of jazz appear misguided, even disgusting. The unquestioned certainty of jazz as *black music* and thus as a critical reservoir against racism and a cultural property to be fiercely guarded, a belief articulated variously but omnipresent in the "Adorno and jazz" debates, however true it may be as history, was itself the outcome of the hegemonic struggles of the postwar period. From a vantage point somewhat temporally and situationally removed from the urgency of the English-speaking reception of Adorno's "hatred" for jazz, it is possible to see certain continuities and aporias that reserve jazz as an unquestionable, even untheorizable, cultural object.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1990s debates, jazz was constructed as an art form that was also implicitly understood to be a crucial resource in black resistance to white supremacy. While I share that view in many ways, I think it is important to note that both views—jazz as an art and jazz as black cultural resistance—were part of the stakes of the creative and political insurgencies of the 1960s. Jazz musicians and other creative intellectuals collectively, through diverse forms of discursive and institutional struggle, *claimed* jazz as an art form worthy of state and other institutional investments and *theorized* jazz as intimately connected both to other black vernacular forms and to political struggles over representations and resources. Beyond that historical perspective, it is also crucial to look at the ways in which jazz remains an untheorized "outside" of the theoretical debates about Adorno's position. While the naming and assumption of jazz as a black art form engaged in historical struggle is evidence of a profound victory for the creative projects of the 1960s, the aporias that impede recognition of black music's theoretical value indicate the unfinished inheritance of those

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<sup>15</sup> For a highly skeptical account, from a literary studies perspective, of the new hegemonic linkages between race, nation, and culture, see Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) and *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). For a theoretical critique of raciological thought as expressed in contemporary culture, see Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

struggles. Although the relationship between race and jazz in the 80s and 90s has been historicized and de-essentialized, in a strange way that discourse recapitulates the 1920s and 1930s reception of jazz as a source of "pure immediacy" and "vitality" that could restore or provide an escape from a desiccated European modernity.<sup>16</sup>

Analyzing the English language reception of Adorno reveals certain discursive regularities between the reception of jazz, which was profoundly primitivist, and the post 1960s discourse of protecting jazz from Adorno. That said, it is understandable to think of Adorno's attack on primitivism, vehement as it was, as itself a kind of racism. And indeed, as I will discuss in the next section, Adorno's references to race at best reveal a misunderstanding of black performance and at worst, exhibit a kind of racist condescension that, while anti-primitivist, is dismissive of the structural conditions within which black performers operated. While no one anymore explicitly avows primitivist beliefs in African or African-American existence as a pure outside of modernity's technological alienation, a celebratory recuperation of jazz risks incorporating (through the back door, as it were) a spatial logic where the music exists as a constitutive outside of the theoretical argument.

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<sup>16</sup> The old primitivist beliefs depended on a racialized and imperial-cartographic construction of temporal and spatial experiences such that "the primitive" was "outside" capitalist modernity, and implicitly offered a critique of it. For the classic account of primitivism in European thought and culture, see Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). While, as Torgovnick's research shows, there were many kinds of primitivism, what interests me here especially are the ways blackness as such was constructed as a primitive outside in the reception of jazz. (See in particular Torgovnick's discussion of blackness in the context of Manet's *Olympia*, p. 102-104, and her reading of Michael Leiris and jazz, p. 111, both of which note the fantasy constructions of blackness as a source of eroticism and sexual danger.) There is a large literature on primitivism and jazz. See in particular Ted Gioia, "Jazz and the Primitivist Myth," *Musical Quarterly*, 73:1 (1989): 130-143; David Chinitz, "Rejuvenation Through Joy: Langston Hughes, Primitivism, and Jazz," *American Literary History*, 9:1 (1997): 60-78; Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz Age Paris, 1900-1930*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Jeremy F. Lane, "Rythme de Travail, Rythme de Jazz: jazz, primitivism, and *machinisme* in inter-war France," *Atlantic Studies*, 4:1 (2007): 103-116; and Tom Pechar, "Tradition, Modernity, and the Supernatural Swing: Re-Reading 'Primitivism' in Hughes Pannassie's Writings on Jazz," *Popular Music*, 30:1 (2011): 25-45. The peculiar irony of a primitivist construction of (mostly) men who were urban sophisticates to a fault has alarmed many a jazz historian and informed the knowing winks of jazz performances from Ellington to Lester Bowie and beyond. A key thing to keep in mind here is that primitivist views were not only racist, but profoundly distorted the shared histories of transatlantic racial capitalism and the necessarily imperial and outer-directed construction of "Europe" itself. What can be theorized more precisely is the relationship between the eroticization of black difference and the effacement of black labor in the shared construction of modernity.

Insofar as jazz is constructed in these debates as a coherent musical object that is outside the process of theorization, they risk repeating the spatial and temporal division between theoretical engagement with modern alienation and a racialized outside that could serve as a “natural resource” for the critique of (post)modernity. The point is not that jazz studies or critical theory scholars are similar to jazz writers such as Hugh Panassié or that they incorporate a primitivist logic, but that insofar as they construct jazz as a coherent, bounded, extra-theoretical object they participate in a spatial policing of generic identity.<sup>17</sup>

The reception of Adorno in the Anglo-American academy has taken place, roughly, in two different trans-disciplinary spaces: jazz cultural studies (as a sub-interdiscipline of Black or African Studies, or as a subfield of American Studies) and critical theory (articulated across the margins of philosophy, film studies, comparative literature, political science, and English departments). These two literatures approach the problem of Adorno’s jazz writing in opposed but complementary ways. Put perhaps in overly schematic language, both literatures’ approach to Adorno has been to bracket his critique of jazz as based in a

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<sup>17</sup> Implicit in my perspective is the assumption that one thing Adorno was correct about in his jazz writing was to think of jazz in terms of the commodity form and commodity fetishism. To bring out my point of view, I would like to engage a particularly interesting statement in the Adorno-jazz debate. Nick Nesbitt has strenuously objected to Adorno’s alignment of jazz with the social functionality of the culture industry, arguing that “[h]is thought rigidifies whenever he returns to the subject in an indeterminate negation that brings his negative dialectic to a crashing halt.” See Nesbitt, “Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane, and Jazz,” *Telos* 116 (Summer 1999): 81-98, 81. While in broad sympathy with Nesbitt’s critique of Adorno, and specifically the project to approach jazz through the concepts, and the analysis of art as embedded in conceptual activity, that underlines Adorno’s own *Aesthetic Theory*, it is worthwhile to point out that Adorno is at least consistent in his approach to “popular” or “mass” culture: he was equally rigid when discussing Hollywood films or, here, pulp fiction, despite the claim to artistic status that admirers of both genres might wish to make. And it is because Adorno’s analysis ultimately concerns the category of the commodity, and commodity fetishism, that it cannot be sufficient to make the distinction, as Nesbitt does, between treating jazz as a commodity and as “a musical-aesthetic object.” Put simply, it is both, and the burden of Adorno’s analysis is to show how the commodity function of jazz infects its musico-aesthetic structure through and through. As this section argues throughout, defeating, or perhaps exorcising, this line of thought cannot be accomplished only by claiming that Adorno misrecognized jazz—that ultimately jazz is something more, or beyond, a commodity. Only by following the logic of commodification through Adorno’s admittedly idiosyncratic mishearings can we think a way out of Adorno’s sense that the commodity finally and forever imprisoned jazz in the reproduction of political passivity. Claiming an “outside” to the commodity form as a way of escaping Adorno’s analysis of jazz is in contradiction to Marx’s theory. The illusion of that within the commodity that magically escapes the commodification process is inherent, after all, to that “very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” that is the object of fetishism. See Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 163.

profound misunderstanding of actual (real? authentic?) jazz. However, their modes of making this bracket are interestingly different. Jazz studies scholarship usually assimilates Adorno to the white masculinist appropriation of jazz in the interwar period, seeing his masculinist and racially condescending language as aligned with Euro-American jazz criticism, and indeed reactionary anti-jazz rhetoric, as a whole. Whereas, for critical theory scholars the problem has been to bracket Adorno's mishearing of jazz from a critical recuperation of Adorno's aesthetic theory, cultural critique of capitalism, and the philosophical method known as negative dialectics. Again schematically, jazz cultural studies tends to perceive Adorno's views on jazz as a singular example of Euro-pessimistic, anti-popular arrogance, a masculinist, paranoid, and at least potentially racist conflation of jazz with kitsch, castration, and fascism; and scholars of critical theory see Adorno's jazz writing as an exception to his usual critical perspicuity, as a temporary but typical lapse into fervent condemnation: Adorno's rigorous negativity had, in the case of jazz, fastened onto an unworthy object. Thus jazz is saved from Adorno. In each case, the central position of Adorno's singular critique of jazz (both to his own philosophical "oeuvre" and in the history of jazz writing and analysis) has to be disavowed. What these critiques of Adorno are invested in (from two directions) are saving and protecting jazz, compelling us to ask: Why does jazz need saving and who are we protecting it from? Who speaks for jazz in the war of words over Adorno's cultural criticism?

The intellectual patterns of the critical response to Adorno had in part been set by a 1953 debate with Joachim Ernst-Berendt, a music journalist who was perhaps the most prominent example in Germany of what Adorno called the "jazz ideologues." Berendt opposed Adorno's latest "Perennial Fashion—Jazz" on several grounds, but he moved principally to consider jazz a modernist form that had abandoned its dance origins. Where

Adorno wrote about commercial dance music, Berendt insisted jazz had since become a modernist, sophisticated, anti-commercial—and de-sexualized—music appreciated by a small intellectual elite. Since the 1930s, however, Adorno had been careful to follow the distinctions made by jazz “fanatics” between light dance music and “hot music,” and argued for their distinct but related functionality. Berendt also seemed to miss the target of Adorno’s attempt to *deracialize* jazz discourse, arguing for the modernist respectability of jazz, its assimilation to a credentialed art world, in terms that must have made Adorno shudder (much of his postwar work was devoted to puncturing the myths of high culture’s “civilizing” effect: German elite culture had failed its people miserably, and to continue to believe in the socio-political value of the high end of cultural hierarchy was, put simply, obscene in Adorno’s view). Indeed, one might have cause to wonder whether Berendt had actually read or understood Adorno: far from being pacified by assertions of jazz’s “anti-commercial” aesthetic, Adorno would have been absolutely horrified—indeed, “*Über Jazz*” was in part devoted to an analysis of how jazz effectively *masked* its commodity form to provide bourgeois consumers a convenient alibi. In short, the famous Adorno-Berendt debate has more than historical interest only because its terms have been so often replicated: Adorno was not talking about real jazz.

The historian Uta Poiger has noted that the debate hinged on whether jazz caused disordered gender relations, and concludes that both Berendt and Adorno’s positions indicated a similar “sexual conservatism.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Adorno’s analysis of jazz since the 1930s had deployed a (partially) psychoanalytic language of castration to describe the subjective exchange of jazz performance and consumption, which several critics have described as

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<sup>18</sup> On the Adorno-Berendt debate, see Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture In a Divided Germany*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), esp. 142-145. The quoted phrase appears on page 145.

reinscribing patriarchal domination.<sup>19</sup> Berendt's response was to de-sexualize, and implicitly remasculinize, jazz as a respectable model of bourgeois rationality and masculinity. Likewise for jazz criticism's most comprehensive historian, Adorno can be assimilated to the "pose of pseudo-intellectual masculinist authority" that held sway over early jazz critics, despite his caustic rancor towards the latter.<sup>20</sup> The gender politics of Adorno's essays, and his work in general, are certainly questionable, perhaps retrograde. Yet Adorno's wildly psychoanalytic reading of how jazz both castrated and provided an illusory compensation for castration, whatever its faults (and there are many), cannot be conflated with Berendt's respectability project: in Adorno's terms, the bourgeois pose of ignoring the sexualized or eroticized associations of jazz out of a false *noblesse oblige*, in order to mask and justify one's own psychic (and likely deeply sexualized) investment in the persistence of those associations, is quite a different project from Adorno's psychoanalytical-ideological criticism, however masculinist both may be.

As Berendt's argument shows, one strategy to reconcile Adorno's distaste for jazz with appreciation for his critique of mass culture is to separate the object of his critique from "true" jazz: the music Adorno attacked—European café and dancehall music—was a poor facsimile, inauthentic, commercially debased.<sup>21</sup> The literary critic Fredric Jameson gives this

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Andreas Huyssen's remarks about the Frankfurt School's use of "castration" in "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 48. Peter Townsend, "Adorno on Jazz: Vienna Versus the Vernacular," *Prose Studies*, 11:1 (May 1988), attacks Adorno's description of castration. In Richard Leppert's summary, ultimately "Adorno hangs a great deal of psychoanalysis on not terribly much." See Leppert's comments in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, p. 352.

<sup>20</sup> John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 88.

<sup>21</sup> This strategy, although not universally adopted, is nearly ubiquitous in the reception of Adorno. The translator of "Über Jazz," Jamie Owen Daniel, suggested this approach in his own introduction to the essay, writing "[W]hen Adorno remarks that 'the extent to which jazz has anything at all to do with genuine black music is highly questionable,' he is referring to the popular, commercially produced hits that were accessible to any European civil servant on the radio, and not to what now would be recognized as authentically black jazz, a jazz which few white Europeans in the 1930s would have been aware." See "Introduction to Adorno," *Discourse*, 41. Although the accuracy of the latter statement requires more detail on what constitutes a "few" white Europeans—certainly only a minority had any exposure to the records of Armstrong or Ellington—this

idea a particularly pointed expression: it was Paul Whiteman, the popular white bandleader, who was “the proper referent for what Adorno calls ‘jazz,’ which has little to do with the richness of a Black culture we have only long since then discovered.” Jameson’s remark can be compared with one he made a number of years previously, in his famous essay on “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,” in which he identified the blues, along with the cultures of colonized peoples, as among the last reservoirs of the non-commodified functioning of folk culture, whereas everyone and everything else has been subsumed by the artificial, human-constructed landscape of capitalist culture. This is not to say that Jameson and like-minded critics merely repeat the modernist alignment of jazz, blues and black vernacular cultures with the primitive outside of a singular occidental modernity, but to invite a symptomatic historical reading of the critical impulse that Jameson here names and exemplifies. Historicizing the defense of jazz against Adorno involves distinguishing a temporality contained in Jameson’s wonderfully suggestive phrase “we have only long since then discovered,” which can almost be said to invent a new tense, call it the imperfect irruptive: his wording suggests “our” belated discovery of black culture and the incipient finality of its transformation of “our” reading of Adorno. The point here, however, is that Jameson’s reference to black culture, his rhetorical shift from ignorance of jazz to certainty

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statement perhaps downplays the extent to which distinctions along lines of race and authenticity were an integral part of Weimar and Parisian jazz writing. Far more telling, however, is the fact that Daniels’ own translation of Adorno contradicts his introductory statement: Adorno focuses explicitly on the minority taste for “hot music,” he discusses (or perhaps exorcises) the blackness of black musicians in considerable detail, and he specifically names Ellington (erroneously) a partisan of “sweet” symphonic jazz and a Debussy epigone. I do not mean to call out Daniel specifically, only to note first how his own framing of the essay was appropriated by many other scholars as a tactic for rescuing jazz from Adorno and, second, to suggest that such a blatant ideological contradiction is not simply a mistake, but precisely an overdetermined rhetorical figure that *performs* a necessary obeisance to the authenticity of jazz and blackness but does not or cannot theorize Adorno’s negativity in relation to the hegemonic adoption of notions of authenticity among the (overwhelmingly white) enclaves of post-Frankfurt critical theory.

about its resistant value, conceals a history of hegemonic struggle that bestowed an oppositional resonance to the appellation “black culture.”<sup>22</sup>

As a number of critics have pointed out, the flaw in the strategy of saving jazz by dislocating its “true” referent from Adorno’s critique runs up against the problem that Adorno’s writings contain careful, even meticulous, discernments between different styles of jazz, and focused explicitly on what Adorno called “hot music,” which overlaps nearly seamlessly with the authentic jazz historiography that needs saving. In fact, Adorno’s distinctions between popular dance music and authentic hot jazz, is the same distinction, inherited from the language of jazz criticism, that the critical theory defense of jazz uses to separate Adorno’s critique from what we now, at long last but finally forever understand as the real thing. Critical theory’s bracketing of Adorno’s terminology recapitulates jazz criticism’s construction of jazz as a bound generic object that ignores the ideological and hegemonic flux of the references of the term jazz throughout its history.

For a number of writers approaching jazz from the interdisciplinary location of African American literary and cultural studies, Adorno’s position is simply racist. For some critics, Adorno’s positions on jazz betrayed a deep-seated racist antipathy to black culture. The poet and critic Lorenzo Thomas, for example, writes that Adorno’s jazz essays depend

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<sup>22</sup> Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic*, (London: Verso, 1990), 141. Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” *Social Text* 1 (Winter, 1979): 130-148. See the similar remarks by Thomas Andrae: “Adorno’s theory of jazz betrayed a racist attitude toward black music that was initially fostered by the culture industry. The recording industry presented a highly diluted and commercialized form of jazz taken from the original but less popular type rooted in black culture and sold it as the real thing. White band leaders like Paul Whiteman, styled the ‘King of Jazz,’ were given the credit, the money, and the publicity for ‘advancing’ and ‘refining’ a form of music that they not only appropriated from blacks but had radically subverted. In his essays on jazz, Adorno perpetuated this prejudice by confining his analysis to the commercialistic white jazz of big name swing bands and flagrantly denying or belittling the black contribution to jazz. .... If the black contributed anything to jazz, claimed Adorno, it was its origin in the blacks’ half-resentful, half-complacent submission to slavery, expressed in spirituals and slave songs. However, contrary to Adorno, blacks self-consciously utilized jazz as a form of rebellion against the hegemony of white values and the assertion of their ethnic identity.” Note that Andrae relies on LeRoi Jones’s *Blues People* for the latter claim, as well as for the history of swing (sic) music and commercialization. See Andrae, “Adorno on film and mass culture: The culture industry reconsidered,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 20 (1979): 34-37.



on a profoundly Eurocentric perspective: “Adorno reveals a total inability to recognize blacks—even in an imagined dawn of folk expression—as people of creating a self-conscious and original art.”<sup>23</sup> Thomas’s reading of Adorno hinges on the relationship between the latter’s claims against the (European primitivist) idea that jazz expressed an (African) archaic unruliness, and his attack on the associations between jazz and political rebellion. Indeed, the Berendt-Adorno debate hinged in part on whether Adorno’s indication of political passivity in jazz was racist in intent or effect, whether it was a characterization of the political passivity of black folks in particular.

I believe it is important to return to the reception of Adorno’s jazz writing because insofar as his critique drops out of jazz historiography, the latter loses an important resource of negativity and culture critique. After the many reductive readings of the “Frankfurt” position on culture in an administered world, we can say good riddance to the caricature of Adorno’s position that reads him as saying that we are all automatons, our light and superficial tastes the product of a bourgeois stupefaction, subjected to a homogenizing conspiracy of industrial capital. The culture industry critique, founded in the analysis of jazz

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<sup>23</sup> Lorenzo Thomas, “Communicating By Horns: Jazz and Redemption in the Poetry of the Beats and the Black Arts Movement,” originally published in *African American Review* 26:2 (Summer 1992): 291-98, reprinted in Thomas, *Don’t Deny My Name: Words and Music in the Black Intellectual Tradition* ed. Aldon Lynn Nielsen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 105-136, 105-06. Thomas’s comments on Adorno appear as a polemical introduction to a classic and revelatory critical survey of music and postwar poetry. For contrast, see Jeffrey T. Nealon, “Maxima Immoralia: Speed and Slowness in Adorno,” in *Rethinking the Frankfurt School: Alternative Legacies of Cultural Critique* ed. Nealon and Caren Irr (Albany: SUNY, 2002), 131-144, which defensively protects Adorno from the charge of racism by comparing “On Jazz” to Amiri Baraka’s analysis of the commodification of swing: “nobody calls Baraka a racist—or at least no one calls him an anti-black racist—because of this critique, and he’s seldom accused of being too high culture for his own good.” This recuperation of Adorno again depends on the ideologically bleeding of “jazz” across musical lines such that it is no longer “good” jazz that is the target: “if you disagree with Adorno, be prepared to tell the world what’s so interesting or crucial about the swinging grooves of Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians,” 136. This seems to willfully set aside Adorno’s deeply problematic references to the psychic legacies of slavery.

as a commodity, does not rely on homogenization qua elimination of cultural “choice.”<sup>24</sup> In the end, and contrary to that stereotype, Adorno’s caution is really directed to those of us who think our aesthetic choices in the marketplace of culture will save us from ruin, which is a caution that needs to be voiced ever more urgently in this present conjuncture.

Moreover, as Adorno and Benjamin’s correspondence makes clear, Adorno imagined “*Über Jazz*” not (only) as a dismissive accounting of one cultural form, but as a major statement in the philosophical method of the critique of commodity culture. Upon reading the jazz essay, Benjamin wrote to Adorno of “how enormously delighted I am to discover such a profound and spontaneous inner communication between our thoughts.”<sup>25</sup> Benjamin pointed specifically to the relation between Adorno’s theory of syncopation in jazz and his own thoughts about filmic “shock effects.” Adorno had written earlier in lyrical and intense phrases of how his own study of jazz worked the same terrain as Benjamin’s “Work of Art” essay, but from a dialectically opposite direction: the mechanical reproduction of jazz music revealed the degrading and illusory power of mass culture whose “avant-garde” procedures Benjamin celebrated; thinking about music suggested that the critical work encoded into the form of the autonomous art work could not be reduced to the concept of aura; finally, the

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<sup>24</sup> For an example of this reading, see Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records, and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 19-20. Pace Eisenberg, when he says that consumer choice “*is* free—at least, its strait-jacket is custom cut,” this is not a refutation of Adorno, but a recapitulation of his critique. For Adorno and Horkheimer in the mass culture essay in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, to take a representative example, it is not that consumers have no choices, but that the exercise of those choices occurs within the prescribed space allowed for choice. The “mass deception” of the culture industry is the fantasy that the endless array of cultural objects on display for purchase—now expertly and meticulously tailored to our idiosyncratic online buying habits, but as Adorno and Horkheimer were writing they drew on experience with the new fields of consumer behavioralism and segmented market research—mirror an open-ended political freedom, that by participating in the marketplace of culture, ideas, or opinions we are participating in the mutual democratic construction of public life. If in fact, as they assert, culture is administered within certain limits, then choice within those limits is empty precisely insofar as those limits—the participation in culture principally through consumption; the organization of affect into well-defined market segments or *genres*; and perhaps especially the acceptance of culture or art itself as a hermetic space that contains difference and disagreement but does not, except in an oblique, mysterious way, touch on the political-economic—are not themselves made into objects of contestation.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940* trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 144. Letter dated 30 June 1936.

study of jazz had illuminated for Adorno the extent to which bourgeois radical intellectuals and the proletarian subjects of mass culture were locked into the same predicament, that “the mutilators become the mutilated” in a wide social generalization of the alienation of class domination and imperialism.<sup>26</sup> Benjamin confirmed Adorno’s sense that they were working on the same problem, “like two different headlamps trained upon the same object from opposite directions.”<sup>27</sup>

My own perspective persists in landing on a certain ambiguity in Adorno’s account of jazz, alternately appalled that this most musical of philosophers was so recalcitrant in refusing to hear the creative gaps, in the break, of jazz modernism, and on the other hand thrilled by his critical engagement with the ideologies of jazz, nearly unparalleled in the history of Euro-American jazz writing. Of the importance the analysis of jazz held for Adorno in relation to his thought, its integral and formative relationship not only to the critique of the culture industry but also to the philosophical method of negative dialectics, there can be no doubt. Therefore, to introduce my reading of Adorno’s analysis of jazz as a “ghastly allegory,” I will propose the outline of a charitable reading of Adorno. “*Über Jazz*,” it might be said, opens a space for the emergence of critical musical practices in jazz, precisely by delimiting the contradictions between the ideologies promoted on behalf of the music and the enchaining effects of monopoly capitalist control of the recording industry.

Far from a racist turning away from the sound of jazz, in this view Adorno might be seen to

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<sup>26</sup> See Adorno’s justly famous letter of 18 March 1936, written just after he received the second version of Benjamin’s essay. *Complete Correspondence*, 127-133.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 144. Letter of 30 June 1936. Adorno replied over two months later that Benjamin’s “letter on Rottweiler’s essay on jazz, which I was naturally extremely keen to look at, never actually reached me.” Ibid, 145. Whether this was a veiled criticism of the brevity and superficiality of Benjamin’s intellectual engagement with the essay, veiled precisely by Adorno’s pseudonym, or was based on a sincere expectation or belief that Benjamin would write a more substantial response, or in fact refers to a letter lost to Adorno and to us, is unclear. Nevertheless, there was a sense, shared between the two writers in the summer of 1936, that they were together composing a philosophy of contemporary art from their respective analyses of film and jazz. Adorno continued to make tenacious and dogged criticism’s of Benjamin’s neglect of the autonomous art work, encouraging him to make a fuller break with Brechtian ideas. Later letters make it clear they did discuss the jazz essay during Adorno’s visit to Paris in early October.

call explicitly, but almost unwittingly, for a music that exploits what gaps remain in the administrative enclosure of culture to create music animated by the spirit of fugitivity, “lines of flight,” and creative spirit. In this view, Adorno was in unintentional, even unconscious, alliance with black diasporic modernism. Despite his deafness, and in some ways enabled by it, by an unremitting critical gaze that refused to succumb to the enchanting sounds of spectacular black (and white European) “primitivist” virtuosity, Adorno could revision proleptically on the one hand, a world saturated by sonic commodities that banally and monotonously trumpeted the right to consume, and a *negative* picture of a set of sonic practices that could repoliticize the act of listening even amid the deafening pulse of cultural unanimity. Reconstructed or developed, like a photographic negative, his critique of “really existing” jazz calls for a music that begins to look uncannily like the “free jazz” that emerged in the late 1950s.

#### Ghastly Allegories: Towards a Reading of Adorno’s *Über Jazz*

What has scarcely been attempted, however, is a critical reading, from within jazz studies, of Adorno’s ideas of jazz on their own terms. In a way, Adorno’s project in “*Über Jazz*” is not dissimilar from the project of this dissertation: to understand the ideological deployment of jazz as a signifier for a field that cannot adequately be described through formal-musicological analysis, but must be read through a social dialectic. Given that Adorno has been consistently offered the alibi that he was writing, not about “jazz” as we now know it truly was, but about “jazz” as a (false) generic label for light dance music in interwar Europe, it is striking that the first pages of “*Über Jazz*” are devoted to making a detailed set of distinctions between various forms of music called “jazz.” Any anachronistic

or presentist bracketing of (true) jazz from Adorno's target does not take into account that Adorno himself consistently distinguished between light dance music and the "hot music" (in English in the original) sought out by aficionados. Adorno, however, does not in the opening of the essay search for the *essence* of jazz so much as for what all of its articulations might have *in common*. Trying out several possibilities, he argues that jazz is perhaps consistent in terms of sound and rhythm: its rhythms are mostly syncopated, and its sound often utilizes a distinctive vibrato associated particularly with the saxophone. Each feature, however, is itself dialectical: the omnipresence of syncopation, a regulated departure from "straight" time, puts into relief jazz's dependence on strictly metered time, and in particular 4/4 or common time; the vibrato's distortion or engraining of the instrument's sound puts into relief the mediating role the saxophone had historically played in European composition. The appearance of disruption covers over an underlying conciliation: from this, Adorno proposes a first "functional" (non-formal) definition of jazz, "letting the rigid vibrate."<sup>28</sup>

And yet, the search for musical qualities held in common by jazz is frustrated by a dense series of social contradictions. In a sense that frustrates Adorno's musical and philosophical rigor, jazz, it appears, can be almost anything (and is thus *allegorical*, but more on that later). He writes:

The wide public success of the *songs* of Kurt Weill was a success for jazz, although the rhythmic profiling of its melodies in accordance with the scansion of the composed verse lines is diametrically opposed to jazz practice—only the pervasive

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<sup>28</sup> Adorno, "On Jazz" in *Essays on Music*, 470-495, 471. This version is a reprint of the Daniel translation originally published in *Discourse*. Further references to the pagination of *Essays on Music* will occur in text. The goal here is neither to endorse nor reject Adorno's musicological judgments on formal terms. As many commentators have pointed out, Adorno's notion of syncopation is a quite reductive way to think about the rhythmic quality of swing. Below I will say more about how Adorno's essay works to suppress the possibilities opened by jazz modernism, although realized only sporadically, in its drive to encompass jazz as a social phenomenon. Here I merely wish to point out that Adorno was not offering synthetic judgments about jazz *as music* in the passages on syncopation or vibrato but dialectically demonstrating the inadequacy of any formalist account of jazz.

basic rhythm and the sound of the saxophone have anything to do with jazz in this case. Jazz is not what it “is”: its aesthetic articulation is sparing and can be understood at a glance. Rather, it is what it is used for, and this fact clearly brings up questions whose answers will require in-depth examination. (472)

The essay’s attempt to find a musicological or formal frame for understanding jazz has reached an important impasse: Adorno instead finds that the term jazz has lost its referent, and has bled all over the musical landscape. Its ideological itinerary through Europe has left whatever jazz might have been as a provincial urban music in New Orleans by the wayside, leaving an empty signifier, and to be blunt, a rotten husk. Jazz has been reduced in the twenty years of its existence as a globally circulated recorded commodity to two “mute” signs: the fixed rhythm and the saxophone, which together constitute an advertisement, but not a distinct intersubjective performance culture. When Adorno complains that jazz is not formally inventive, this is, in part, what he has in mind, this sprawling of “jazz” across a soundscape that is deeply ideological, invested with unconscious forces and populated by what Adorno will call “mutilated psyches.”

At this key moment of impasse, the essay makes a lateral move to a comparison with the detective novel. This could be read as an appeal to cultural hierarchy, an assertion that jazz and pulp are both low and manipulative. But in the context of the essay’s projection, the comparison opens up a rush of dialectical concepts that explode the formal analysis Adorno had undertaken in the first few pages to make far reaching claims about jazz’s significance to an understanding of what he calls the “fatal characteristics of capitalism” (473). Both the detective novel and jazz deploy individualizing elements to conceal their ultimate determination by stereotypes or conventions. In a way that Adorno doesn’t fully make clear,<sup>29</sup> this comparison leads him to make a series of condensed dialectical claims that are

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<sup>29</sup> Adorno’s transition is as follows: “Just as in the detective novel the question of the identity of the criminal is intersected with that which is implied by the whole, so in jazz the question of the alien subject, who both

worth some detailed exegesis. The paragraph following Adorno's admission of formalist failure and his appeal to the genres of pulp fiction contains in condensed form many of the arguments that the rest of the essay will unpack:

If one attempts, as has been the case often enough, to consider the use value of jazz, its suitability as a mass commodity, as a corrective to the bourgeois isolation of autonomous art, as something which is dialectically advanced, and to accept its use value as a motive for the sublation of the object character of music, one succumbs to the latest form of romanticism which, because of its anxiety in the face of the fatal characteristics of capitalism, seeks a despairing way out, in order to affirm the feared thing itself as a sort of ghastly allegory of the coming liberation and to sanctify negativity—a curative in which, by the way, jazz itself would like to believe. (473)

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quivers and marches through it, is intersected by the question of what its purpose is, why it is there at all, while it asserts its existence [*Dasein*] as something self-evident which only conceals how difficult its own vindication of it must be," Ibid, 472-73. I confess to losing completely the thread of the argument in this opaque passage, where the antecedent of "it" (presumably "jazz"?) fades into grammatical incoherence. Yet it is a fascinating illustration of the affective experience of reading Adorno's jazz analysis, the tantalizing feeling that he has diagnosed something crucial mixed with a nauseating sense of being caught in a rationalizing circle set in motion by Adorno's own aesthetic (dis)taste. I think, however, that there is something important, even in the dense circularity of the passage of the "alien subject" through jazz's personified struggle for ontological identity. If I recognize correctly, in this passage Adorno articulates a frustration with the appearance or ruse of jazz's self-evident identity with itself. Again Adorno's clumsy deafness is a compelling rubric to think with: is he asking of the alien subject (the foreign traveler, the musicianly interloper intruding into the cultural and psychological space of Europe?) to justify "his" presence? The detective novel interrogates a social totality by focusing on its constitutive outside, the criminal—that much is clear, and certainly backed up by subsequent readings. (See e.g. Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism*, [Durham: Duke University Press, 2000].) In jazz, however what is interrogated (jazz's very existence or appearance, its irruption as a cultural phenomenon) is itself dialectical, both asserted and concealed by the unanimous assumption of self-evidence. It is true that Adorno does not explain himself fully here, but I wonder if the tautology he aims for is not even today at work in jazz discourse, the tautology of jazz ontology, its use(less) value a persistent justification for its assertion of its right to (continue) exist(ing). Jazz is the ultimate cultural expression of identity, its relation to itself so dislocated from language (or so I say) that its non-identity with itself, the self-contradiction that Adorno's method looks to as a dialectical opening, is not *visible* (or for the most part, *sayable*) but perhaps in the end *bearable*. Adorno, then, is fascinated by the appearance of the "alien subject" waltzing through town enjoying himself in a moment of self-possession and freedom of movement, his marching perhaps an expression of carefree pride or defiance, his quivering perhaps a set of embodied stylistic gestures whose language Adorno cannot read. But he doesn't stop (stoop?) to listen to the alien *sounds* that subject makes, which as Adorno knew well did not come from a primitive outside, but which he could not, however, hear as an advanced articulation of the *alienating* experience of biopolitical modernity. (See, for two canonical arguments that blackness refers to an experience of modernity par excellence, in its alienation of labor and terrorizing technics, Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, [London: Verso, 1993]; and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997].) Adorno tries to assimilate the alien (the black) influence on light music by systematizing it into the European categories of syncopation and vibrato, which, we must be clear, he *knows* are inadequate; their inadequacy is the spur that drives the essay. But at the crucial moment of the argument, just prior to its eruption of negativity, Adorno fails to make sense of his experience of that inadequacy as a symptom of the *non-identity* of jazz and blackness with each other or themselves.

In other words, if we think of jazz as having revolutionary use value, we participate in a “politics of despair” that views the end of capitalism with horror, constructing in jazz a “ghastly allegory” of what a revolution might mean.<sup>30</sup> What Adorno means by this is that bourgeois audiences project onto jazz their fears about their own overthrow, fears that are dialectically reversed into the positive, restorative, vitalist rejuvenation of bourgeois existence itself that jazz was said to provide. All of the talk about improvisatory freedom, emotional expression, collective improvisation, what in the U.S. was fetishized by the jazz ensemble as a model for democratic political forms—all of this in Adorno’s analysis is a mirrored projection onto the empty canvas of jazz, bourgeois celebration as a mask for anxiety and fear.

While there is some ambiguity to the issue, the contexts of Adorno’s “ghastly allegories” indicate that he was not, at least at this moment, expressing pessimism for the future. When he writes of the “approaching order of things,” he means the immanence of revolution. Here, he is saying that romantic efforts to see a use value in the “pure immediacy” of jazz are not only engaged in a process of psychic projection, but also misunderstand the artistic needs of a society in revolution. Spontaneous revolt, the subjective immediacy of flaunting bourgeois morality: these stances—whether associated with a superficial understanding of surrealism or a more middle-class “New Age” spiritualism or a pseudo-political nihilistic destruction of bourgeois edifices—are not revolutionary, and insofar as jazz provides an image of immediacy it too supports such damaging, futile acting out (indeed such actions are “impotent” in a strong and problematic

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<sup>30</sup> That in this case “use value” refers to value for revolutionary thought is made clear by several subsequent references in the same paragraph to “an approaching order of things” and “the coming revolution” in the passage quoted. Adorno’s postwar work may suggest a melancholy tone for this passage, but instead it is filled by a (no doubt naive) anticipation of the collapse of bourgeois rule. As I hope to make clear, Adorno is not (quite) saying here that jazz is ipso facto reactionary, but that it functionally serves a bourgeois audience in psychically compensating them for their valid fears of what a true revolution will do to them.



sense: Adorno will say that jazz is the music of “coming too soon”). Adorno questions whether aesthetic desublimation would be part of any true utopia. “[T]he use value of jazz does not sublimate alienation, but intensifies it,” he writes, and the essay will go on to describe jazz as effecting a kind of psychic mutilation, designed for the market and ideologically functional for the upper class, although the mutilation of the jazz phenomenon had spread across the class antagonisms of European society.

And it is here that Adorno asserts that jazz is unthinkable outside of the commodity form. Jazz’s formal elements, as well as its use value, are keyed to market relations. The ruse of immediacy is expressed by the incorporation of “improvisational moments,” or what Adorno will later call “interference” or “differentiated elements,” into the jazz commodity, but he writes that these “moments” “are added in their naked externality to the standardized commodity form in order to mask it” (473). It is worth repeating this crucial turn in Adorno’s argument: not only the contained moments of improvisation in most jazz performances, expressed fundamentally by the syncopated rhythm itself, but in fact the whole functioning of “hot music” as a more improvisatory, more immediate style of jazz, reveal the particular investment jazz has as a commodity in the concealment of its own commodification. Improvisation *appears* to be outside the commercial imperatives of the jazz market, but instead it works to offer an alibi to bourgeois consumers and mask the commodity nature of the recorded object.

The way the “interference” of improvisation works offers insight not only into the operations of the jazz or popular music industries, but also capitalism as a social totality. The contradiction between the improvised elements of jazz and the rigid structure that contains those elements, and the contradiction of consumers consuming commodities for their illusory (or masked) non-commodified ornaments, together reveal something important

about the irrationality of commodity culture. How can it be said that the culture industry (a theory that was in its infancy when Adorno wrote “Über Jazz”) “determines” audience tastes (desires, expectations) when cultural shifts are unpredictable and unforeseeable, and when *a fortiori* the record companies despite now having decades of market research, and increasingly sophisticated positivist techniques, to draw on cannot always successfully predict which records will become “hits”?<sup>31</sup> Clearly, if the administrators of industrial culture knew how to

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<sup>31</sup> This argument from Adorno may shed some light on the seminal debate among historians about audience response and “the folklore of industrial capitalism.” See the AHR Forum on Lawrence Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences” and responses by Jackson Lears, Natalie Davis, and especially Robin D. G. Kelley, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘The Folk,’” *American Historical Review* 97:5 (December 1992): 1369-1430. That debate hinged on the status of evidence that audiences of mass culture “responded” in various ways: by writing critiques and suggestions to producers, by reframing plots to fit different life parameters, by talking back to screens and developing oral cultures around critical consumption. Such evidence does not defeat Adorno’s argument, although it may qualify it or justify a shift of analytical perspective; indeed, Adorno’s study of jazz prepared him for his encounter with U.S. social science techniques of audience surveys and their deep complicity with the emerging doctrines of segmented marketing. From an Adornian perspective, the correlation between advertisers’ and culture producers’ sophisticated techniques of measuring popular desire and historians’ later use of similarly constructed evidence of popular desire would have to be explained. Adorno’s argument may also address the ways in which culture critique has been taken up, and alternately rejected, in recent U.S. cultural history. Adorno’s name, and the Frankfurt School as metonymy for Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, has become shorthand for a totalizing, undialectical, gloomy, and conspiratorial analysis of commodity culture. The “culture industry” critique, in the views of such scholars, reduced consumer culture to the manipulation of passive and dumb consumers by a secret society of capitalist puppet-masters. Such views have been pervasive in cultural history for years, but it is my view that they rely on a misreading of how market populism operates in the “Frankfurt” or “Adornian” critique—not through the rational manipulation of all-powerful executives but through the commodity itself by way of its fetishization, which drives the irrational workings of the market which irrationality in turn reveals the “falsity” of society. Whatever one thinks of this view, it is an unhelpful reification to turn it into a hypothesis that consumers are “duped” and that any archival traces of their “agency” disconfirm the culture industry hypothesis. More pointedly, to see (as Adorno did) a structural explanation for the divide between quality and success under commodity capitalism arguably is a more respectful attitude towards the agentic-aesthetic capacity of workers whose access to cultural enrichment and aesthetic materials is constrained, than is a neo-populist view that takes at face value peoples’ “sociological” reporting of tastes and consumption habits. Even more pointedly, we are willing to believe that intellectuals are in part *determined* by their training, the discourse into which they intervene, and the conjunctures they lived through; why is it a denial of agency to note the same complexity for “ordinary” folks? Perhaps this trend in cultural history was inspired by the mobilization of the “culture industry” critique for elitist or anti-populist polemics. Two recent statements by eminent cultural historians of the view of Adorno’s critique as a conspiracy theory suggest as much. Lizabeth Cohen recounts her experience of cultural history “[i]n the early 1980s”, when “the historical study of mass culture was in its infancy [a phrase that echoes the opening line of Benjamin’s 1936 “Work of Art” essay!]. Interpretations derived crudely from Karl Marx’s concept of superstructure, the Frankfurt School’s suspicions of mass culture as fascist manipulation, or even Antonio Gramsci’s more nuanced notion of hegemony uncontroversially held sway, supporting the assumption that mass culture was by definition homogenizing, depoliticizing, and ultimately a tool of the ruling class to control the masses.” In Cohen’s case, it seems that it was a Marxian problematic, rather than the “infancy” of the study of mass culture, that posed problems. The merits of her close and detailed empirical reading of the complexities of workers’ engagements with mass culture were fundamental to the field, but in principle the recovery of popular agency cannot *disprove* culture critique or commodity fetishism, since both theories not only take popular agency into account and provide theories of its

make profitable hits consistently they would do so: since the emergence of hits is unpredictable, audiences must have a say in which “songs” best reflect a popular consciousness or sentiment. Adorno’s reply to this imagined interlocutor opens up perhaps the central argument of his cultural theory: the fact that the hit system is irrational does not in fact reveal anything about how power is distributed in such a system, because “irrationality represents not so much a suspension of social determination as something which is itself socially determined” (476). He goes on to say that this particular irrationality (the market that produces hits) is destructive and not generative. It is a destructive force for a variety of reasons, but it is particularly destructive to art, and any critical power that art might seek to retain under commodity capitalism.<sup>32</sup> “In an ideal society,” he writes again

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formation, but also see it en masse as the “motor of history.” Similarly Eric Avila has written about Adorno and Horkheimer in Los Angeles and described their views in these terms: “modern society exhibited a profoundly undialectical relationship between an all-powerful cabal of capital and its dependent mass of passive consumers.” Again, this view does not discount the brilliant archival work and sensitive cultural analysis that inform Avila’s work, but it does foreclose a more nuanced engagement with the theoretical history of cultural analysis. This is important, I believe, because a theory of the commodity form is a necessary component to thinking through the problems of market populism without uncritically reproducing its terms. The relevance for free jazz in particular are clear: if populism is the only guarantee of progressive politics, and if populism is invariably mediated by the market, then the commercial marginality of avant-garde jazz, and postwar jazz in general, can only be explained as an elitist “betrayal” of popular “agency.” See Lizabeth Cohen, “Preface to the Second Edition,” *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xxiii; and Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 248-49n29.

<sup>32</sup> The relevance of Adorno’s perspective in the jazz essay becomes, in my view, more apparent by the day. Whereas there were still clear signs of irrationality qua *a gap* between administered production and popular consumption in the 1930s, today those few records that could still be thought of as hits are without exception *designed* as hits, heavily promoted, borne by media saturation campaigns, and pushed relentlessly in a struggle to recover profits during the few weeks before the false and threadbare quality of the product becomes apparent. The circuits of popular desire, creative alienation, and corporate capture still operate, but with far more rapidity than when first the blues, then R&B and rock and roll, could build structures of feeling, musical communities, and aesthetic commitments long before being “discovered” by the majors. Now we have examples like rap collective Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All: clearly rooted in a dissatisfaction with the aesthetic options of commercial hip hop, this group has since 2009 skyrocketed to global fame, and has documented the psychic dislocations, even trauma, of that experience. OFWGKTA’s alienation, however, is so fetishized it is essentially analytically inseparable from nihilism—what Adorno’s perspective allows us to *think* is this result as a logical outcome of the market in popular music. In both the relentless vapid succession of pseudo-hits and the dadaish nihilism of young artists like OFWGKTA, we see how irrationality migrates from the market to the production of art itself, by way of its routing through generation after generation of consumers, who themselves are bound by structure (not, that is, by nature) to a nostalgia for the fast disappearing emergent cultures of their youth (for me, Public Enemy, Rage Against the Machine, Nirvana, the Fugees, etc.). If, for Adorno, there is “no way out,” it is not because of the insurmountable power-knowledge of the cultural corporations—indeed, their emissaries appear a bit clownish in their incessantly belated attempts to appear

directing his comments towards a theory of revolutionary culture, “a correlation between quality and success could perhaps be put forth, but in the false one, the absence of a correlative relationship is not so much proof of an occult quality as proof of the falseness of society” (477). The fact that so much “popular music” is bad, simply but pointedly insisting on that evaluation, can make one appear elitist or a proponent of a hierarchical aestheticism; however, this misses the point. There is something larger at stake in the argument that most of the culture available in “our” society (i.e., under capitalism, then and now) is terrible—and the more terrible it is the more broadly it is consumed. To say so is not to criticize the people who consume, as if to suggest that they drive the dialectic that widens the gap between quality and success.<sup>33</sup> Without a negative critique of what passes for popular culture in an administered world, our only available philosophical option is a retreat to populism.

Having suggested some of what is at stake for Adorno’s critique of jazz, I want to interject some thoughts about why it is helpful for theorizing the emergence of the jazz “avant-garde.” Why think about the avant-garde in this context—why specifically the late modernism or postmodernism of the moment after Coleman, after Taylor, after Coltrane, or after Ayler? For if one returns to, as really one should, the records of, for example Louis Armstrong (the Hot Five records, say), or even Ellington in the “jungle music” phase, one can hear both Adorno’s big ears and his spectacular deafness. Put very simply, listening to

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“hip.” Rather, it is because fetishism progressively narrows politico-aesthetic options and evacuates any “shock value” left in modernism, now that it has left the museums, gone into the streets, and in turn left the streets to ascend into a totally imaginary space, accessible only via nostalgic remembrance.

<sup>33</sup> For example, if I were to point to the popular television singing competition *American Idol* as a hysterical, desperate attempt by record producers to recapture a national-popular audience for manufactured hits, an attempt that is not only doomed to ever more embarrassing failures, but also that the pleasure that can be derived from the show is implicitly the negative pleasure of *enjoying* the embarrassment and failure, and therefore that there is a direct line between *American Idol* and the laughter of theater audiences that Adorno called “the worst form of bourgeois sadism”—to say all that would not yet be to criticize anyone for participating in it, or should I say getting caught in it, since I am also caught up by my own participation, as indeed Adorno was as well, being a regular theater-goer.

the canonical jazz of Adorno's moment—records that were circulated in the 1930s and canonized by the emergent amateur jazz cognoscenti—I think one has to be struck at the relevance of Adorno's critique of the rhythmic and compositional rigidity of the song form and appreciate his argument that improvisation is confined within that form, ornamenting it without fundamentally disturbing the onward march of the rhythmic pulse. Adorno's hearing was seriously disabled in discerning the rhythmic fluctuation and creative openings of "swing." Moreover, in the break, of which Adorno emphasizes the enchaining of improvisation by the rigidity of composition, there are moments of "spectacular virtuosity" that cannot be assimilated to ornament, but instead in retrospect are charting improvisatory paths outside inherited forms through relentless artifice and creative engagements with vernacular elements. For example, Adorno notoriously described Duke Ellington as a Debussy epigone, which shows up the severe limitations of Adorno's own notions of "structural listening" because to hear Ellington as if "reading" his harmonic structures is to be tone-deaf to the artifice of Ellington's playful disruption of primitivist expectations in the use of vocalizations, smears, growls, and other sound effects that creatively distort that same harmonic framework—as well as to the programmatic or allegorical dimensions of his work. Indeed, canonical jazz history ranks Armstrong so high because he "liberated" improvisation from its confinement in the two-bar turnaround and other liminal performative moments, making of his virtuosity a spectacle that could on its own carry and convey a performance, and indeed a complexity of musical information that made improvisation a kind of immanent composition rather than a series of rote repetitions. This canonical narrative has its merits, although it is limited by its extreme individualism, but what I have in mind is something other than the heroic irruption of the modern soloist that Armstrong is credited for. Rather, listen to his duet with Earl Hines, "Weather Bird" (1928), which I discuss

further in Chapter Six. Indeed, this performance is constrained by both the song form and by the three-minute duration of a 78 side. Yet for jazz aficionados, the startling originality of the interplay between Hines and Armstrong signals that something fundamentally different is occurring in the interstices of King Oliver's composition. The ornamental elaborations of each chorus grow in intensity until each musician is driven towards a level of rhythmic nuance that threatens at several moments to destroy the persistent pulse that Adorno thought was jazz's singular quality. In Hines's playing particularly, there is a break with stride piano style that pushes "swing" into deep space—for one extremely brief moment (around 2:06-2:08) as the two musicians trade statements, Hines's rhythmic staggering is so "modernist," so unexpected, that the listener feels the frisson of expecting the performance, perhaps this time, on this hearing, to fly apart. Now perhaps my affective experience of this moment can be assimilated to an Adornian analysis of sexual frustration and inhibition, to the illusory appeal of only apparently subversive "interference" or "differential elements," but I share with many jazz listeners a sense of some ineffable "minimal difference" between Hines's radically minimalist unsettling of the conventions of "trading twos" and more routine improvisatory breaks.

With this recording in mind, we can examine the kernel of Adorno's "pessimism," which has been so unsettling in the reception of "*Über Jazz*":

With jazz, a disenfranchised subjectivity plunges from the commodity world into the commodity world; the system does not allow for a way out. Whatever primordial instinct is recovered in this is not a longed-for freedom, but rather a regression through suppression; there is nothing archaic in jazz but that which is engendered out of modernity through the mechanism of suppression. It is not old or repressed instincts which are freed in the form of standardized rhythms and standardized explosive outbursts; it is new, repressed, and mutilated instincts which have stiffened into the masks of those of the distant past. (478)

Leaving aside for the moment the question of his "pessimism," one way of reading the point Adorno makes is that any creative-progressive irruption will neither inhere in the archaic

(primitive) or repressed past recovered to aid modernity out of its alienation, and neither will it be able to hegemonize the name “jazz.” Adorno is both wrong and right, at the same time. We might conjure up the image, for a moment here, of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, their slogan “Great Black Music: Ancient to Modern,” their use of costuming, masking, and other visual performance devices, their recuperation of a tradition of “little instruments” and collective percussion ensembles. They were not the only musicians of jazz after 1968 to make reference to the archaic, or, however parodically or strategically, to the recovery of repressed instincts. Are the masks and face paint worn by Joseph Jarman or Famoudou Don Moye covered by the idea of “mutilated instincts which have stiffened into the masks of those of the distant past,” or does the latter view veil the creative “agency” of appropriating and resignifying the “primitive”? What kind of archaic does the Art Ensemble’s appeal to the ancient and to ancestry dig up, and what, if anything, does it have to do with the archaic qua primitive against which Adorno sets his critical gaze? What is at stake in Adorno’s analysis is that his logic dictates that the irruption of a self-conscious jazz modernism is strictly speaking *impossible*. In this he assumes that improvisation is so fully integrated into the commodity’s immanent structure that any attempt to free or accentuate it will only intensify the compensatory and erotic charge it offers bourgeois spectators. The historical emergence of “free jazz” exploded many of the limits to improvisation that inhered in the jazz commodity, making room in some cases for a facsimile of the “pure immediacy” Adorno believed his contemporaries heard in improvisation, but in many more to a notion of improvisation as creative artifice, bricolage, and transgeneric musical experimentation that exploded Adorno’s own assumptions of improvisation as the Other of composition. Yet in a way the novelty of improvisatory materials works to confirm Adorno’s point, albeit negatively, that any transformation of jazz could never be founded on its apparently archaic

elements. This last statement is contentious, however, as many artists described their work precisely in terms of a recovery of or reconnection to a buried, ancestral, African past—the debate among critics, within the AACM, and upon which the Art Ensemble’s own performances commented obliquely, about how “literally” to understand the assertion of temporal simultaneity in the ensemble’s slogan indicates the contested terrain of the archaic and the modern. The valence of “invented traditions” for post-1960 “jazz” indicates both the contradictions inherent in Adorno’s own argument as well as the value of engaging with his rigorous anti-primitivism in thinking about “free jazz” not as pure spontaneity but as deliberate artifice. Moreover, Adorno’s implicit understanding that any significant political challenge to the psycho-affective structure of jazz would be driven from the hegemonic field and outside the genre seems to have played out during the 1960s and 1970s.

Perhaps Adorno’s error extends even to the claim that jazz, as cultural commodity par excellence, is integrally wired into the subjective maintenance of industrial capitalism as a whole. If we take seriously this claim, however, then the development of a musical practice within jazz that privileges improvisation to such an extent that meter disappears, that the song form is discarded or stretched into unrecognizable shapes, a practice that pushes both the technological and the affective limits of its commodity container—such a musical practice would indicate something transformative was occurring not to the “form” of jazz but to the fetishized form of the commodity itself. In an Adornian framework, “free jazz” represents not a move into a transcendent “beyond” of the commodity, but far more radically an immanent demolition of the affectivity that sustains “jazz” as a vehicle for the perpetuation of bourgeois rule. The implications of putting Adorno’s critique against and within the frame of “post-songform” jazz and improvised music are staggering: there is perhaps an under-recognized contribution or even causal role to be found in the disruptions



of jazz aesthetics beginning in the late 1950s that could help explain the dramatic disintegration of cultural authority in the 1960s. It is important not to overstate this role, however: even in the 1950s, jazz no longer played the hegemonizing role in popular music that it once had. Yet many of the affective structures Adorno analyzed, particularly the mirrored projection of reactionary fear onto jazz as sexual excitement and moral license, were arguably still quite operative in the postwar period. And, of course, free jazz was never popular, but then again, it could not have been; in a strict reading of Adorno's comments above: any significant challenge to the psycho-affective structure of the jazz commodity would likely *no longer be jazz*, in Adorno's definition of the latter. (It may be important for jazz historians to keep this in mind when attempting to explain, for example, the emotional eruption among jazz critics c. 1961 signaled by epithets like "anti-jazz" or denunciations of Abbey Lincoln as a "professional Negro".)<sup>34</sup>

I want to return briefly to the racial significations of Adorno's "*Über Jazz*" as a continuation of a reflection on the stakes, possibilities, and limitations of Adorno's analysis of the jazz commodity. For indeed, when he writes in the passage quoted above that "[w]ith jazz, a disenfranchised subjectivity plunges from the commodity world to the commodity world" there is a provocative and disturbing racial ambiguity: exactly *who* is disenfranchised in this view, and *what or who* is moving among commodity worlds? On the one hand, this *plunging* well describes the affective experience of listening to jazz qua vehicle for improvisational ornament: the feeling, like I had listening to Earl Hines, of momentarily escaping the temporal bonds of the commodity, is fleeting and I am quickly returned to the commodity form, if nothing else than by the scratch of the 78 reaching its end.

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<sup>34</sup> For this period, and for a perceptive account of the "jazz wars" in the pages of *Downbeat* magazine, see Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

On the other hand, this passage occurs just after Adorno has invoked the history of slavery in the most hyperbolic and problematic terms imaginable, suggesting resonances of both legal black disfranchisement in the United States and the commodification of human beings in the vortex of slavery. Is Adorno perhaps saying, implying, or even unconsciously indicating that it is black musicians who have plunged from one commodity world to another, from slavery to the false liberation of urban capitalist modernity? Under the rubric of jazz's "recourse to false origins" as an illustration of the irrationality of the commodity structure, Adorno takes up the question of black music in terms that have exposed him to the charge of racism ever since. He claims that "black music" is little more than a brand name, since (regardless of ethnographic findings about diasporic connections between African music and jazz, in other words mooted the just-emerging debate about African "retentions" among anthropologists) "all of the formal elements of jazz" have been manufactured within the commodity apparatus. He claims that "black people" exist in relation to jazz much as "gypsies" (i.e. Roma people) relate to fiddle music: both have been "supplied" with their musical "brand" in an urban context, which is why "the skin of the black man functions as much as a coloristic effect as does the silver of the saxophone." Many have taken this last statement as final confirmation of Adorno's racism; although it is certainly unwise and so hyperbolic as to be rhetorically ineffective, the context makes it clear that Adorno's target is the cynical marketing of blackness as authentic or exotic, and what he is parodying is the language of advertisement that repeats the tragedy of "colonial imperialism" as farce.

Yet he continues to dig this hole, insisting on a rigid distinction between the vitality of Africa as illusory advertisement and the reality of enslavement as psychologically damaging domination. "Society has drawn its vital music," he writes, "not from the wild, but from the

domesticated body in bondage” and the source of jazz in particular is “the spontaneous singing of servant girls” (478). When Adorno then articulates his sense that escape is impossible, is he constructing the legacy of slavery itself, historically and metaphorically, as a perpetual curse? “The improvisational immediacy which constitutes [jazz’s] partial success,” he writes, “counts strictly among those attempts to break out of the fetishized commodity world which want to escape that world without ever changing it, thus moving ever deeper into its snare” (478). If, as certainly seems possible, Adorno here has lapsed, even unconsciously, into making jazz a “ghastly allegory” of slavery, then we might investigate as well the psychic investments such a discourse might in turn reveal about the persistence of racial domination. Adorno clearly intends to absolve blackness and black people from the crime against art and society that is “jazz” as Adorno understands it, indicating obsessively the “mask” of blackness as a vulgar and cynical appeal to European decadence. Yet in persistently aligning authentic blackness with archaism and African inheritances (access to which was, in Adorno’s view, denied to black people by the “somasochism” of slavery), Adorno remains trapped in a primitivist imaginary: his immanent negation of primitivism remains dialectically bound to sustaining it as the only access to blackness as something *other* than psychic mutilation.

I want to close this excursus on Adorno’s “*Über Jazz*” with a brief look at what Adorno called “the jazz subject,” for the question of this final analysis of jazz, in terms of castration, impotence, fear, transgression, sex, neurosis, and premature ejaculation, has proved to be the most intractable aspect of Adorno’s theory, a “wild psychoanalysis” that leads nowhere, but which is profoundly suggestive, not least about the specific nature of the limitations of Adorno’s approach. It is also the point of the essay in which he explicitly

focuses his analysis on “hot music” with its “improvisations which sound ridiculously off-beat at first and sound right only once the last beat has sounded, a systematic stumbling over and turning around one another which is both ingenious and futile” (490). This description of the uselessness of musical dialogue via improvisation once again demonstrates Adorno’s open-eared deafness: what a lyrical description of advanced musical practice c. 1936, and what a narrow conception of what music might be useful for, even as it remains in the final analysis useless. As he says, “The jazz subject is inept and yet is inclined toward improvisation” (488). The idiosyncrasy cultivated by the jazz subject can take the form of the eccentric or the clown: “If the clown is the one whose anarchistic and archaic immediacy cannot be adapted to the reified bourgeois life, and becomes ridiculous before it—fragmentary, but at the same time allowing it to appear ridiculous—the eccentric certainly is just as much excluded from instrumental regulation, from the ‘rhythm’ of bourgeois life,” (489) but the latter adopts a different stance towards bourgeois life, one of haughty superiority and delight in individual difference. The distinction between the eccentric and the clown is another moment, like the comparison to the detective novel, where Adorno’s logic becomes quite obscure. He was, incidentally, particularly proud of his theorization of the clown figure as inassimilable to bourgeois life, as he repeatedly remarked to Benjamin of his belief that the clown was the key to the theorization of mass culture. However, as literary scholar James Martin Harding notes, by the time of the 1953 debate with Berendt, Adorno was using the fused formulation “eccentric clown” to characterize how the culture industry deployed stereotypes of black musicians, in defense against Berendt’s charge that Adorno’s attack on jazz was racist.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> James Martin Harding, *Adorno and “A Writing of the Ruins”: Essays on Modern Aesthetics and Anglo-American Literature and Culture*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 102-103.

To return to the jazz subject, in 1936 jazz appeared to Adorno thoroughly eccentric, and he seemed to detect very little of the stubborn resistance of clowning around. What happens in jazz, according to Adorno, is that the sense of superiority and “liberal difference” he poses as part of eccentricity increasingly drop out, leaving a gnawing sexual anxiety and weakness, all a product of the “purposeless” meandering of jazz improvisation, which Adorno relates to “premature and incomplete orgasm” (490). Just as he identified a functional principle behind jazz’s diverse rhythms and sounds—“letting the rigid vibrate”—so Adorno will now propose a “latent dream content” of the fantasy that drives the eccentric (weak, neurotic) jazz subject: “I will only be potent once I have allowed myself to be castrated.” Like the gaping mouth of the piano lid, ready to snap shut on any jazz “fanatic” who gets too close to the music, who comes too close or too soon or too often, jazz performance is a seductive invitation to have one’s “individuality” (i.e. “manhood”) sacrificed for the sake of the collective. Jazz performatively enacts the domination of the individual by the collective, the initiation of the potent individual into a society of impotents, emotional cripples, neurotics, and fascists. One may accept the invitation and become one with the jazz community, but at the too high cost of a “destroyed subjectivity” (491).

In Chapter One, I suggested the importance of making a distinction between the latent dream content that is the result of hermeneutic investigation and the unconscious qua formal repetition. Therefore without even questioning the details that drive Adorno to arrive at the latent content of potency-through-castration, we can open another line of questioning about the jazz subject, and what this mutilated subjectivity might reveal about jazz, and about Adorno. While the latent content combines sexual fulfillment and castration in a (false) dialectic, the unconscious of this particular fantasy might have something to do with an individual’s (perhaps Adorno as a particular individual) repeated encounters with a

collective in which his masculinity might be disturbed. Adorno has a rigid understanding of the dialectic of individual (autonomous and self-conscious vs. mutilated and submissive) and collective (which is *ipso facto* repressive and dominating, all collectivity being at least potentially proto-fascist). Thus the structure that Adorno's wild psychoanalysis leaves out, that remains unsymbolizable (and thus, in Lacanian terms, Real) for Adorno, is musical collectivity and dialogic interaction per se.<sup>36</sup> We might turn his wild psychoanalysis back on him in effect to say that he himself is projecting his fears of the approaching order onto a jazz subjectivity preemptively figured as weak and castrated. What is unconscious in this fantasy of jazz is the fear of sexual competition within a social collective, and the resulting inability to imagine collectivity apart from self-abnegation and domination.

Earlier I questioned Adorno's deployment of race and the trope of slavery as incurring not only psychic damage, but more problematically an attachment to one's own domination. Indeed Adorno closes the essay in part by suggesting that "not yet adequately mutilated liberals" (491) could learn from oppressed peoples, for whom jazz was tailor made, how to identify with their own oppression. It strikes me that Adorno may have gotten this point nearly exactly wrong: what his account of the "jazz subject" describes all too well are precisely the liberal erotic investments in jazz as exorcism of historical responsibility for

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<sup>36</sup> In Slavoj Žižek's work, for example, the Real is not (only or any more) the unsymbolizable kernel left out of the symbolic and absent from consciousness; on the contrary, self-consciousness is itself theorized as the absent, negative, unsymbolizable Real around which language revolves. Therefore it is not that Adorno leaves out or mishears musical collectivity, that it is a recognizable feature we can replace into his theory, but rather that it is his self-consciousness itself, what he listened for but could never hear—perhaps because it was the ear of the other that was listening in his place. This would mean that there is much more to Adorno's "deafness" about collectivity in jazz than a simple mishearing: to redeem jazz by calling it a collective musicality would be to skip over precisely the grain that had tripped Adorno up. Is there not something inherently *impossible* about musical collectivity qua transcendence of isolation or qua non-linguistic communication? Adorno complained about the illusory or false (appearance of) realization of collectivity in jazz, thinking that proposing jazz as an easy solution to social alienation only deepened our predicament. That aesthetic collectivity is an appearance or ruse (*Schein*) is unavoidable in a society that has not "solved" the problem of collectivity socially or politically. Or at least, such is where Adorno's self-consciousness leads, winds up, and slips into a rut. But insofar as he stumbled over and into the (in)determinate Real of musical collectivity, his theory remains valuable—far more valuable than the comforting illusion that in jazz our social antagonisms have been superceded, only to remain forever under glass in a museum of impossible utopias ("democracy," integration, equality, and so on).

present conditions. The eccentric jazz subject might then be thought to describe the sexualized unconscious of white liberal double consciousness (an awareness of the ontological vapidness of [one's/his/my] privilege coupled with an unwillingness to give it up).

When Adorno engages in his own complex of psychic projections and mirrored reversals, what effect does it have on the use value of his theory? When he writes of the legacy of slavery as a damaged psyche, political passivity, castration, sadomasochistic perversion, and identification with the oppressor, is he simply ignorant of the ugly resonance the idea of black obeisance would have?<sup>37</sup> Is the idea of a black liberation politics, or an anti-colonial politics connected to black cultural formations, so impossible for Adorno to conceive in the spring of 1936 (when, for example, the diaspora was mobilizing to fiercely oppose fascist Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, a moment when Langston Hughes's lyrics were circulating: "All you colored peoples/No matter where you be/Take for your slogan/Africa be free.")?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Fred Moten has perceptively commented on this issue, framing it as "the insight Adorno's deafness carries." Noting the "overwhelming ocularcentrism" of Adorno and other psychoanalytically inflected criticism, Moten nevertheless takes up Adorno's language to argue for the radically incommensurate presence/absence of black aurality in texts like Adorno's, "for what is borne in work of the black radical aesthetic tradition—and not only at the site of its recitations of terror and violation but also in the critical and metacritical discourse it produces on its own productions—is nothing other than the cries of a servant girl, the material-phonetic substance that is transferable but not interpretable from either inside or outside the circle, the aural content that infuses and transforms (our dominant understandings of) primality, extremity, or extension out from inside or outside." Moten, *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 179. See the further development of this idea later in the essay: "This is about a certain adisciplinary counter-inscription before the fact, if you will, of discipline; this is a counter-inscription that is situated precisely in the gap Marx locates between '(the knowledge of) human nature and its life-situation,' though that knowledge or gap is located in sites Marx didn't fully anticipate and Adorno couldn't find. This is to say that it is not only located after the point or moment of a postemancipatory, postmigratory emergence into wage-labor, in which a specific form of alienation associated with such labor is manifest; it's before that. And so the document or music, similarly, is not just the hidden transcript of repressed knowledge of alienation but is the reservoir of a certain knowledge of freedom, a counter-inscription anticipatory of the power/discipline that it overwrites and the life-situation against which it prescribes, out from the outside of the regime of signs we now inhabit. This is the knowledge of freedom that is not only before wage-labor but before slavery as well, though the forms it takes are possible only by way of the crucible of the experience of slavery (as forced and stolen labor and sexuality, as wounded kinship and imposed exile.)" Ibid, 227.

<sup>38</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, "This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do: African Americans and the Spanish Civil War," *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, (New York: Free Press, 1994), 123-160.

Adorno's essay nevertheless remains a useful theory of jazz for latter-day cultural studies to think through strategies of repoliticization in a landscape of the reduction of social antagonism to differences of culture or identity. To read Adorno critically but carefully can restore an absent dialectical pole in scholarly thinking about jazz (not only in jazz studies, but especially in how jazz is deployed elsewhere in contemporary theory). Adorno is stringently, perhaps even naively, anti-raciological in his assessment of jazz. This anti-raciological rigor perhaps even approaches a kind of condescension, making him appear unable to recognize either the cultural autonomy of black vernaculars and modernisms or to recognize the segregation and racial domination in the culture industry that was his target. Nevertheless historical analysis of jazz still has to wrestle with the racio-economic and racio-political logics at play in this early reception of jazz. If Adorno failed to appreciate the integrity of black cultural formations, and the extent of their influence on the performances he thought of as "jazz," still Adorno's analysis astutely recognized the kind of screen for raciological projections that jazz offered a Europe on the brink of cultural and political catastrophe. His arguments anticipate the kinds of mutations in the semiotics of race that later commentators would characterize as "postmodern" or post-Fordist: the elevation of singular black people and performances as overdetermined spectacles of capitalist excess even as routine, quotidian racist domination persists.<sup>39</sup> His arguments offered a profound skepticism towards a surface reading of culture and ideology: that jazz *appeared* to offer a rebellious challenge to bourgeois respectability was a sure sign of its structural alignment with the fascist perversion of those very cultural values. On a cultural level, Adorno's arguments offer a useful counterpoint to populist readings of the politics of culture: culture is neither autonomous from political economic forces, nor does it exist as a kind of functionalist implementation of

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century*, (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000).



them; rather, culture, or rather—since it is the muted object of his analysis—*performance* is a privileged site, or literally a *stage*, a notion he borrowed from Walter Benjamin, for the enactment of the subjective processes informing political domination.<sup>40</sup> Just as it is crucial to distinguish between Adorno’s (naive) anti-raciological assault on the blackness of jazz and his analysis of political passivity, it is equally imperative to distinguish between his (perhaps crude or clumsy) use of psychoanalytic tropes like castration and the possibilities his construction of “the jazz subject” opens up for thinking about the sexual, affective, unconscious, and phantasmagoric dimensions of musical spectatorship. His derision of jazz—like that of Hollywood genre pictures or other representatives of the early mass cultural reproduction industries—was based in the pseudo-liberation they offered, the impotence they concealed beneath a mask of sexual titillation. If mass culture is to be theorized, in contrast, as a resource for revolutionary transformation, such a theory must take into account the imbrications of consumer culture in the libidinal maintenance of race and class domination.

It is, however, only when we restore a set of dialectical interlocutors to Adorno’s extreme anti-raciological, anti-primitivist, and anti-populist position that the full ideological problematic informing jazz as a historical formation becomes evident. For while one can appreciate Adorno’s stubborn refusal to accept any easy characterizations of racial difference in musical performance—for instance, seeing behind the sexualized “Negro” saxophone the banal instrument of European military bands—it is nevertheless true that his ignorance of the historical formation of black political-cultural collectivities (nation, diaspora, and as Brent Hayes Edwards argues the outer-national formation of *race* itself) makes his interpretation of jazz and industrial popular culture more generally radically incomplete.

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<sup>40</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 106.

“Race” as a historical, implicitly political, oppositional formation with a multitude of contradictions and inconsistencies is muted by Adorno’s stalled dialectic of primitive-archaic-Africa-immediacy and modern-urban-enslaved-mutilated. Taking the narrative of jazz out of a black white dialectic means many things, some additive: restoring a transnational, multicultural context to an ideological narrative that acts as synecdoche for U.S. “race relations.” It also means focusing on how jazz is a formation of contradictions, eccentricities, and inconsistencies—what Jacques Rancière calls heteroglossia—within a black (national) cultural space.

## Part II: Ascension

### Chapter Four

#### Disintegrationist Intimacies: Slavery, Internal Colonialism, and the Political Economy of Black Culture

Afro-American folk music became the aesthetic ingredient, the cultural material, the wealth exploited by white American cultural materialism. This kind of appropriation can be explained only by an analysis of the cultural apparatus in all its economic, class, political, and institutional ramifications. [...]

The [Pulitzer] prize itself is not really important but what lies behind the denial of the prize [to Duke Ellington] is: a whole history of organized duplicity and exploitation of the Negro jazz artist—the complicated tie-in between booking agencies, musicians' unions, the recording companies, the publishers, the managers, the agents, the theater owners, the nightclub owners, the crooks, shysters, and racketeers. The Negro creative intellectuals have to look into the question of how it is possible for a Negro jazz musician to walk the streets of large cities, jobless and starving, while a record that he cut with a music company is selling well, both in the United States and Europe. They have to examine why a Negro jazz musician can be forced to pay dues to unions that get him no work, and that operate with the same discriminatory practices as clubs, halls, and theaters. [...]

[Jazz] was, in fact, the truly *native* American touchstone on which the whole concept of cultural revolution could have hinged—had the creative intellectuals, both black and white, seen the implications and faced up to them in a political fashion.

—Harold Cruse<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, (New York: Quill, 1984), 108, 110-111, 154.

## The Jazz Panels, Cultural Production, and Neo-Slavery

The series of panels where black musicians and creative intellectuals met jazz critics and other representatives of white liberalism on a contested public stage were an important genre of public discourse in the 1960s, whose implications stretched well beyond the narrow discourse of a jazz art world or jazz market. In *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), Harold Cruse cites the jazz panels as both an exceptional example of intellectual engagement of the question of the material realities of black cultural production and as a unique opportunity that was not fully realized. Cruse's most acerbic criticisms were directed at the black intelligentsia for failing to recognize the colonial, resource extraction political economy that obtained in jazz, and thereby failing to politicize the music's production as a key arena for the development of a black nationalist economic transformation. His criticism also fell against the "black bourgeoisie" whom he said "knew nothing" about the social contexts of jazz music or the conditions musicians had to contend with. The jazz panels, on the other hand, represented for Cruse a potential area of critical intellectual engagement that was not exploited. Unlike Harlem-based and national literary movements and conventions, which Cruse faulted for hazy thinking, integrationism, and the intellectual domination of white outsiders in left-liberal organizations, at least the jazz panels raised the questions of cultural production that Cruse thought were essential in the late 1960s. In interpreting one panel, held at the Village Vanguard, he nevertheless faulted poet-critic LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and saxophonist Archie Shepp for their romantic, individualist cultural nationalism and their political confusion.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 485-87. On the Village panel, see also Harry Gilroy, "Racial Debate Displaces Jazz Program," *New York Times*, February 10, 1965, 47.

When white audience members/participants brought up the 1964 lynching of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in Mississippi as evidence of the possibility of cross-racial solidarity, or when painter Larry Rivers referenced the Holocaust to indicate a shared history of suffering among Negroes and Jews, Shepp and Jones reacted angrily, rejecting the sentimentality of white support for civil rights; Shepp compared the Holocaust to the Middle Passage and the Belgian genocide of Congolese. Cruse was unimpressed. “The fact is,” Cruse wrote, “Jones and Shepp are confused about the Jews.” Reading them as “close friends” and political allies, Cruse criticized Jones and Shepp for misunderstanding the complexities of ethnicity and class in American pluralist capitalism. For Cruse, power in America was only nominally liberal democratic—in fact, real political and economic power was divided among ethnic groups, who engaged in a nationalist struggle in competition with other groups for resources and prestige. He admired American Jews as an example from which Afro-Americans could learn, but also recognized that the closeness of the bond between African Americans and Jews was not the sentimental sympathy appealed to in integrationist rhetoric, but the proximity of struggling groups bound by exploitation, cultural adaptation, and competing geopolitical nationalisms.<sup>3</sup>

Cruse contrasted Shepp’s dismissal of black nationalism in Harlem in the early 1960s with his embrace of it in the mid-1960s, arguing that both the poet and the saxophonist had embraced not the “native” nationalism developed within African American working class communities, but a romantic, individualized cultural nationalism that only deepened their alienation from the black masses. More to the point, such individualist romanticism obscured the two artists’ ignorance of the complex political realities of both ethnic politics in the U.S. and the geopolitical context of decolonization. And indeed, Cruse develops in his

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

chapter on the “two nationalisms” a learned and sophisticated reading of the complex relationships between and among U.S. and Israeli Jews, making sharp distinctions between Zionists and anti-Zionists and examining how American Jewish cultural and political organizations framed their activities. Whereas the founding of Israel in 1948 had fundamentally reshaped the geopolitical implications of U.S. ethnic conflict, Cruse argued, the decolonization of African nations had brought black nationalism into open competition with Zionism for power and resources within the U.S. state and political economy. Far from being a romanticized idea of racial fraternity (in fact Cruse consistently emphasized the cultural divisions and conflicts among African Americans, Caribbeans, and Africans), Cruse’s idea of decolonization’s relevance for black politics was that it could force the hand of the state into accepting the demands of an organized U.S. black political leadership. But such a strategy depended on the mobilization of cultural production.<sup>4</sup>

However much Jones and Shepp disappointed Cruse, he was not surprised by their rhetoric or commitments. They spoke and thought like artists, when what was really needed were black intellectuals trained in politics and economics to take up the question of jazz’s political economy and how to transform it such that it benefited and was controlled from within black communities. The lost opportunity of the jazz panels as a public forum to open up the question of the political economy of jazz was for Cruse a failure of the black intelligentsia as a whole, not the failure of two jazz intellectuals, who were, as artists, naturally confused, misled, and fickle when it came to cultural politics.

Taking up Cruse’s identification of the jazz panels as a key forum, and indeed a lost opportunity, for thinking about the cultural politics and political economy of jazz, this chapter will take a closer look at Archie Shepp’s politics of black cultural production and his

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 476-497.

politics of black musical aesthetics in order to think, in connection to but along different lines from Cruse, about what artists could do in the contexts of political struggle and the “failures” of (and the overwhelming obstacles to) creative intellectuals in fundamentally transforming the cultural economy. Indeed, we might think about the panels, not (only) as an arena of ethnic political competition and conflict, but as a unique intersection of shared and competing “publics,” as Michael Warner employs that term to indicate the material instantiation of a collective, anonymous community organized around affiliation, discursive conventions, and shared representational tropes.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, the jazz panels were an occasion for the jazz public to represent itself to itself in order to take up and perhaps sublimate the challenge to jazz aesthetics and a dominant ethos of sentimental liberalism represented by the discursively conflated and sometimes ideologically aligned developments of new musical practices and black (cultural and revolutionary) nationalism. In this sense, the panels were an example of a rending of the jazz public sphere by outside forces—and indeed many participants experienced powerful emotions of loss, rejection, resentment, and anger both during and after the panel discussions. These emotional experiences of politico-aesthetic debate were inseparable from the constructions of the jazz art world, by the very composition of the panels, as a homosocial imaginary space for the staging of disagreement between black men (nationalists) and white men (liberals). There was an intimacy of working relationships and friendships among the regular combatants that was supplemented by other unconscious, imaginary intimacies that suggest the sublimation of sexual desire through love of music. Upsetting these intimacies, which we must read as a political act, caused both predictable and unpredictable eruptions of confusion, resentment, and a dislocated affect of betrayal. The presence of Abbey Lincoln at one of the early panel discussions confirms

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

rather than contradicts the idea that the panels reveal the jazz public imaginary as a masculinist space, as she provoked hostile reactions from certain jazz critics, in print and in public, that were explicitly gendered and racialized in ways that foreclosed the invitations to intimacy that structured the discourse of critics when responding to African American male musicians.

On the other hand, Cruse's critique, despite its narrow focus on ethnic particularism and a reading of Jewish influence on the production of black culture that is problematic at best, does at least open up a framework to see the jazz panels as a space for the intersection of overlapping and contrasting publics—a marginal stratum of the liberal intelligentsia and an equally marginal stratum of black radical creative intellectuals. In this sense, the staging of emotional confrontations between white men and black men over the identity and history, and aesthetics and culture of black people in America was connected to and a precursor of other arenas of public contestation. Particularly relevant for thinking about what was at stake for the jazz panels is the comparison that can be made to similar confrontations that took place in the professional meetings of U.S. historians several years after the climax of the jazz debate.

The mainstream historiography of slavery, the plantation economy, and African American life, despite decades of scholarly production by black historians following Carter G. Woodson, was in 1965 still entirely dominated by white historians. Moreover, the problematic raciological assumptions that shaped and distorted this historiography had become particularly odious in the context of the radicalization of the black freedom movement. As various actors and organizations in the movement shifted from struggles around formal legal citizenship to attempts to develop a critique of U.S. political economy, or a theorization of political economic alternatives to liberal capitalism, the mainstream



historiography's narrow debates about the economics of slavery, that failed to take into account the lasting patterns slavery imposed on U.S. history, was particularly rankling. By the late 1960s and 1970s, in the context of the student protests that led to the creation of the first Black Studies programs on U.S. campuses, African American historians were increasingly in a position to, and increasingly prodded to, take public stands against the white-dominated historiography. Public confrontations, similar in tone if different in content, became a regular feature of historians' gatherings in the 1970s, and like the earlier jazz panels these confrontations between white men and black men (like jazz, the historical profession was dominated in the postwar era by an imaginary of homosocial masculinity that was an important factor in the marginalization of women in terms of jobs and degrees, and the further marginalization of those women who were part of the profession) were contexts for the airing of powerful emotions.

African American historian Julius Lester has written movingly of the tragic aftermath of one of these public confrontations over the narrating of the American past (a white historian's suicide after being publicly upbraided for his presumption in writing black history). For Lester, the tragedy of the situation was that, while it was potentially avoidable, the historical dynamics of the encounter seemed to compel certain actions.

It was one of those situations that are unavoidable when blacks and whites come together in post-Black Power America, a situation in which people are not individuals, but historical entities, playing out a drama whose beginnings are now so submerged that we will never find them.... History makes its demands, but one does not have to accede to them.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Julius Lester, "Suicide of a Revolutionary," *Liberation* 15/16 (Spring 1971), 64. I was drawn to this example and this text by Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, (Cambridge, 1988), 476. Novick discusses the historians' affective-political encounters over race during the 1970s, 475-91. Although I will have occasion to disagree slightly with his framing of the conceptual issues at stake in these debates, and frame them somewhat differently (see fn below), Novick's account is still an invaluable resource for tracing historiographical debates as a political discourse. Although we might draw more extensive conclusions from this result than Novick was willing to, his investigation of historical practice and debate in a political and social context reveals that the drive to craft narratives that provide a useable past is in nearly every particularly situation primary to historiographical debate, with a consensus as to the "accuracy,"

In Lester's view historians had become agents of history, caught up by the force of publicity to act as history's unwitting agent... Such a view bears a comparison to Jacques Lacan's famous reaction to the graffiti slogan that was ubiquitous in the Paris of the May 1968 revolts: "structures do not walk the streets," that is, structuralist thought had failed to predict or comprehend the "spontaneous" street politics of 1968. As Slavoj Žižek has discussed, Lacan's response to this was to affirm what had been negated; on the contrary, Lacan told the students, May 1968 was precisely a moment when structures walked the streets, when structural shifts were played out by individuals as actors on a stage. In the U.S. "1968," there were relatively few structures walking the streets—when they did descend, the structure of the police apparatus responded quickly to contain the threat. But perhaps in small public fora like the jazz panels and the meetings of professional historians, places where intellectual and discursive structures met through their calling upon human voices, history did take up its agents and force a change, not the material reconstruction of the cultural economy that Cruse hoped for, but a discursive and textual displacement. What was displaced in jazz, I will argue, was the exceptionalist belief that jazz, in the public and imagined intimacies it fostered

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factuality, and objectivity of the ideological winner declared subsequent to the resolution of the dispute. The outcome of methodological debates among professional historians consistently follows from the ideological search for a useable past. In other words, there is no direct causal connection between an assemblage of material evidence and the narrative constructed around it. There is, therefore, an unsettling theoretical aporia at the heart of historical narrative. When Julius Lester says that people became historical entities in a political conjuncture, he points, I think to a relatively untheorized condition of history writing, which is the historian's own determination by historical forces, forces which, as Lester says are not *mechanically* determining (i.e. as in removing the element of choice or agency), but they are, in a sense, *unconsciously* determined in the social, institutional, discursive contexts of a historian's training and wider cultural milieu. Therefore, to extend Novick's implicit conclusion, in this chapter I will abandon the search for a consistent methodology and instead opt for a polyglot theoretical exploration of the multiple structural determinations of history and jazz as these coalesced around images, figures, tropes, and unconscious repetitions having to do with slavery. The second half constructs a narrative of Archie Shepp as a creative artist intervening from within these determinations to unsettle them in language, gesture, and sound, all of which inform or shape what is unconscious, while the latter two are relatively lost in the systematizing language of methodology. The footnotes to this chapter continue to occasionally break up the flow of the argument to pose questions of historiography's attempt to "ground" its projects in selective borrowings from other disciplines and extra-historiographical milieus. In a sense, then, this chapter has music running in the background, less an object of narrative description and more an insistent disruption of its narrative shape and theoretical coherence.

across racial lines, symbolized the beautiful telos of racial integration. What was displaced in U.S. historiography, was a far more stubborn and pernicious psychic knot, a commitment to an ideology of black dehumanization that was an unacknowledged inheritance from proslavery ideology.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, therefore, as Cruse admits even in his chastising of creative intellectuals, we cannot expect artists to do the work of economists or historians. The work artists do in aesthetic practice, however, was not an especially significant topic of exploration for Cruse—he hoped that writers especially would organize and work to introduce and sustain black control over publishing and criticism; the same emphasis on institutional control applied to the even more important resource of music. The approach this dissertation adopts, however, that of the meeting of the aesthetic and the political at the point of the distribution of the sensible, suggests other ways of thinking about artists’ public work. Efforts by musicians to start independent labels, going back at least to Max Roach and Charles Mingus in the 1950s, as well as Sun Ra’s decades-long production of his music through his label, Saturn, continued into the 1970s. And organization of musicians into composers collectives in the early to mid-1960s dramatically reshaped the artistic landscape and opportunities for creative autonomy. Aside from the crucial example of the AACM, however, few of these organizations were able to sustain their autonomy from the culture industry for more than a few years.<sup>8</sup>

But the distribution of the sensible suggests that artists reshape political imaginaries in their work as artists, in their invention of sensibility. What from Cruse’s hardheaded

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<sup>7</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), esp. 353-356

<sup>8</sup> Cruse, *Crisis*; on Cruse and cultural production, see Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 183. For Mingus and Roach, see Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 112-116. John Szwed, *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Pantheon, 1997). On the AACM see George Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Also see other references in Chapter One.

political perspective might look like romantic meanderings in musicians' discourse, can appear remarkably different when thought as engaging imaginary and even unconscious boundaries of perceptible reality. In this chapter, I reopen the question of Archie Shepp's cultural politics and interventions into the public of jazz discourse. Shepp contended with, I suggest, not only inherited tropological definitions of jazz, but also a wider intellectual climate that had forgotten (key aspects of) the history of slavery. Reading the historiography together with Shepp's self-described "sentimentalism," I propose that a foreclosure of the humanity of the enslaved was the psychic reality Shepp hazily recognized and battled against, both in a public rhetoric of confrontation and a musical style of subtle compositions steeped in nostalgia.

To do this, Shepp started with a simple transposition, a hyperbolic equation between jazz and slavery. Later I will argue that this simple equation is in actuality a somewhat more complex parallax construction. Nevertheless, the re-imagining of slavery in the jazz debates can be analyzed in a context that interprets the (extremely high) stakes of defining slavery in a society with an amnesiac historical culture. And in the U.S. jazz public, a similar amnesia obtained, justified by a self-congratulatory interest in promoting the music as an American, democratic art. In a famous 1965 panel discussion Shepp attacked his interlocutors for appealing to "the music" as an autonomous entity: "Why do you say 'the music'? What is the music? The music is the product of social, cultural, racial, historical forces." Those forces had made the production of jazz music into what Shepp called an economy of "neo-slavery":

[T]he jazz tradition, the jazz music is one of the bloodiest, dirtiest, ugliest businesses I know. It is precisely America. It is profoundly, thoroughly American, and I think that if we're going to talk about jazz music and musicians and how we make our living, it is a dirty business. There's no question of what it is, that we sell ourselves a thousand times a day, a minute.

If slavery was an historical outrage that made human beings into commodities, then how dubious is its legacy in an American century where everyone (not only jazz musicians, of course) was enjoined to “sell themselves” in order to “get ahead.” This dead metaphor and everyday colloquial expression is here taken up by Shepp to reverse the jazz exceptionalism of critical discourse: jazz was not the harmonious telos of liberal integrationism, but the ugliest continuity linking postwar modernity to the legacy of slavery. Jazz was “precisely America” in that it was a peculiar institution devoted to the nasty business of commodifying humanity. How could musicians navigate the “bloodiest, dirtiest, ugliest” American business and continue to create art? Where would support for that art come from once the culture industry was rejected? Was it possible to avoid selling oneself in the production of culture? Could jazz step outside the network of commodities?<sup>9</sup>

### Cultural Revolution and Temporal Parallax

If it were possible that cultural performance could dispense with, or even profoundly challenge, the commodity form, this would in itself constitute a cultural revolution, and likely not only a cultural one. This section will propose that the global framework of (attempts at) cultural revolution can be mobilized to view U.S. historical processes in non-nationalist frames. From a transnational perspective, the modern black freedom movement in the U.S. is an important instance of decolonization—and the decolonization of the U.S. that occurred in the U.S. from 1960 to 1974, however uneven and partial, however much it ended in unresolved contradictions, depoliticization, and an intensification of the spatial and

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<sup>9</sup> “Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism,” panel discussion, December 29, 1965, St. Paul the Apostle School Hall, New York, NY. The transcript of the panel was serialized in *Jazz* magazine over the first few months of 1966.

economic regimes of neocolonialism, initiated a seismic shift in the society's cultural relations that rippled into every aspect of American life. This process reached a climax in the U.S. in the mid to late 1960s as the civil rights movement in the southern states, led by activists with years of grassroots experience of organization and mobilization, was supplemented by a national mass movement (including the participation of a significant but precarious minority of left-liberal non-black Americans) against white supremacist policies in housing, employment, municipal policy, and media. By 1967 a mass mobilization against U.S. imperial warfare in Vietnam, in combination with the newly-designated movements for Black Power and student agitation against the state's role in university education, appeared for a brief time to pose the serious possibility of some kind of political revolution in the U.S.<sup>10</sup> Globally, criticism of U.S. imperialism, varying degrees of sympathy with anti-colonial movements, resistance to authoritarian measures by various states, and a flourishing intellectual critique of capitalist culture combined to create the conditions for the revolts of 1968—touched off by the Tet Offensive, which demonstrated the weakness of American militarism.

Although this thumbnail sketch of political history may be familiar to many readers, it also helps avoid thinking about musical and cultural history in a vacuum or in a media-

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<sup>10</sup> This may be received as a contentious claim. I am not arguing counterfactually that there could have been a U.S. revolution, only pointing out that for some actors at the time, the possibility appeared real. Harold Cruse portrayed the dilemma of black nationalist politics in part as a dilemma over the strategic goals and tactical timing of the use of revolutionary “force and violence.” He attacked what he saw as muddled thinking on this question among other black radicals. The stakes of his intervention can only be understood if we posit an overthrow of local, state, regional, or even federal power as something that was thought of as a serious possibility at the time. Thus Cruse consistently poses realistic questions about the application of U.S. federal military and policing power, warning his various interlocutors that since a significant threat to federal control would be met with overwhelming force, their revolutionary rhetoric was empty unless they could seriously address this dilemma. Ultimately Cruse advocated for a black nationalist politics within the structure of competitive ethnic pluralism, which he saw as the real arena of political and economic power in the U.S. Thus Cruse was pessimistic about the potential for a revolutionary event, but recognized that others did not share that view. For an analysis of Cruse's thinking about violence in dialogue with the ideas of Robert Williams and Amiri Baraka, see Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and The Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 18-53.

constructed U.S. exceptionalist context that sees the 60s as primarily about “counter-cultural” movements or generational conflicts on the (imaginary) terrain of the nation-state. Indeed the emergent prevailing dynamic of “cultural revolution” of which the transformation of jazz aesthetics in the 1960s was one element was itself partly inspired by the example of the Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. For Mao Zedong, the cultural revolution was an attempt to prevent or forestall the post-revolutionary return of class conflict in the form of a party bureaucracy by opening the doors of state administration, relations of production, and the regulatory institutions of cultural legitimacy to revolutionary groups outside the party bureaucracy. As Alain Badiou, a French Maoist in the 1970s who is also an influential philosopher, points out, the GPCR, while ultimately a disaster, was the most far-reaching attempt to date to resolve the problem of the “party-form” of political organization. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political parties, both in their Leninist form as revolutionary vanguards educating and leading the proletariat, and in the bourgeois parliamentary “post-democratic” West, have failed as vehicles of mass political desire. Yet there is as yet no solution for the organization of political action, desire, and transformation outside the party-form. Therefore Badiou argues “Mieux vaut un désastre qu’un désêtre” (better a disaster than an “unbeing”)<sup>11</sup>

For black radical creative intellectuals in the U.S. the overall situation was not so far removed from Badiou’s interpretation of the party-form. A revolution in cultural production was a pervasive concern not because the party in power needed to be revolutionized from within, but because the two-party political structure of the United States had failed to deliver on its promise of equal opportunity; on the contrary, despite the formal order to desegregate

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<sup>11</sup> Alain Badiou, *Conditions* trans. Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 159. For Badiou’s thinking on the Cultural Revolution, see *Polemics* trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006). Also see the special issue on “Alain Badiou and Cultural Revolution” of *positions: east asia cultures critique* 13:3 (Winter 2005).

schools amidst terrorist “massive resistance,” and by 1964-65 the passage of federal guarantees of civil rights and voting rights (which had technically been guaranteed by the Constitution, but not secured by the federal government for a century), the structures of political economic power were unable even to address profound racial inequalities in economic opportunity and access to the basic social goods necessary to improve life chances (health care, education, prenatal preventive care, child care, etc., not to mention community security, freedom from state harassment, protection from terrorist violence, and fair and equal treatment by the police and justice system).<sup>12</sup> Contra the vast majority of discussions, especially within the literature on “jazz,” of black creative intellectuals seeking creative control over the machinery of cultural production, the issue was not (only) one of asserting black autonomy or freedom from malicious (white) representation, and still less (importantly) about seeking out sources for “black pride” (James Brown did not need research to make his famous assertion). To think of it that way is implicitly to cordon off culture as an arena of spectacular ethno-idiomatic recognition, where systematic oppression is rewarded with the “majesty” of the blues. On the contrary, black control of the means of musical production came onto the agenda in the 1960s so that black music might become a *material* source for the (re)construction of independent black communities.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> My characterization of inequalities in “life chances” is based on research described by A. T. Geronimus and J. P. Thompson, “To Denigrate, Ignore, or Disrupt: Racial Inequality in Health and the Impact of a Policy-Induced Breakdown of African American Communities,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research On Race*, 1:2, (2004), 247-279.

<sup>13</sup> To be clear, I am not claiming that all or even most creative intellectuals, black nationalists, black radicals, and especially black experimental musicians, thought this way. Indeed, I can imagine all sorts of Ellisonian objections about musicians being the “least political of men,” or empirical-positivist claims about the class origins of jazz musicians, or from another direction complaints that free jazzers and other experimentalists were not political *enough*, too wrapped up in their formalist idealism to make “real” political art (i.e. agitprop). Rather, what I am saying is that the struggle over the means of cultural production was part and parcel of the theoretical-objective conjuncture itself. In this much I think a historical perspective supports aspects of Harold Cruse’s intervention in *The Crisis*, where for Cruse the stakes are whether and how cultural production can be leveraged to secure political-economic power, and that this national imperative was not a new proposal but a historical and objective reality for which black intellectuals had to develop political strategies. That said, this study will not be following Cruse in critiquing intellectuals’ strategies or lack thereof in this context, still less



Considering decolonization and cultural revolution as global organizing tropes for resistance struggles in the 1960s, ideas and practices that traversed and crossed the U.S. nation space, has a number of effects for the writing of U.S. history. Resistance to U.S. empire globally must be centered in narratives of the U.S. state, since the ideological contradictions of U.S. rule, the identification of U.S. influence as the power behind the introduction of mass cultural commodities, and the unremitting violent menace of U.S. warfare, hot and cold, meant that in its domestic policies the state had to take into account international challenges and vice versa. One effect of the political opening of the 1960s was to revision histories of black labor and migration, and the spatial containment of migrant populations in materially and socially underserved sections of cities, as a history of “internal colonialism.”<sup>14</sup> The Panthers and others in the “New Left” took up, from 1967, Che Guevara’s call for “two, three many Vietnams,” for the proliferation of militant challenges to imperialism across the global range of U.S. power. This was a kind of spatial parallax structure, which rhetorically leaped over the significant challenges to theorizing effective resistance in different locales by holding up guerilla warfare as a model. Imperialism could be defeated despite massive imbalances in “force and violence,” the slogan seemed to indicate, although the U.S. state’s ready willingness to use violence, subterfuge, and clandestine

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along the fault line between integration and nationalism. Rather, to reiterate, what I am interested in is how musicians, as a specific group of creative intellectuals, crafted musical performances and musico-political subjectivities in this context. It is theoretically impossible, anyway, for musicians to craft a unified and politically coherent strategy in the manner Cruse demands of Harlem literary organizations. Music in its elemental structure is heterophonic and heteroglot, polyvalent and fleeting-fugitive. Here it is worth endorsing one basic lesson of Adornian aesthetics: music “responds” to social antagonism, and I would add, historical conjuncture, by enstructurating, encoding, that antagonism into the form of the musical (art) work. For him, and this is in part why his aesthetics are so stringent, and why *Aesthetic Theory* (1969) itself so relentlessly codes its claims into a rigorous paratactic structure, the “best,” most liberating work is that which encodes social antagonism “deepest,” most fully into its structure and thus is resistant both to appropriation by the capitalist culture industry and to over-simple interpretation of thematic, biographical, or programmatic-allegorical analysis. While I think Adorno ultimately sets the bar impossibly high, rendering cultural critique an exercise in the “politics of despair,” his theory is not a species of (idealist) “formalism” but on the contrary the greatest materialist theory of musical aesthetics we have available.

<sup>14</sup> See Nikhil Pal Singh’s discussion of the Black Panther Party, the police as an occupying force that abandoned seeking hegemonic consent, and the built environment, *Black is a Country*, 193-202.

operations in an effort to destroy black militant organizations made efforts to take up arms increasingly futile and self-defeating. As rhetoric, however, such calls for international solidarity showed that imperialism could be delegitimized, which many took to mean that one might “opt-out” and “choose autonomy” from the state. At the higher levels of the U.S. social strata, this opting out took forms that were often narcissistic, individualist, and obscurantist. But even these were rippling effects of fundamental challenges to the structures of political economic power, which exposed the entire state and corporate apparatus’ dependence on white supremacy (intimately linked to anti-Communism) as an ideological motif to sustain its rule. In the Cold War moment of the late 1940s and 1950s liberals mounted ideological and legal challenges to segregation, and there were lingering traces of the Popular Front’s attempt to construct a new hegemony, now shattered by repression. But it was the movements of the 1960s that exploded the racial contradictions of U.S. empire and put both decolonization, as a global liberation movement that faced resistance from the U.S., and internal colonialism, as the manifestation of U.S. empire in its metropolitan spaces, on the political agenda in ways they had not been before or since. For our purposes, it is also important to note that internal colonialism also, in a very real sense, was a framework to revise interpretations of popular culture. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S., but also and increasingly globally, black music was a social currency people could employ to recognize each other in terms of shared national or regional identity and in terms of differing elective affinities. In a society ruled by commodities the social currency of black music was exchanged with real currency and was part of a profit-generating industry. Black music did and still does provide much of the “raw material” and the surplus-value generating labor for this industry—and since the 1940s jazz was its research and development arm.

This perspective suggests we hear claims about, for instance, “black ownership” and “white theft” of black culture, not necessarily as racialized, essentialist appeals to genetics, but as claims for a material reconstruction of a colonial exploitation that is as much about space and class as it is about race. In another instance, when black music is thought as a “natural resource” subject to “exploitation,” as does Cruse we are dealing not (only) with a metaphor for the right to define or speak to or about black cultural expression, but also a political attempt to redistribute the sensibility of musical experience so that when we hear it we hear its *value* (as a result of labor and not merely its idealistic value as expression open to everyone’s experience, and thus an affective transformation from work *of art* to work *as such*). When Archie Shepp makes the admittedly hyperbolic claim that “the jazz business is the most American business” because it is exceptionally, peculiarly exploitative of the surplus value created by the musician’s labor, is he not echoing the “peculiar[ly American] institution” that John C. Calhoun had defended as a “positive good” on the floor of the U.S. Senate in 1837 and more recently had been reinvoked and repurposed by historian Kenneth Stampp in the title of his 1956 book?<sup>15</sup> We are free to dismiss the comparison between being enslaved and being a jazz musician; surely, they are tectonically far apart as far as everyday experience and life chances go (but how far apart? how far is too far to make the comparison no longer function as a political or artistic performativity?). I am trying to get at a sense that to dismiss it would be to miss something important, to repeat an Adornian deafness to some “simple shit” (Baraka, “Afro-American Lyric”) that leads to some complex or difficult rearrangements of the sensory experience of the *time* or temporal enfolding of the past. What we hear, then, might be thought of as two redistributions of the sense of

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<sup>15</sup> John C. Calhoun, *Remarks of Mr. Calhoun, of South Carolina on the Reception of Abolition Petitions. Delivered in the Senate of the United States* (Washington: William W. Moore, 1837). In the next few pages I quote from the Library of Congress’s holding of this document, available online at <http://www.archive.org/details/remarksofmrcalho01calh>

proximity between past and present, two crossings of the sensory distribution of aesthetics and politics. One is the temporal parallax of the plantation and the nightclub: we have already seen that for white bourgeois patrons this parallax was performatively enacted in venues like the Cotton Club, but even outside that specific site the nightclub enacts a temporal parallax when it is constructed as a mythic space of what Marcuse called “repressive desublimation,” where the spectacle of virtuosity is displayed as a natural expressive gift given for the audience’s enjoyment.<sup>16</sup>

Second is another temporal parallax, but instead of the space and relations of production that are superimposed past onto present, it is the creative musician who is temporally grafted into a performative proximity to the enslaved. This is not a case of *speaking for* the enslaved, I think, but of inhabiting a cultural world where relations of continuity can be felt and experienced, even if only through ritual. What can be heard if we take this idea seriously as a way of describing black cultural difference (as a set of embodied and material relations that are lived as a cross-generational sharing of affective experience), and as a performative topos for black experimental music? To clear space for the consideration of such an aesthetics, another context must be excavated: the U.S. historiography of slavery, which I have compared to jazz as a space where public confrontations around matters of race took particular shape. These debates among historians, however, took place several years later than they did in the jazz world, and they were arguably more intense and more intractable. Part of the reason had to do with the psychic and affective structures that haunted the American social memory of slavery, and distorted its professional historians’ view of it. It is this distortion, which I associate with the unacknowledged inheritance of proslavery thought, to which I now turn.

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<sup>16</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1991), 56-83.

## The Haunting of Foreclosure: Proslavery Ideology as an Historiographical Trope

As a preface to the historiography of slavery, however, I'd like to reexamine the famous text that articulated the peculiarity of the American institution, Senator John C. Calhoun's 1837 speech "On the Reception of Abolition Petitions." Why leave questions of jazz and cultural production to shift to a text produced over 125 years earlier? Partly because when the "peculiar institution" was invoked in postwar U.S. culture, it was not only as a dead metaphor or polite euphemism for slavery, but for many who heard the reference it likely called up Calhoun as the phrase's original speaker. It is hard to overstate the widespread circulation the text enjoyed for over a century after its articulation, or the familiarity it had for many educated Americans. Calhoun's text was frequently brought out in new editions, included in collections of southern oratory, used as a public speaking text, and widely circulated nationwide. Calhoun's text is still commercially available today in several editions, both historical reprints and newer editions, but it was particularly pervasive during the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century period of national "reunion" when the U.S. symbolically reconciled on white supremacist grounds.<sup>17</sup> This period of "reunion" is known in African American historiography as the "nadir," a spectacularly horrific intensification of state and

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<sup>17</sup> See David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Two comments about the material reproduction of so many textual afterlives for Calhoun's speech: first there is the tragic-comic or even farcical contradiction between the extensive circulation and citation of this text, which strenuously argues that "Abolition and the Union cannot co-exist" and the popular historical belief, quite prevalent in secondary education, that the Civil War was not "caused" by slavery (that the federal-state conflicts, Constitutional interpretive divides, let alone the economic differences that are nominated as the "real" causes might have something to do with slavery does not too much disturb this tic of populist history). "Be it good or bad," Calhoun insisted, "[slavery] has grown up with our society and institutions, and is interwoven with them, that to destroy it would be to destroy us as a people." Kenneth Stampp chose Calhoun's phrase as a title to argue for the centrality of slavery to understanding the war. But despite the clarity of the Senator's line in the sand, slavery as the fundamental *political* contradiction of the republic's history had been almost silenced from popular and pedagogical U.S. historiography by a nostalgic romance with the plantation South.

populist violence in the construction of a new regime of racist law, effectively an internal colonialism or apartheid state that came to be known under another dead metaphor or polite euphemism, Jim Crow. The “nadir” witnessed state-level disfranchisement in violation of the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment to the U.S. Constitution; the rapid segregation of public space in the wake of the 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson decision; the horrifying regularity of lynching and the banality of white spectatorship of them; and the periodic explosions of white terrorist violence against whole communities, as in Wilmington in 1898 or Atlanta in 1906, St. Louis in 1917, and in dozens of cities in 1919.

Calhoun’s text was relatively ubiquitous in U.S. public culture in the century after the Civil War, but it and the proslavery ideology it expressed also had a profound influence on the development of U.S. historiography on the South, the plantation economy, slavery, and race. Although white supremacy was a widely shared ethos among the upper-class white male dominated intelligentsia of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (for example Woodrow Wilson’s well-known admiration for D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*) for professional historians the analytical portrait of slavery was dominated by one man in particular, U. B. Phillips, whose historical accounts of the plantation regime were openly and explicitly racist, condensing into the Sambo image that would haunt the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who admired the white Southern “aristocracy” for their honorable devotion to a doomed way of life, and who defended slavery as a noble and orderly form of labor discipline that unfortunately could not compete with industrial manufacture in terms of profitability. Phillips’ writing of history is interesting today only because of its peculiar domination of the profession into the 1960s. Until the 1940s Phillips’ version of slavery was the unchallenged synthetic picture in American historiography. As we will see below, the attempts to dislodge his narrative from its position at the pinnacle of the literature after 1940 were only marginally successful, and through

Phillips' adoption of a proslavery position, the terms—and the psychic investments and negations—of proslavery rhetoric exerted a submerged but powerful shaping force not only on historiography but on U.S. intellectual culture and public policy as well.

Therefore I propose a brief reading of Calhoun's text to unpack the ideologies circulating "at the lower frequencies" of U.S. history writing through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Calhoun's speech opposed the Senate accepting the petitions of abolitionist groups; legal histories have focused on the Constitutional issues raised by Calhoun's argument, which are too complex to explore in full detail here, but his premise was that if Congress followed the letter and spirit of the first amendment, it would violate a strict construction of the tenth, and in doing so ultimately destroy the federal union. Calhoun's argument posited that slavery was so integral to Southern society that to allow even rhetorical attacks to go unchallenged would be to invite civil war. Of particular interest are the affects of vulnerability, terror, and paranoia that pervade the rhetoric of his address. Calhoun complained that the abolitionists' petitions betrayed a "systematic design of rendering us hateful in the eyes of the world, with a view to a general crusade against us and our institutions." He draws a line in the sand and refuses to concede to the abolitionists' "aggression," suggesting that those who would "are prepared to become slaves." Abolitionism is an "incendiary spirit," but had not "infected this body [the Senate], or the great mass of the intelligent and business portion of the North." He opposes both the end, and the act of arguing against, slavery by deploying several overlapping but contradictory arguments: first, whether it is good or bad, ending slavery will rend the union and cause a race war; second, all societies are divided into labor and capital, so slavery is not uniquely bad and can be roughly compared to how other societies treat their lower classes; finally, slavery is a positive good—not only are the West Africans more civilized and living better lives than

they could hope for anywhere else on earth, but in fact the bonds of intimacy between master and slave are closer and more affectionate because of the social harmony and stability that slavery brings. Calhoun is often remembered for arguing for slavery as a positive good, but in fact that argument only emerges as a contradictory defense and cover for something else. The overlap and logical incompatibility of these three simultaneously argued points is an example of what in psychoanalysis is known as the logic of fetishist disavowal. The argument is fetishist in a way roughly comparable to the way Freud theorizes the fetishist's disavowal of castration or the way Marxism theorizes the fetishism of commodities under capitalism. What Calhoun's contradictory argument works to disavow is his belief in the enslaved's capacity for mastery over him. Calhoun's text adds a fourth complaint, one that, in a way, speaks the paranoid belief that the other arguments work to conceal: the abolitionists don't just want the end of slavery, they won't rest until the relation between master and slave is reversed and the white men of the south are whipped and enchained. Calhoun points to the British West Indies, where slavery had been abolished only four years before. While there were no more overseers, the army and the magistrate had the authority and the force, the police power, to keep the ex-enslaved working under similar conditions. If the abolitionists get their way in the United States, he claims, white men will be put to the lash: imagine the horror, being forced to work while "they" enjoy their leisure! In the absence of a credible police power to sustain the labor regime of slavery past the point of legal emancipation, Calhoun implies, emancipation would destroy society itself.<sup>18</sup>

We will return to Calhoun's logic as a fetishist disavowal of the humanity of the enslaved, but for now it is important to ask how proslavery ideology was perpetuated into

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<sup>18</sup> On the connections between slave codes and the development of police power in the United States, see Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).



the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Images of nostalgia for slavery as an idyllic commune like those deployed in the Cotton Club depended on the “plantation legend,” which was the name given to the historiographical distortion of the history of slavery that inaccurately represented large plantations as the typical scene of enslaved life. This legend was pervasive in mid-century U.S. culture as a key argument of U. B. Phillips’s history of slavery. In the 1944 *Journal of Negro History*, the young historian Richard Hofstadter assembled detailed quantitative records to argue that the picture U. B. Phillips presented of slavery, which Hofstadter claimed was the most influential source for teachers and scholars even a generation after its publication, was wildly inaccurate. Hofstadter was part of a cohort of historians seeking to theoretically ground historical research in the methodological techniques of social science. Hofstadter discovered in his analysis that Phillips’s description of slavery only applied to around 10% of enslaved people, whereas the masters’ plantations he both romanticized for their elegant policing of white supremacy and pronounced as inefficient and ultimately doomed—they accounted only for a single percentage of white southerners. The key point here is to note that the ideology of the “plantation legend” was therefore not simply driven by nostalgia for slavery, but was an important element in the disciplining of subaltern whites: the romance of the plantation south was an advertisement for the virtues and pleasures of white supremacy, and an invitation to white Americans in the north and south to enlist in the policing of white supremacy on behalf of the ultra-rich. Plantation nostalgia was not directed towards the past, it was aspirational: Phillip’s romantic history, wrote Hofstadter, “really” (i.e. empirically) only applied to “the upper crust of the upper crust.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Hofstadter, “U. B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend,” *Journal of Negro History* 29:2 (April 1944): 109-124. Without getting into a too extensive discussion of the issue, it is worth pointing out that in a post-Althusserian theoretical context the kind of legitimation project that Hofstadter and others were attempting for professional history is rendered logically impossible, because for Althusser theory and methodology are rigorously opposed, as respectively belonging to the knowledges of materialism and idealism. See Louis

Hofstadter is able to challenge Phillips on his own methodological ground, and accuse him of distorting the picture of slavery by selectively reading the evidence.

Hofstadter, pre-rightward turn, and all but calls out Phillips as a racist unworthy of serious attention. Writing the 1940s, Hofstadter's critique built on the work of a generation of black historians grouped around Carter G. Woodson's *Journal of Negro History*. The key work, however, that had already in the mid-1930s eviscerated the empirical and theoretical logic of the "plantation legend" was W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*. That work offered brilliant insights into the role of enslaved black workers in both liberating themselves and forcing the political issue of emancipation onto the center stage of union war aims. Du Bois also embedded voluminous historical evidence in a richly realized theoretical analysis of class and race, but his work was almost completely ignored by U.S. professional historians until the 1970s. In addition to Du Bois and other black historians, there were other dissonant voices, especially on the Communist Left—a key figure was Herbert Aptheker, whose painstaking documentation of the resistance of enslaved people directly challenged the terms

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Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1997). Another way of putting it is that since positivism assumes a structural (mechanistic) reality external to knowledge that can be accessed by way of (bourgeois) science, its focus on methodology insofar as it is meant to gain access to and order the elements of structure remains ideological. In the Althusserian paradigm, only theory can produce concepts of how a structure can be thought as structuring an element of the structure when the structure is only its own elements. Methodology meanwhile remains ideologically convinced of the possibility of a full picture of the world, while knowing that it will never practically achieve it, only continue to gather empirical data to round out its (ideologically presupposed) views. Since theory, on the other hand, is dedicated to the explication of totality while knowing theoretically that its own knowledge is part of the totality, it must take up its work within knowledge and produce concepts that think the totality's symptomatic effect on its elements without recourse to an outside of those conceptual elements themselves. I add this not to endorse uncritically an Althusserian or post-Althusserian theoretical project, but to suggest it as an interesting contemporaneous explanation for the profound conceptual, racialized, and finally ideological dead ends of the establishment historiography of U.S. slavery (and in other subfields not considered here) between 1920 and 1975. It might be useful for a theory of historiography to compare Althusserian logico-speculative reconstruction of history to other alternatives such as Hofstadter's borrowing of mid-range theory from social science, especially social psychology, as tools selectively to *apply* to historical topos—status anxiety, paranoia, irrationalism, and so on. That Hofstadter ultimately produced a usable past for a given moment along a certain political trajectory, and that in that moment along that trajectory what was usable (for who? for what?) revealed an ideological deadlock that made critique of "consensus history" an important agenda for later historians. To be clear, pace Novick's excellent history of these debates, the important distinction is not between subjectivity and objectivity, but between theory and methodology, and between critique and positivism.

of the historiographical mainstream, but despite these efforts Phillips's hypotheses remained influential beyond any reasonable standards of evidentiary scrutiny.<sup>20</sup>

The discipline's failure to take up the critiques of Aptheker and Hofstadter, and especially Du Bois's still illuminating and challenging work, can be read as a symptom of ideological investments that belied the post-1940 search for methodological borrowings that would put history on more "scientific" ground.<sup>21</sup> The Popular Front in the 1930s and early 1940s and the left-liberal alliance against fascism and racism had created an opening to displace Phillips, the "plantation legend," and the disgrace of the Sambo archetype from its position in American historiography. The closure of that opportunity, and Cold War repression's chilling of anti-racist intellectual engagement, left the legend standing in place of any historiographical construction of a new model more appropriate for the emerging postwar consensus. Liberal efforts to craft an ideological alternative to the legend's Sambo myth were fraught with difficulties and generated discord rather than the consensus they sought. We have already seen Kenneth Stampp's 1956 *Peculiar Institution*; that book was invested in establishing slavery as the issue that drove the nation towards civil war, but it could not ultimately dispel the archetypes of the plantation's harmonious social and labor relations. Stampp's book is remembered for its emphasis on "passive resistance" to slavery in slowdowns and other practices that stopped short of violent rebellion, but he also pointed

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<sup>20</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998). Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (International Publishers, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> For a principal example of the discipline's search for a scientific grounding for historical methodology, see Social Science Research Council Committee on Historiography, *Theory and Practice in Historical Study* Bulletin 54 (New York: SSRC, 1946). For a discussion of the SSRC amid other attempts within the discipline to ground historical practice theoretically, especially borrowing "mid-level" concepts from sociology, see Terrence J. McDonald, "What We Talk About When We Talk About History: The Conversations of History and Sociology," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* ed. McDonald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 91-118

to the legacy of the “baffling” logic of proslavery ideology in constructing historiography.<sup>22</sup>

In a way, Stamppp could be said to have constructed a useable past for a liberal imaginary of civil rights resistance; however, the growing shift in movement cultures towards non-violent direct action, culminating in the sit-ins and freedom rides of the early 1960s made Stamppp’s use of silent, invisible resistance as a vindication of the enslaved from the Sambo myth less ideologically effective.

Perhaps ironically, the work that emerged to offer a critique of Phillips that historians could finally accept as a challenge to his dominance of the field was Stanley Elkins’s *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959). Elkins directly addressed the overt racist implications of the Sambo archetype as a key ideological edifice of the proslavery interpretation of the South, but accepted its empirical validity. Slaves acted like Sambo precisely because of the dehumanizing cruelty and brutality of slavery. Comparing the plantation to the concentration camp, Elkins suggested that slavery had inflicted such profound psychic damage that the enslaved were infantilized, their humanity reduced to a childlike nature whose misreading as racial identity gave rise to both the legends of plantation nostalgia and, presumably, minstrelsy’s derisive comedy. The Sambo archetype

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<sup>22</sup> Stamppp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*, (New York: Vintage, 1989), 429. As a telling illustration of Calhoun’s predominance in popular narratives of American history, Kenneth Stamppp mentioned Calhoun only twice in his book whose title derived from a phrase associated with the proslavery Senator. That this was the result not of amnesia about the phrase but expectations that readers would already know where it came from is strongly suggested by one of the brief mentions of Calhoun. Introducing Nat Turner’s revolt, Stamppp writes, “No ante-bellum Southerner could ever forget Nat Turner. The career of this man made an impact upon the people of his section as great as that of John C. Calhoun or Jefferson Davis. Yet Turner was only a slave.... If Nat Turner could not be trusted, what slave could? That was what made his sudden deed so frightening.” Ibid, 132-33. That the historian tells us Turner could not be forgotten by “ante-bellum Southerner[s]” suggests that he had been forgotten in the reunified 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S.; not so Calhoun, who appears as a familiar. This passage demonstrates perhaps one reason why Stamppp’s liberal attempt to displace the existing historiography of slavery was relatively unsuccessful: despite challenging the proslavery conclusions of U.B. Phillips, Stamppp felt compelled to write rhetorically from an imaginary proslavery position: what slave could be trusted, Stamppp wonders, as if musing in the diary of his fantasy cotton plantation—he expected liberal irony to carry the historiographical challenge, but, despite the book’s notable influence on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the movements for black freedom had made Stamppp’s rhetoric sound dated and condescending almost immediately after its publication. I would argue further that the nature of historiography’s inheritance of proslavery ideology (see below on “foreclosure”) made irony an ineffective weapon: psychotics do not understand irony.

was like the *Musselmann* created by the camps, a human being stripped of its humanity and reduced to “bare life.” Elkins’s “damage thesis” was to have a long and strange afterlife as historiography resolved into a decade-long debate between the racist dehumanization of the Sambo archetype and the opposed thesis of dehumanization as a condition inflicted by a racist regime. The two “opposing” theses both held in common a belief in the infra-humanity of the enslaved, but disagreed whether it was natural or the result of environmental conditions. The ideological legacy of the shockingly narrow terms of this debate continue to haunt debates about public policy, metropolitan space, and social provision in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore when we encounter a public reference to slavery in a disputatious interracial dialogue during the conjuncture of the mid-1960s, it’s important to keep in mind that it is an irruption from a murmuring but publicly silenced “unconscious” of American history. In psychoanalysis the unconscious is formed by negation: at some point in the past, and likely repetitively, something of “what happened” was negated. Historians’ inability to hear Du Bois’s intervention as a challenge to their orthodoxies, and the way even postwar left-liberal historians continued to hold positions on slavery that were partially continuous with the most extreme antebellum proslavery rhetoric—these are symptoms of a massive collective negation.

In psychoanalytic theory, there are three types of negation, each correlated to a distinct psychic development. Slavery was, strictly speaking, neither repressed nor disavowed in U.S. intellectual culture and historiography—indeed it was quite openly discussed, but in a

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<sup>23</sup> Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959). See Novick, 481-84 for Elkins’s role in finally stimulating the emergence of a liberal historiography that successfully devoted itself to displacing Phillips. Novick describes the new literature as an industry of “Sambo-bashing” histories that played up the “harsh conditions” the enslaved endured. Novick also discusses the influence of Elkins’s work on the Moynihan and subsequent debates about black culture and the black family.

pathologically restricted way. The negation we can hear in the historiographical discourse of U.S. slavery falls under the psychoanalytic category of foreclosure. Foreclosure completely removes the negated element from the symbolic, leaving no trace, and no *point de captation* to secure the symbolic chain. In Lacan's terminology, foreclosure indicates the failure of the paternal function, leading the subject to have a distorted understanding of the relationship between language and "reality." This condition is the psychoanalytic diagnosis of psychosis. The question of what was historiographically foreclosed—what part of "what happened" had to be foreclosed—is complicated by the fact that slavery was talked about and debated incessantly in postwar historiography, but in a way that silenced the enslaved a second time. In 20<sup>th</sup> century historiography, what was foreclosed was the humanity of the enslaved. Regardless of whether dehumanization was explained in racist terms of a limited innate capacity and the Sambo trope, or in liberal terms of the dehumanizing machinic brutality of the plantation regime itself, slavery was regularly understood in terms of dehumanization. The historiography of slavery deployed a biopolitics that figured slaves and ex-slaves as dehumanized partial subjects, bearers of "damaged" and disordered cultures, and the excluded-fetishized figures of "*homo sacer*," (ex-)humans reduced to "bare life."<sup>24</sup> The idea of slavery having mutilated the psyches of the enslaved and their descendents is a trope we have already seen deployed by Adorno but in the postwar U.S. it became the central trope of a cultural debate that spanned intellectual life from arts and letters to jazz criticism and finally to the making of public policy. For as is well known Elkins' "damage thesis" was the primary influence on the infamous Moynihan report that described the structure of black families as a pathological residue of the dehumanization of the middle passage. Assumptions about psychic mutilation and cultural pathology have dominated the making of urban policy

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<sup>24</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

in the US since the 1960s despite a periodic waxing and waning of the direct influence of Moynihan's thesis.

Above I claimed that proslavery ideologue Senator Calhoun disavowed (his belief in) the capacity of the enslaved to act as masters, their capacity as fully human in Calhoun's ideological belief structure. Contrary to the assertions of historians, and the repetition of those assertions among policymakers, in a real sense it was the (symbolic) descendants of slave owners, not the (symbolic) descendants of slaves, who dealt with the absence of the "Name of the Father," who felt the trauma of a lost patrilineality and sought in vain for a signifier to tie up the loose ends—it was "historiography" itself that was in the grip of psychosis, confusing signs for reality, and confabulating elaborate mental structures that were confused with reliable memory.<sup>25</sup>

The ghastly revenge of proslavery ideology on (Northern, liberal) historiography was to implant a haunting absence in the place of what the slave owners, by their very practice of commodifying human beings, had disavowed: the full humanity of the enslaved. What I would like to propose as a way back into Archie Shepp's intervention into the jazz debates is that we hear the articulations of an Africanist aesthetic ethos among many musicians and their sense of frustration in attempting to deflate the critical expectations and assumptions that constrained their aesthetic choices as taking place in this broad context where (whether in the form of persistent minstrel stereotypes or in the form of liberal overcompensating claims of the damaging effects of slavery and segregation) a narrative of black dehumanization was a cultural dominant into the 1970s. As I suggested above, an ideology critique of the trajectory of the dominant themes of American historiography of slavery suggests that this widespread cultural investment in black dehumanization was, strictly

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<sup>25</sup> For psychosis, see Lacan, "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 445-488.

speaking, psychotic. That is to say, and to repeat, the humanity of the enslaved and implicitly their descendents, was not repressed or disavowed but foreclosed in wide sectors of American intellectual life. The attempt to displace this disavowal and restore a useable memory (and sanity) to the national imaginary of “America,” and the continuing legacies and repetitions of the original foreclosure, defined a significant portion of the hegemonic struggles in a variety of discursive locations in the wake of the 1960s. If it were only discourse at issue, it would be a tragedy; the continuing effects of this unspoken and unrealized disavowal on the creation of public policy and the built environment has instead made it a nightmare.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Therefore it should be clear that in describing the period of the 1960s and 1970s as U.S. decolonization I am not telling a celebratory story of a “successful” decolonization. And while I submit that the “wild psychoanalysis” I performed in the above section provides some insight into a cultural imaginary that obstructed a fuller decolonization, by no means do I take it to be a full or causal account. For anyone paying attention, not to mention historians of African and Asian decolonization, the term does not connote anything like a final settling of accounts with colonialism, nor the establishment of a condition of national autonomy and social justice. Instead, the postcoloniality of our moment, like that of the 1970s, is marked by the perpetuation of neocolonial exploitation, larcenous and/or brutal authoritarian states, “gate keeping” and patronage structures, repressive legislation of personal morality, financial pillaging of common property, rampant violence, and war. And to be as clear as possible, I mean to refer simultaneously to much of postcolonial Africa as well as to the material situation of the majority of black people living in the U.S. The political economic structures and policies that sustain “internal colonialism” in the metropolitan United States have not abated, although the ideology that normalizes such conditions has changed significantly. In addition to psychoanalytic explanations, which may be useful in opening up questions about the constitution of an imaginary, but cannot ultimately settle historiographical issues of social and political history, I want to suggest two ways of thinking about “what happened.” Put simply, postwar policies that enforced segregation and disfranchisement by race were reframed in the 1970s as the results of market relations, and made thus to appear as the product of individual “choices.” Put more complexly, while there was an introduction of a dissensus in the 1960s that coalesced a politics that once and for all made explicit white supremacy unspeakable/unhearable as public discourse, that politics was unable to achieve a number of other aims, such as for instance a revisioning of community as sustained by love and mutual interdependence, or of the human being as in him/herself worthy and in need of economic justice to be truly recognized (seen and heard as citizen of the state, member of the community, and agent of personal autonomy). These two politics are often associated with the name of Rev Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. There was at the same time a project, victorious in the 1970s and ever since, that was not a political project but a policing, which redistributed the sensible, in particular the sensory experience of public space, around an affective experience of fear. One of these perspectives is a synthetic synopsis of recent U.S. metropolitan history, based on a reading of state and municipal political structures, public policy, and community organization. The other is in the theoretical language provided by Jacques Rancière to explain how the aesthetic distribution of what is sensible (visible, audible, intelligible) connects to politics and the police. The coincidence and coordination of these two narratives, one emprico-historical and the other aesthetic-speculative, suggests that despite translational difficulties among scholarly dialects, to the extent that historians are committed to politics as such—for Rancière, to review, the opening of a dissensus by the part of no part that reopens the question of what is held in common—we are holding the same elephant.



## Archie Shepp's Politics of Black Music

In February 1967, Brooklyn's Chelsea Theater presented Archie Shepp's "jazz allegory," *Junebug Graduates Tonight*, a series of vignettes set to music that sought nothing less than the diagnosis of a nation whose social fabric appeared to be in tatters. If the Moynihan report had described black urban culture as a "tangle of pathology," Shepp's play depicted the U.S. mainstream as a "tangle of ideology," with a veritable modernized Greek chorus representing the wide spectrum of U.S. racial and political belief: "the SDSers", "DAR", "the Panthers", the "White Liberals", the "Birchers", the "KKK." Alternatingly shouting each other down or calling out in unexpected alliance, this shifting, politically fragmented chorus of American modernity was tied together only by a shared course towards widespread social violence, perhaps even genocide. Junebug, a young black man with literary and political aspirations is caught in the midst of this conflict, attempting to navigate between the other characters' variously self-serving appeals for his loyalty. Junebug is a bit of a romantic: he is on a search for truth, a truth that may be revealed in a book he rereads constantly, Malcolm X's autobiography. What would an authentic stance be for a young, educated man, a descendent of slaves in an America that had historical amnesia, a nation that had forgotten its past and continuing crimes and was on track towards an epochal accounting for its murderous history?

Ironically foregrounding the discursive connections forged over the previous generation between "jazz" and "America," Shepp's "jazz allegory" is also, indeed primarily, a national allegory for a United States corroded by a genocidal past and an imperial present. Junebug is the son of the play's "Black Muslim" (NOI) character, and his lover is a young

white woman called “America.” She represents the putative “nation”— an imagined community that has lost its way: America doesn’t know much about democracy, and responds with puzzlement to Junebug’s attempts to get her to understand slavery. Another character, “Uncle Sam,” stands in for a “state”—violent, rapacious, morally empty—that long ago lost control. Uncle Sam is a blundering fool with a gun. He obfuscates the corruption of his moral rhetoric in the language of business, he celebrates his imperial adventures in Iran, Guatemala, Cuba, and particularly Vietnam, and he threatens similar violence to the radicals in his midst. The play is a tragedy. Junebug and America both end up dead.<sup>27</sup>

The play was performed several times through the late 1960s and Shepp revised it over the course of that time, adding references to contemporary events such as the 1968 riots at the Chicago Democratic Convention. Its first showing in 1967 took place at the Chelsea Theater. The small, experimental theater located at Brooklyn College was known for its willingness to produce experimental and radical drama. In 1969 it was the first to put on LeRoi Jones’s now-famous *Slave Ship*, and Jones reportedly accepted the offer because of the theater’s long-running relationship with African American-themed and Black Arts-oriented playwrights, including Shepp. Yet in the aftermath of *Junebug*, the theater took a six-month hiatus from political drama. In a subsequent interview, Shepp chastised the theater’s inability to run the play longer than the two-week initial showing. The critic appointed by the *Village Voice* to review the play openly admitted not having understood it, and attributed his incomprehension to his white skin. Such lame dismissals outraged Shepp, who felt that his play’s social diagnosis, its engaged provocation on issues of national concern, deserved a wider audience. Shepp argued that refusals to treat the play seriously were tantamount to an

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<sup>27</sup> A late version of Shepp’s play can be found in *Black Drama Anthology* ed. Woodie King and Ron Milner (Signet, 1971), 33-76.

“intellectual cop-out.” Moreover, the reviews failed to observe that the play had drawn a responsive audience: playwright and audience alike, according to Shepp, “sensed the fact that they are anonymous, that somehow someone just cut the whole thing off. There were droves who came and enjoyed my play and my play should have gone on and yet it didn’t because it was smashed by intellectual bigots.”<sup>28</sup>

The play was experimental, didactic, and broad, and the allegory veered into agitprop; it was also provocative, funny, and absurd. In the non-sequitars of its dialogue, in its abrupt shifts in tone and subject, and in its juxtaposition of a veneer of social realism with a poetic sense of unreality announced by frequent and unpredictable eruptions of song and instrumental sound together announced the play as absolutely contemporary with emergent “postmodern” drama. When the subject was racial politics, however, experimentalism and social critique were translated in the mainstream liberal press as nonsensical emotion.

By 1967 Shepp had been relatively famous for several years, especially in the New York arts scene, as a key intellectual agitator on behalf of the new music. In the early 60s, he had played with Cecil Taylor and Bill Dixon, two masters of avant-garde composition. With Dixon, Sun Ra, Carla Bley, Paul Bley, Roswell Rudd, John Tchicai, and others Shepp was involved in the founding of the Jazz Composers’ Guild in 1964, a short-lived but deeply influential attempt to wrest control over the political economy of the new music away from record companies. He was also integrally involved in the Guild’s collapse, having taken a record contract with Impulse rather than holding out with the other members of the

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<sup>28</sup> Shepp interview, November 1967, Archie Shepp folder, Clippings file, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ. Program, “Junebug Graduates Tonight,” Chelsea Theater Center, Shepp folder, IJS. Review of “Junebug Graduates Tonight,” *Village Voice*, March 2, 1967. Martin Gottfried, “America’s Most Exciting New Theater?” *New York Times*, February 21, 1971, D3.

group.<sup>29</sup> For a time in the early 1960s, Shepp lived on Cooper Square, a neighbor of Amiri Baraka as well as musicians working in an experimentalist vein: he lived only blocks away from the Five Spot, where Ornette Coleman made his debut in 1959. Shepp was involved in some of the earliest organizations of black artists and intellectuals on the Lower East Side, groups like the On Guard for Freedom Committee, an early black nationalist group that raised funds to help defend North Carolina black radical Robert Williams, along with musicians Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach, Harold Cruse, and others, and the Umbra Poetry Workshop, an influential group of poets including LeRoi Jones, Tom Dent, and Calvin Hernton. These groups would have a significant impact on both the institutional architecture and the aesthetic debates of the Black Arts Movement.<sup>30</sup>

Although Shepp has been given his due as a spokesperson for the new music, I will suggest here that in the 1960s and 1970s he also crafted a singular analysis of U.S. society in a decolonizing crisis by reframing that crisis as the haunting legacy of an epochal and tragic history. Moreover, he developed a creative approach to political aesthetics, attempting through speech, writing, and musical performance to undermine the separation between politics, art, and social life. As he declared repeatedly in the 1960s, “art is propaganda.” Yet much of the art he made does not fit stereotypes of agitprop; on the contrary, his music in the 1960s cut across a variety of compositional techniques, some sonically overwhelming compositions that demanded much from the audience, and other playful explorations of the “tradition” and nostalgia for cultural home. I will briefly revisit Shepp’s career in Chapter

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<sup>29</sup> On the Jazz Composers Guild see Benjamin Piekut, “Race, Community, and Conflict in the Jazz Composers Guild,” *Jazz Perspectives* 3:3 (2009): 191-231 and “New Thing? Gender and Sexuality in the Jazz Composers Guild,” *American Quarterly* 62:1 (2010): 25-48.

<sup>30</sup> On the Lower East Side cultural scene, see Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (New York: Freundlich, 1983); Hettie Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (New York: Grove, 1996); Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*; “A Lower East Side Retrospective” in *African American Review* 27:4 (Winter 1993); Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Black Chant: Languages of African American Postmodernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Eben Wood, “Black Abstraction: the Umbra Workshop and an African American Avant-Garde” (PhD diss, University of Michigan, 2004).

Five, discussing his travels to Algeria and Europe in the company of a trans-generational community of musicians. In the 1970s Shepp moved towards a more populist aesthetic, recording large ensemble rhythm and blues, spirituals, and revisiting the work of Duke Ellington. By the end of the 1970s he was exploring the spirituals, the blues, and bebop in a series of meditative duets.

Archie Shepp had a significant presence in the jazz and middlebrow press during the mid 1960s. He authored articles that appeared in *Down Beat*, *Jazz*, and the *New York Times* and was positioned as a “spokesman” for the new jazz, a kind of organic intellectual or informant both for the aesthetic imperatives of free jazz and the music’s newly recognized connection to black politics and the black experience. Both at the time, and in subsequent histories, Shepp has been described as aligned politically with Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), who had emerged as the most visible intellectual proponent of the New Thing. Hostile commentators in the jazz press, indeed, often suggested Shepp was a mouthpiece for Baraka’s black cultural nationalism, and that his views were neither authentically his own nor representative of musicians more generally. Yet writers, whether contemporaries or subsequent scholars, have not examined Shepp’s ideas about jazz, black music, and the politics of culture in the complexity of their articulation.

His politics were neither derivative nor easy to categorize. Shepp departed in significant ways from Baraka, and had an ambivalent relationship to cultural nationalism. He wrote with an intensely personal style full of allusions and poetic constructions. An aphoristic thinker, Shepp’s writings ranged widely across the American cultural landscape: he wrote about prize fighting, minstrelsy, African decolonization, the social and cultural legacies of slavery, urban poverty, and the economic struggles of working musicians, among other subjects. His references included the novelist Richard Wright, the Marxist playwright Bertolt

Brecht, contemporary literary critics such as Leslie Fiedler, and the entire jazz tradition, from Fats Waller to Cecil Taylor. Perhaps his most significant intellectual influence was W. E. B. Du Bois, particularly the analysis of class and race in *Black Reconstruction*, which as I mentioned above Shepp was citing in public debates while U.S. historians continued to ignore it. His attempts to diagnose American racial politics resonated with the new social histories of slavery that would emerge in the 1970s and anticipated scholarly attention to minstrelsy and other manifestations of the cultural politics of race. At times combative, at times meditative, Shepp's writings glistened with what he referred to as a "gift for style" and a political outrage that matched the "sentimentalism" he heard in his own playing.

### Material Haunts

"The nature of jazz is so inextricably bound up with enslavement and emancipation."<sup>31</sup>

In the several years following the release of Archie Shepp's first two albums for Impulse, *Four for Trane* (1964) and *Fire Music* (1965), he took advantage of his growing notoriety to explain, deliberately and in an uncompromising style, the social analysis that drove his cultural work. Shepp, in the second half of the 1960s, was among a number of artists who were engaged in carving out a space for musicians to participate in the discursive and textual construction of their own music. His many public statements depended on a recent history in which musicians such as Charles Mingus, Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach, Eric Dolphy, John Coltrane and others had seized available opportunities to challenge the authority of critics to pass aesthetic judgment without regard for musicians' own aesthetic

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<sup>31</sup> "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism," transcript, *Jazz*, 1966.

philosophies.<sup>32</sup> These musicians' work in textualizing their own public personas and framing the critical assumptions that would evaluate their work looked for inspiration to musicians like Duke Ellington, who during the Popular Front period and afterwards used literary techniques and a meticulously exact speaking style to gain some control over his public representation<sup>33</sup>

By the mid-1960s, the war of words in the jazz press that had occupied the previous several years had opened up a space for musicians to speak openly about their political role as engaged artists in middlebrow venues. The challenge to the critical authority of *Down Beat* between 1961 and 1964 had had a significant effect. By 1965 the magazine had competition, the newly formed *Jazz*, which took the politics of black music more seriously and devoted itself to giving musicians a space to articulate their views. A coterie of writers, especially Amiri Baraka, but also A. B. Spellman, Nat Henthoff, Pauline Rivelli, John Sinclair, Frank Kofsky, A. D. Saunders, Robert Levin, and, by the 1970s Valerie Wilmer and others, sympathetic both to the new music and to African American democratic demands turned increasingly to musicians themselves to guide their writing. Shepp, who was a playwright and student of literary style, embraced the opportunity to compose an aesthetic philosophy for *Down Beat*, *Jazz*, as well as *The New York Times*. Cast by a clueless liberal press as the quintessential angry man of jazz and the most notorious example of a jazz musician with black nationalist sympathies, Shepp was at times dismissed as too radical, an Uncle Tom, an out-of-touch elitist, a sell-out populist, and a charlatan. Yet his politics, expressed in his writings and in numerous interviews, were of a classical bent: he described himself as “a socialist, a humanist, and a nationalist.”

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<sup>32</sup> Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*

<sup>33</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Literary Ellington,” *Representations* 77:1 (2002): 1-29.

In the liner notes to his third album for Impulse, *Mama Too Tight*, Shepp stated that he wanted the album to juxtapose “the poignance of the blues and the jubilant irreverence of a marching band returning from a funeral. It is my interpretation of a slave and neo-slave experience; rather like the feeling of being subjected to a ‘haunt.’”<sup>34</sup> An attempt to articulate in sound form “the slave and neo-slave experience” is the basis of Shepp’s whole aesthetic, and the idea of the present haunted by a past of enslavement informed his politics of culture. The concept of neo-slavery, which marked Shepp’s tentative allegiance to the emerging Black Arts imperative, and marked out a philosophical approach to the making and theorizing of black music, was one Shepp returned to often in interviews and published writing through the late 1960s and 1970s. Neo-slavery acted both as a deliberately hyperbolic description of the economics of the music business and a wider historical diagnosis of America’s social crisis. As we have seen, finding adequate economic support for innovative music making shaped much of the discourse of 1960s jazz modernism. Club gigs were increasingly difficult to find, and major record companies rarely recorded experimental musicians new on the scene without prodding. Shepp himself only gained a contract with Impulse after the intervention of John Coltrane. Especially after the founding of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, the disparity between state support for Pan-European classical music and the almost non-existent grant funding streams for jazz was especially galling. Charlie Parker had died in 1955, only thirty-five years old, and Billie Holiday passed away in 1959—these two tragic deaths took on added significance as musicians in the 1960s struggled against what they perceived as second-class citizenship for jazz musicians. The situation on the ground for most artists was a deep material

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<sup>34</sup> Archie Shepp, liner notes to *Mama Too Tight*, Impulse! AS-9134, 1966, 33 1/3 rpm.



contradiction of the U.S. State Department's use of jazz to promote U.S. foreign policy, as well as the now-ubiquitous celebrations of jazz as expression of American democracy.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, Shepp used neo-slavery as a description for the political economic "dilemma" at the heart of American racism. By 1970, Shepp would claim, "I never think of myself as an artist. I think of myself as a worker."<sup>36</sup> His attempt to undo the effacement of black labor in the reception of jazz ran through many of his public statements. As he said in a late 60s interview, "The lessons of slavery are numerous and they're not all over. They haven't all been erased."<sup>37</sup> He described African Americans as "ex-slaves" to dramatize the continued structural effects of racism and to account for material deprivation as racism's effect. Within the discourse of postwar American liberalism, pervaded by a historical amnesia about slavery and blindness to racism's material presence in American institutions, this was a key intervention. From his earliest writings and public statements, Shepp attempted to interject an historical context for contemporary debates that were often sorely lacking in historical imagination.

### Speaking in a Vacuum: the Jazz Panels as Political Theater

To return to the 1965 panel discussion on jazz and revolutionary black nationalism at New York's Village Vanguard, Shepp repeatedly attempted to steer the conversation towards the presence of the past. Noting that the discussion always assumes black nationalism to be the source of the problem under discussion, Shepp attempts to reverse the gaze by historicizing the problem of "white chauvinism":

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<sup>35</sup> See Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) on the State Department tours.

<sup>36</sup> Hollie I. West, "Archie Shepp on Thinking as a Black Man," *Washington Post*, Feb 13 1970.

<sup>37</sup> Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: John Coltrane and Beyond* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992), 161.

The problem is not Black Nationalism. Black Nationalism is the logical outcome of certain inveterate abuses that have been heaped on the Negro for centuries, on the black man.

Let us address ourselves to that, to Frederick Douglass and President Johnson; let us address ourselves to the entire historical circumstances that create the animosity that black people feel toward white people today.<sup>38</sup>

The juxtaposition of Douglass and Johnson suggests an effort to pose the past as erupting within the context of the present. Shepp here, as elsewhere in his music and writings, gestures towards a collapse of distinctions between the present and the past to dramatize the material and cultural traces of slavery that continued to haunt an amnesiac Cold War America. Shepp rightly discerned a lack of historical imagination in the largely abstract discussion of the nature of racism and the typology of nationalism. The participants represented a left-liberal political spectrum, from George Wein, a founder of the Newport Jazz Festival and powerful jazz promoter and tastemaker, who approached the question of black nationalism with a well-intentioned but defensive incomprehension, to Nat Henthoff, a liberal jazz critic who sympathized with black nationalism, to Frank Kofsky, a Trotskyite sociology professor who saw in black nationalism a potential revolutionary vanguard, to Shepp and Amiri Baraka, the only two African American participants.<sup>39</sup> Declaring that “we are evidently speaking in a vacuum,” Shepp was the only discussant to return repeatedly to historical questions, although an analysis of the experience of slavery animated much of the talk. Baraka, speaking around the time he founded the Black Arts Reperatory Theater in

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<sup>38</sup> “Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism,” *Jazz*, 1966. Further quotations refer to this transcript.

<sup>39</sup> Wein: “De Gaulle has France, the Negroes have Africa, and the Negroes in America are a different thing than the Negroes in Africa, although there is some relationship.” Henthoff: “Sure, ideally there ought not to be any nationalism; ideally there out to be no states; there ought to be world government and all that desiderata.” Kofsky: “It is not nationalism, then; it is internationalism because it really is the fraternal solidarity of the oppressed, if you’ll pardon a cliché.” The other three participants were Steve Kuhn, a white jazz musician who takes a stance of apolitical colorblindness, distressed at the putative “racism” of black nationalist positions; Robert Farris Thompson, the great anthropologist of African art and religion, who attempted to steer the conversation towards thick description of specific African cultures; liberal priest Norman O’Connor moderated. Ibid.

Harlem and having become a committed cultural nationalist, stressed black racial distinctiveness and cultural vitality: “black people were a nation; they were brought here from another nation. They had a different culture, a different philosophy, a different way of looking at the world ... I do believe in races.” While he would change his position on racial formation during the 1970s, in 1965 for Baraka, black claims to American citizenship fundamentally mistook the organic, embodied difference of blackness but also were blind to the irreparable flaws of the American nation, founded on the labor of enslaved Africans. “You see, because in the situation we are in now, we have been taught that this is *our* country too, and we both know, and everybody in here knows that it was not, that we were brought here to do work.”

Shepp refused to criticize Baraka’s positions, given the embattled nature of the panel and its dominant liberal tone. He also assailed the hack job Baraka’s ideas were being subjected to in the jazz press and elsewhere. Moreover, Shepp shared Baraka’s stress on the “fundamental cultural differences” between African Americans and whites as well as the historical necessity of black nationalism. He nevertheless suggested enigmatically that he and Baraka “know where we disagree”; one possible source of disagreement was that Shepp rooted cultural distinctiveness in a history and reality of segregation, rather than innate racial difference, and placed his defense of black nationalism squarely in an analysis of historical power dynamics:

You know, when a people, regardless of class, get together, a people who get together on the basis of a common language, common culture, perhaps common race, then, that’s one kind of nationalism, you know; but when people get together in terms of common oppression ... it means the pitiful struggle, the pitiful, valiant struggle of an oppressed people, outnumbered twenty to one, whatever the figures are, in this country, over four centuries. It means the struggle of those people to emancipate themselves, to emancipate themselves economically, socially, culturally.

Shepp alludes to a social memory of struggle via references to Marcus Garvey, the Harlem Renaissance, and “the thirties,” which “are certainly bound up now with the whole cultural revolution that’s taking place in the black community.”

That cultural revolution, so immediately on view in late 1965 in the discursive wars over free jazz and black nationalism, was not, however, “an actual working class revolution ... this is a revolution which has to do with jobs, with employment, with housing, schools, with certain basic facts of economics which right now don’t accrue to people of color.” For Shepp, the link between the achievement of racial self-consciousness in cultural production and the political restructuring of a racialized economy was not guaranteed. Returning to the question of cultural difference, Shepp again distinguished himself from Jones/Baraka in stressing the cultural differences between black Americans and Africans, who were “brothers” and allies despite “enormous cultural differences,” and the cultural commonalities of white and black Americans belied by what was primarily an economic difference. Referring to W. E. B. Du Bois’s seminal account of *Black Reconstruction*, Shepp described the book’s insight into the way race acted as a technology to reinscribe social order in a revolutionary South. Joking that “white folks eat chitlins too,” Shepp argued that while cultural distinctions flowed from economic oppression and segregation, “The differences are that one group of the oppressed class of workers was allowed to emancipate itself and another has never emancipated itself—that is, the black American.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> To expand briefly on this point. Shepp: “the argument for the separateness of people is a fallacious one and even empiric in its implications because I don’t think that that is the thing which will emancipate the great majority of our people ... [I]f I work beside a man in a field as a sharecropper, if I work in a factory beside a man; what is my relationship to that man? How are we going to get better wages? ... The real problems are what we have in common; not so much our separateness as how we can come together.” The crucial point is that for Shepp this common ground is blocked not by “black nationalism” but by “white chauvinism”: “it is precisely white chauvinism that has kept men apart; it is precisely the white chauvinism which is systematically, which is institutionally enforced, which has kept black men and white men from getting together to wrest this world from bastards who daily exploit us.” As Eric Porter has noted, the panel discussion never escapes a masculinist tunnel vision. All the commentators speak in the gendered generalities of “mankind,” the “black

Yet a reading of “culture” as socially constructed life world begged the other “cultural” question—how should artists, musicians, construct their work given the incomplete project of black emancipation? This was the question on which Harold Cruse found Shepp and Baraka’s intervention lacking. Could musicians address economic deprivation and structural constraints? What kind of aesthetic would this entail? Was it even desirable to dedicate art to social transformation? Were artists important as advocates of political positions, or could their aesthetic practices themselves be useful to the struggle? Both Shepp and Baraka struggled over this question in both their public statements and artistic work, Baraka famously fantasizing about “poems that murder” and eventually elaborating a poetics of revolution. The answers that Shepp and other musicians—Marion Brown, Pharoah Sanders, and Albert Ayler, for example—provided were more implicit, more enigmatic, more embedded in sonic gesture and allegorical reference.

Overall, the panel as whole is short on musical analysis but Shepp’s views on why jazz had emerged as a key battleground in the cultural revolution are suggestive. He noted his deep ambivalence about claiming jazz and uncertainty as to its conceptual coherence. Parrying casual appeals to “jazz music” as an integral category, Shepp suggested that jazz “was the only language that you allowed us.” Yet “jazz” also brought to mind a banal complacency with regard to the deep racial divisions of American society: the fact that a white musician hires a black musician “means that we’re living in the best of all possible worlds, you know, that this is the one area of American life where people really see where it’s at because jazz is the only place where integration really exists, and man, if you weren’t a priest [to moderator O’Connor], I’d tell you what kind of lie that is because that’s a lie.”

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man,” the “white man,” etc. One might also note the pervasive androcentrism of much of the ideological debates within jazz in the early 1960s. However, fallacious it was (after all, Abbey Lincoln was maybe the most important artist-activist in the early debates), the “jazz wars” were constructed as a battle, or, more hopefully, a conversation between black and white men. Porter, *What is this Thing*, 191-192.

Here Shepp pinpoints the jazz exceptionalism that pervaded the liberal discourse on race and jazz: in the nationalist celebration of jazz epitomized in the official ideology of the State Department tours, jazz's blackness was held up as a fulfillment of American pluralism, thus obscuring the real power dynamics of cultural production.

### Conjuring Up Love in a Veil of Despair: Archie Shepp's Jazz Writing

The anxiety that Black Power and musicians' militancy caused for many white liberal jazz critics and others can be observed in the obsessive concern over musicians' supposed "contempt" for nightclub audiences, symbolized in the many colloquial stories of Miles Davis turning his back on the audience and refusing to introduce each piece.<sup>41</sup> Archie Shepp was at the center of such anxiety about growing disconnects between militant African American musicians and a putatively white middle-class jazz audience.<sup>42</sup> While he did not in

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<sup>41</sup> John Szwed has suggested that Miles may have been more interested in musical communication with his band than in either playing to or flagellating his audience. That is, his back turned to the audience, Miles *favéd* the rhythm section, listening intently and communicating changes of tempo or tone with his eyes. See Szwed, *So What: The Life of Miles Davis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> The audience for jazz, quite simply, was not "mostly white" or dependent on the white middle-class for its economic survival, as recalcitrant critics so often claimed in the late 1960s. Jazz's economic support was drying up due to structural forces within the music business, and regardless of the actual demographics of the jazz audience, which it should be said are incredibly difficult to discern from sales figures or nightclub appearances, the construction of the audience as "white" erases the powerful presence of jazz in the institutions of the Black Power public sphere, from black music festivals held at the Hampton Institute in 1968 and Howard University in 1970 to the centrality of the "new music" in New York-based cultural nationalism, particularly the writings of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, and A. B. Spellman. Much more accurate is the claim that a surge in the popularity of rock, soul, and other pop musics had the effect of drying up jazz's audience, but more importantly its access to the economically lucrative performance spaces, whether nightclub or major label studio. As elsewhere, here I propose a two-prong structural interpretation of jazz decline: mass-market expansion and consolidation of the music industry coincided with the deepest effects of the postwar urban crisis on the spatial and economic networks that supported the production of jazz. But if, as I claimed above, jazz was already in the postwar period an "R&D" music in its relationship to the culture industry (albeit a poorly funded, ad hoc, temp, casualized, super-exploited reserve army of intellectual labor), then "decline" doesn't quite cut it, since the "decline" is compared to the 1930s, and thus is fundamentally imaginary: "jazz" (including the economic inequalities between white and black swing bands) was at the center of a national-popular culture in the 1930s, but as the postwar period winds on jazz gets (symbolically) blacker, more "artistic" in a negative sense, less authentic, more intellectual, less social, more abstract, etc. All of these narrative gradations, since they are all temporal emplotments that deploy certain hegemonic musical objects

any simple way hold the audience in contempt, Shepp saw his role, in the late 1960s, as the engaging and disarming of audience expectations rather than confirming them in order to produce pleasure. In fact, he sought to disrupt the connections between jazz performance, entertainment, and pleasure—a linked chain of performance and response that, to him, worked as palliative allowing audiences to ignore the more serious dimensions of black art music. He declared in the 1965 essay “On Jazz,” that “music must at times terrify! It must shake men by the throats. It must extol the inevitable triumph of full stomachs and fat laughing babies. It must bring social as well as aesthetic order to our lives.”<sup>43</sup> In the mid-1960s, Shepp worked out an aesthetics designed to destroy audience preconceptions by overwhelming them with unruly sound.

Shepp’s declaration of the potentially terrifying properties of sound occurs in an enigmatic and imagistic essay that elaborates his consistent themes of the haunted presence of the slave past in the material deprivation of the cities. In this early essay, Shepp goes so far as to collapse art completely into a social totality: “Art can be thought of as interchangeable with life on all levels. IT IS LIFE. It differs only in this respect: that it lends the dimension of infinity to the human experience. It says, forever.”<sup>44</sup> If art is the creative translation of lived experience, then it must show the despair of life in a crisis-ridden society;

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against others at a different moment, are inadequate to the recorded archive, from which multiple contradictory narratives can be produced. The contest of historical narratives to explain “what happened” to jazz (the object, the coherent cultural formation that was not one [but always multiple]) consistently depends on an unacknowledged set of ideological and indeed libidinal investments, most prominently and pervasively investments in populism, as aesthetic “superego” disciplining the intellectual straying too far from ordinary folks, and populism as political strategy, which depending on how you see it, is the only game in town, or a reactionary proto-fascist substitute for the building of a socialist left. On populism, see the debate between Ernest Laclau and Slavoj Žižek in *Critical Inquiry*. Žižek, “Against the Populist Temptation” *Critical Inquiry* 32:3 (2006): 551-574; Ernesto Laclau, “Why Constructing a People is the Main Task of Radical Politics” *Critical Inquiry* 32:4 (2006): 646-680; and Žižek, “*Schlagend, aber nicht Treffend!*” *Critical Inquiry* 33:1 (2006): 185-211. This debate recapitulates, in starker, perhaps more urgent or even desperate terms, some of the discussion in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Shepp, “On Jazz,” *Down Beat*, 1965.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

if art is a truth-telling practice, then the truth of a painful world must take precedence over pleasure: “Sometimes we must bludgeon beauty to seeming death; make it ugly; simply because life itself is at times ugly and painful to behold.” At stake was nothing less than the destruction of Platonic aesthetics, the exaltation of beauty, and the autonomy of art; audiences expecting pleasure and distraction needed to be unsettled.

Indeed both for sympathetic critics and detractors, Shepp’s music of the mid-1960s, particularly in live performance, registered as an overwhelming sonic force. One reviewer, describing a performance that was captured on the 1966 Impulse release *Live in San Francisco*, wrote perceptively that Shepp’s group “create[d] musical breakers which crash, wave upon wave, against the audience and the club walls until every extraneous thought and musical preconception is literally blasted from mind.” Critics compared the music of that period to the sounds of busy downtown streets and boiler factories, called it chaotic and described the exhaustion audiences seemed to feel at the performance’s end: Shepp, as one memorable negative review described it, “battered his listeners with a relentless, rambling, undeveloped, almost unchanging blast of ensemble cacophony.” While it was simply incorrect to suggest, as many reviewers did, that Shepp only played in one “chaotic” or “angry” mood, even the hostile dismissals register Shepp’s studied effort to deconstruct, in the dialogue of performance, the audience’s reactions. For LeRoi Jones, on the other hand, Shepp’s most dedicated critical supporter, the sonic blasts of the mid-1960s were a prophesy of a coming revolution.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Helen McNamara, “Avant-garde evening coming up,” *Toronto Telegram*, Dec 7, 1966; McNamara, “Boiler factory jazz,” *Toronto Telegram*, Dec 12, 1966. The quote is from John S. Wilson, “Shepp Jazz Unit at Recital Hall,” *New York Times*, Mar 31 1968. LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Black Music*, (New York: William Morrow, 1967).



In the 1966 essay “On Jazz” Shepp returned to the definitional difficulties inherent in the category “jazz.”<sup>46</sup> It is unlikely that Shepp deliberately echoed Adorno’s essay of thirty years before, but the resonances are striking. Casting his own discourse as a search for truth through a forest of pernicious imagery, he writes, “Thus jazz. Or whatever you have chosen to name *US*. That name may be your own inept euphemism for our lives. Thus jazz, which seems now never to have been, ever, what you wanted it to be except in the most nostalgic retrospect.” Seeing “jazz” as overdetermined by a nostalgic disavowal of social and material history, Shepp wants to evacuate from “jazz” the romantic racialism that has led to the inept euphemizing of black life in the white mind. The construction of the jazz past in jazz criticism, its tendency to reify jazz in musical articulations like “swing” is here claimed to be nostalgic and false.

In late 1967, writing in the aftermath of the first production of *Junebug*, the death in April of John Coltrane, Shepp’s mentor and friend, summer riots in Newark and Detroit—and in the . midst of escalating calls for Black Power across the United States—Shepp penned an important essay in the *New York Times*. Recall that late 1967 also witnessed the reprise of worry in the jazz trade press about whether jazz was dying (see Chapter Two). Shepp’s essay, “Black Power and Black Jazz” expanded on the themes that he had emphasized throughout the panel discussion on black nationalism several years earlier: the historical framework necessary to comprehend the contemporary crisis, jazz history’s intersections with the political economic history of race in the United States, and jazz musicians’ economic insecurity. His enigmatic silence on the political role of African American musicians evident in 1965 was replaced by 1967 with a revolutionary optimism and a celebration of musicians’ ability to not only reflect but to express creatively the

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<sup>46</sup> Shepp, “On Jazz”

political contradictions of race. Bebop, the music of the 1940s, plays a central role in Shepp's account of the "historical inevitability" of Black Power. Drawing on Amiri Baraka's account in *Blues People*, Shepp casts bebop as a music of urbanization, political consciousness, and African American modernity. According to Shepp, the music of the black church, carried north by migrants despite "limited access to musical instruments, save an occasional upright or a guitar," represented "the only authentic cultural experience this country has ever inspired, with the possible exception of the ritual of the Indians." Bebop emerged as "black jazz musicians, economically insecure just as the worker, made a similar trek north bringing with him the secular music of the streets, the language of hip and the lore of the bistros." A product of the wartime and postwar migration, bebop expressed a "sophistication" that "was in reality a realignment of values that would enable the Negro to deal with the specious hypocrisy of northern whites while at the same time maintaining his own sanity."<sup>47</sup>

Shepp's interpretation reads against the grain the romantic trope of the jazz musician as hip outsider that had been so prevalent in the 1950s and remained influential into the 1960s. The shadow of Norman Mailer's notorious essay, "The White Negro," in particular, falls over Shepp's re-vision of bebop. Mailer had spun off from the declaration that "jazz is orgasm" a primitivist romance of the jazz musician as lumpen and disaffected. Living in an eternal present, apolitical and ignorant of social reality, urban blacks and their white Negro avatars lived for kicks in an endless Saturday night bacchanal. An age of nuclear threats and post-Holocaust disaffection, Mailer suggested, had made such hedonism historically necessary, yet the essay's unapologetic vitalism and primitivism famously riled Mailer's friend, the novelist James Baldwin. In "Black Power and Black Jazz," Shepp rewrites the "hip" of Mailer-esque romantic racialism as a political response to persistent constraints and

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<sup>47</sup> Archie Shepp, "Black Power and Black Jazz," *New York Times*, November 26, 1967, J1.

unfulfilled democracy: “The urban black turned inward, became more taciturn. Was he really apathetic? Super cool? Or had Whites once again gratuitously misjudged the extent and potential of his political response to terror?”<sup>48</sup>

As an alternative, Shepp suggests black power was “the inevitable response of a people without power to a system that had grown fat and indifferent to the yearnings of the poor, a system whose ethic, at least was still rooted in the institution of slavery, whose immense wealth and idyllic democracy had failed at this late date to provide even a single black quarterback, or a single solitary Negro billionaire.”<sup>49</sup> Black power is for Shepp heralded by the “New Thing” but also the music’s “immediate ancestors,” the urban sophisticates of the bebop and hard bop eras, precursors of a “new American Revolution” whose “democratic message was hammered out in the intransigence of Elvin Jones’s drum and the plangent sounds of the Trane’s horn.” Coltrane’s sound as plangent suggests the New Thing might be in mourning, and the ambiguity of Jones’s intransigence—militant

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Norman Mailer, *The White Negro*, (San Francisco: City Lights, 1957). Also see Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*. and other Mailer references. In the 1967 interview (IJS Clippings File) Shepp likewise invoked themes that had animated the Mailer essay, particularly the embrace of pleasure and stimulation caused by the ever-present possibility of violent death. Shepp describes this as a “have-not” psychology: “It’s the psychology of constantly seeking to avoid death so that in the end you are not suicidal at all and you reaffirm life in every instance, simply because you know what it is to die. I think every slave and ex-slave knows that.” This comment verges very close to Mailer’s romantic racialism and vitalism, and shows the dangers inherent in using “ex-slave” broadly: its tendency to reify and homogenize widely varied individual experiences.

<sup>49</sup> This mélange of radical culture critique followed by “uplift” and demands for social visibility are common in Shepp’s discourse. Again, as Cruse pointed out, artists are not well positioned for political analysis. But this points to larger problems with the protest language of a cultural politics like Shepp’s—the discursive interventions point directly to a fundamental expression of social antagonism, but the demands that follow are far from revolutionary: state funding and a true integration of black people into American capitalism. I am suggesting we read Shepp here not as a political organizer or militant, whose jobs were to formulate political demands and strategies, but as an artist whose redistribution of the sensible could have been taken up by political movements. However, it would be remiss not to comment here in the lower frequencies that the symbolic divide between Shepp and Cruse that frames this chapter suggests some real problems. Both writers see black music as a precious resource whose commodification should be harnessed for black community development as (necessitating) radical transformation of the political economy. Shepp is too romantic, too individualist, and not political enough for Cruse (his nationalism is suspect, implicitly perhaps because Shepp, however angry he gets, is enmeshed in these intimate encounters with the white liberal representatives of the jazz world). Cruse did not seem to be on Shepp’s radar, or perhaps there were personal differences between the two that are lost to me. Yet the missed opportunity for an effective coalition to have been made across the line between creative and critical intellectuals focused on the economic problem of cultural production is at least as provocative as the missed opportunity for Shepp to align himself with Cruse’s thinking about American ethnic politics.

defiance or stubborn impasse<sup>2</sup>—suggests that behind the expression of hope for a cultural revolution, the political stakes and strategies of that revolution remain untheorized. Aside from that, taken as an aesthetic program, Shepp’s rhetoric is ringing: “The breadth of this statement is as vast as America, its theme the din of the streets, its motive freedom.”

Critics often wondered how Shepp thought he could gain a following or commercial success with demanding and confrontational music, but Shepp, focused on the realm of production, reversed the imposition of responsibility: “We can’t let the audience escape. We must bring into our music every stench of the streets, every tragedy. Don’t let them rest.”<sup>50</sup> Aldon Nielsen’s formulation sums it up brilliantly: “Shepp was not interested in providing background music to soothe the angst of a disaffected generation of white American intellectuals [a la the Beats romanticization of African American musicians as “untutored”] . . . . But Shepp did offer jazz texts as interdictions within American musical and political discourse, as ‘gifts’ designed to prevent America from hearing what it intended and desired of black people.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “Archie Shepp: we can’t let the audience escape,” *Melody Maker*, Nov 18 1967.

<sup>51</sup> *Black Chant*, 210. As Iain Anderson notes, once free improvisers stepped out of the market for politico-aesthetic reasons, they were often forced to seek funding from the state, corporate foundations, or universities. Indeed this is the case with Shepp, who protested at the Guggenheim Foundation and the NEA with the Jazz and Peoples Movement to demand more funding for jazz artists. Again, there is a contradiction between a radical rhetoric and political demands that are constrained by the existing political economic structure. This is a real problem, but again I want to point to this period, 1964-1968, as a profound opening, a reordering of discursive, a disruption of hegemonic conceptions of black cultural politics, and a redistribution of the sensible in musical terms that should not be discounted because it was not effectively taken up by political actors. The Jazz and People’s Movement, for example, can be seen several ways: as political actors the organization used protest tactics to demand state and corporate funding that was commensurate with the modernist discourse of jazz as high (American) art. As political theater, the JPM brought the smooth operation of the culture industry “spectacle” to a crashing halt for a brief, ephemeral moment. When Rahsaan and other musicians along with listener-allies infiltrated the tapings of late night talk shows, interrupting the banal repetition of television (studios) with an insurgent sound that disoriented the media celebrities and producers and audiences for a moment before they could interpellate it as “protest” and therefore a noisy outside of the regular unfolding of speech for the camera—when that sound happened, it was an ephemeral eruption of another place, another scene, within one of the most routinized precincts of the culture industry. Later, of course, after the JPM’s occupation of the space finally brought out the corporate managers, the political negotiation produced exactly one performance for the new music on one television program. Reducing their noisy anti-discourse to the demand, however, mistakes a temporal gap, however ephemeral, between the sonic redistribution of the sensible and its capture by the established routes of corporate (and at the NEA, state) responsiveness, with

Shepp's attack on Platonic, metaphysical, and market-based aesthetic imperatives was deeply tied to his understanding of the functional role of music in African societies. Even in the 1960s, before his first trip to Africa, he had a deep interest in musical connections between African-American and African musics and in the idea of African retentions. While he did not point to the work of Melvin Herskovits and other anthropologists, who in the 1930s and 40s had proposed the survival of African cultural elements in twentieth century Afro-diasporas cultures, Shepp was nevertheless clearly influenced by LeRoi Jones, who had drawn on Herskovits to construct his influential history of African American music, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963). Jones had suggested that Negro music was forged in the crucible of modern slavery, in which two distinct worldviews, the European and the African, collided violently in the establishment of a dialectic of domination. In this collision, a "new race" was formed, African Americans, whose cultures, especially music, preserved in attenuated form an African stance towards the world. Later in the 1960s, the imperative of Amiri Baraka's cultural nationalism was to recover an originary African philosophy and spirituality and recreate it, now purged of the corrupting influences of centuries of contact with Euro-American culture, but such a politics of authenticity is not foreordained in his historical account of the *Blues People*.

For many musicians and Black Arts writers, Africa represented the potential of a non-Christian spiritual renewal; John Coltrane's own spirituality, which maintained but transformed Christian iconography, was often referenced for its profound influence on a great number of musicians. For Shepp, however, who was relentlessly secular and materialist,

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predictably frustrating outcomes. The editor of *Down Beat*, Dan Morgenstern lamented the performance of Haitian Fight Song as a missed opportunity to win an audience for jazz, but this reformist project was beside the point, since by then the negotiated settlement had closed the dissensus created by the initial disruptions. The JPM did not last very long—several "performances" from the fall of 1970 into 1971, but what it had been taken up by a political organization or a social movement as a mass tactic of creatively disrupting the spectacle, not by attacking it, but by invading its space with a creativity that was outside its sensory range.

Africanity was best represented in functional, as opposed to transcendental, approaches to art.<sup>52</sup> African art made the rains come, if only symbolically; functional African art worked to build human communities and communicate political necessities. Thus Shepp saw his own engaged cultural politics as an expression of an Afrological perspective: “I am, as a black man, a politically oriented person. Because I feel my aesthetic is a functional one, I cannot divorce it from my political overview, because I think we live in a political world and it is folly to say we don’t.”<sup>53</sup>

How did this aesthetic philosophy—an aesthetic of confrontation, contention, and the voicing of resistant historical imagination—work in Shepp’s music of the 1960s? We have already encountered the visceral reaction many critics had to the sonic waves of Shepp’s “free jazz” compositions, but although a recognition of such is most visible from reading the alarmed commentary of critics, it comes at the expense of recognizing the diversity of styles and moods that punctuated his work. As musicologist Ekkehard Jost suggests with regard to an early recording of the New York Contemporary Five (1963), Shepp’s work was “Janus-faced: one face looks back, the other forward toward a continuing development of knowledge gained from the jazz tradition.”<sup>54</sup> His ability to rapidly transform a performance by suggesting a wide range of “historic-stylistic materials” leads Jost to compare Shepp to Charles Mingus.

Shepp’s particular vanguardism was always informed less by a cult of the new than a deep reverence for histories—written on the bodies, in the speech, and manifest in the

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<sup>52</sup> Amiri Baraka wrote in his famous essay “The Changing Same” that “Archie’s is a secular music, that remains, demands secularity, as its insistence. He probably even has theories explaining why there is no God. But he makes obeisances to the spirits of ancient, ‘traditional’ colored people (‘Hambone,’ ‘The Mac Man,’ ‘The Picaninny’) and what has happened to them from ancient times, traditionally, here.” Jones (Baraka), *Black Music*, 196.

<sup>53</sup> Don Heckman interview, 1967, IJS Clippings File. He elaborates: jazz is “an emerging African-American aesthetic, one which is rooted ... in the basis of African art, which is primarily functional, vis-à-vis what I consider the aesthetic of Western art, which seems to me Platonic.”

<sup>54</sup> Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo, 1994), 110.

sounds of the jazz tradition. On his earliest recordings, Shepp often interpreted the music of Duke Ellington. He also reworked pop songs, and *Fire Music* (1965) contains a clever, if not always successful, reading of “Girl from Ipanema,” with which Joao Gilberto had achieved tremendous market success. The same album has a dirge-like ode to the recently assassinated Malcolm X, “Malcolm, Malcolm—Semper Malcolm,” which was a reworking of the 1963 composition “The Funeral,” written after the murder of civil rights worker Medgar Evers. Shepp returned to the celebration of fallen heroes repeatedly into the 1970s, in the 1969 recording “Poem for Malcolm,” another 1969 recording as well as the Cal Massey composition “Good Bye Sweet Pops” on *Attica Blues* (1972), which was an orchestrated funeral, march for the recently passed Louis Armstrong. “Malcolm, Malcolm—Semper Malcolm” was built around a poem recited to the music, and as Aldon Nielsen has suggested, Shepp “has devoted more of his attention as a composer, and with greater success, to the incorporation of spoken text within jazz performance than nearly any other jazz artist of his era.”<sup>55</sup>

On the 1975 release *There's a Trumpet in My Soul*, a meditative exploration of Afro-Brazilian tonalities in a free jazz idiom, the poet Bill Hasson reads “The Year of the Rabbit” to Shepp’s accompaniment. The poem examines a theme that Archie Shepp held dear, the translation of black culture in the rural-to-urban migrations. The lines “A hound dog bays off in the cotton fields / As a scab forms on the heart of a young man in a far-off New England town” suggest the poem’s relevance to Shepp’s own experience, a Florida native who attended college in Vermont. “He will have never sailed up the Mississippi / Or served time in Parchment Farm Penitentiary/ Like his uncle”: the poem is a romance of black life that bears the haunted traces of slavery in the upstream river journey and the discipline of

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<sup>55</sup> Nielsen, *Black Chant*, 201.

chain gangs. Like Shepp's music, the "Year of the Rabbit" is in the mode of cultural affirmation, without erasing the painful realities of historical experience; as Shepp said, "lilies growing in spite of the swamp." It closes with these words: "it's easy for me to conjure up love in a veil of despair."



## Chapter Five

### “We Have Come B(l)ack”: Free Jazz, Africa, and the Transnational Formation of a Revolutionary Aesthetic

We have come back. *Nous sommes revenus*.<sup>1</sup>

Ted Joans, Pan-African Festival of Arts and Culture, Algiers, 1969

Certain Blacks  
do what they wanna  
Certain Blacks  
go oh yeah  
Certain Blacks  
groove on Love  
Certain Blacks  
dig they freedom<sup>2</sup>

Art Ensemble of Chicago (1970)

To which blacks do Bowie, Jarman, Moyé, Mitchell, and Favors refer? This alacritous incantation, one element in a wide spectrum of techniques of performative estrangement that the Art Ensemble held up its collective sleeve, recalls and extends the Brechtian theater

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<sup>1</sup> “We Have Come Back” on Archie Shepp, *Live at the Pan-African Festival*, Recorded live in Algiers July 30 1969, BYG Actuel 529351, 1969, 33 1/3 rpm.

<sup>2</sup> “Certain Blacks ‘Do What They Wanna’” on Art Ensemble of Chicago, *Certain Blacks*, Recorded in Paris February 10, 1970, America 30 AM 6098, 33 1/3 rpm. See also Robin D. G. Kelley, “Dig They Freedom: Meditations on History and the Black Avant-Garde,” *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 3 (1997): 13-27.

of “estrangement effects.” In this case, the radical assertion of black particularity and heterogeneity effectively disrupts or distances the cultural context of “blackness” in which the Art Ensemble was operating in France in 1969 (in their first months as a working quintet). Celebrated by the French jazz press almost immediately upon their arrival in Paris, Roscoe Mitchell, Malachi Favors, Joseph Jarman, Joseph Bowie, and the ensemble’s newest member Don Moye encountered enthusiastic but also at times bewildered audiences and a French jazz press struggling with the legacies of imperialism and primitivism and reeling from the events of May 1968. There was a tendency among French critics, in their celebration of “free jazz” to reduce black art to a monolithic conception of cultural struggle as the assertion of romantic resistance. In asserting black formal heterogeneity (saying that blackness must be limited by a “certain” disaggregating qualifier) and the non-contradiction of experimentalism and the performance of vernacular speech, the Art Ensemble obliquely intervened into this debate and set it on its ear. Two years earlier Lester Bowie had more directly engaged the jazz critical discourse in his solo performance “Jazz Death?” Mimicking a jazz criticism that made pronouncements on the health and vitality of the music, Bowie asserted, “it depends on what you know.”<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, rather than recounting the story of criticism’s attempts to frame the politics and stylistics of jazz after the modern, the argument moves to other places and other contexts, suggesting the transnational, and revolutionary internationalist, formation of the aesthetics of creative music in the late 1960s and 1970s. Jazz musicians after modernism were intimately involved in world music before the advent of “world music” as a discrete (and folkloristic and neo-Orientalist) marketing genre. Attending to the geopolitical contexts

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<sup>3</sup> For the Art Ensemble and other AACM musicians in Paris, see George Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 215-258. Lester Bowie, “Jazz Death?” on Roscoe Mitchell Art Ensemble, *Congliptious*, Recorded Mar 11 1968, Nessa N-2, 1968, 33 1/3 rpm.

of musical travel and performance reveals the idea of world music as imbricated with the revolutionary overthrow of colonialism, and the return of the latter in the form of neo-colonialism. This chapter will explore these dynamics by interpreting a performance by U.S. and Algerian musicians at the 1969 Pan-African Festival in Algiers.

The chapter narrates the elaboration of “free jazz” musical practices in the later 1960s in the contexts of the critique and dissolution of the category of jazz. It emphasizes how musicians’ aesthetic and social activism supported increasingly ambitious reconceptualizations of musical practice, the social and spiritual meaning of music, and the spatial and temporal limits of “jazz” performance. It also interprets the turn to African aesthetics, imagery, and languages characteristic of much of the musical experimentation of this era. Contrary to the romantic and dismissive attitude that sees the adoption of African dress (i.e. dashikis), musical forms and performance practices, language, and names as a cultural fad, I argue broadly that it was the emergence of modern, postcolonial, revolutionary African politics onto the world stage that inspired experimentation in music and style. The chapter suggests that a transnational interpretive frame is necessary for understanding the “free jazz” movement, and argues that post-1965 musical experimentation looks radically different if the traditional jazz history emphasis on New York is displaced onto other sites, especially Algiers in 1969. Although cultural studies has lately developed a variety of transnational approaches, the case of jazz is particularly interesting; while in the 1950s agents of official cultural interpretation had created the idea that jazz was “America’s classical music” and the unique contribution of the U.S. to world culture, by the late 1960s a variety of actors disclaimed jazz music, the “jazz” label, the integrationist ideology of the State Department and the liberal intelligentsia, and the project of using jazz to identify, still less identify with, the U.S. in the perspective of world culture. Also by the late 1960s

opportunities for musicians to work and live in the United States had to a large extent dried up. Where musicians had long emigrated to Europe to escape domestic racism, by the late 1960s sojourns and extended stays outside the U.S. had become a matter of cultural survival and creative political strategy.

### Point of Departure

Recent interest in the transnational dynamics of cultural production and exchange has shifted the agendas of cultural studies, in general, and jazz cultural studies in particular. New theorizations of black internationalism and translation within black diasporic spaces have upset the nationalist paradigms within which narratives and analyses of jazz music historically took place. This is part and parcel of a historiographical transformation that has revealed the claims of the “essential” Americanness of jazz, claims that jazz expresses something fundamental about U.S. political culture, as a specific ideological project deeply connected to Cold War discourses. Recent work in the black humanities has uncovered the intra- and extra- national formations within jazz, ranging from its polyglot roots to its dialogue with Afro-Cuban and more widely Afro-Latin musics to the world travels of musicians.<sup>4</sup> By the early 1960s jazz musicians’ interest in Africanity and the anti-colonial politics of newly independent Africa added to these “outer-national” formations, opening up

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<sup>4</sup> For an early example of diasporic theorizing about black music, see the work of John Storm Roberts, in particular *Black Music of Two Worlds* (New York: Praeger, 1972) and *The Latin Tinge: the Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). The discourse on diasporic culture also draws on older interventions in anthropology (i.e. Herkovits and the theory of “Africanisms”) and among black intellectuals (see for instance the explosion of recent interest in Claude McKay). There is now a vast literature on the transnational currents of African diasporic cultures. A ground-breaking, enormously influential, and for a time paradigm-defining work has been Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Another field-defining theorization of transnational racial formation is Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). An important recent work that covers a period contemporaneous with the material of this chapter is Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

spaces for critique that also held the potential to undermine received ideas about race and the musical expression of racial identity.

Any search for models of jazz transnationalism could do worse than to focus on multi-instrumentalist Don Cherry (1936-1995), a musician integral to the emergence of post-1960 “free jazz” who carried the tradition of jazz travel and expatriation to a new level over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. As a member of Ornette Coleman’s quartet and the New York Contemporary Five, Cherry was intimately involved in the emergence of the avant-garde in New York during the early 1960s. Born and raised in Oklahoma (he was one quarter Choctaw), he later moved to Watts where he made many of his early musical acquaintances, including Coleman, whom he met through Coleman’s then-wife, poet Jayne Cortez. Cherry was part of the band that arrived at the Half Note in 1959 and set the jazz world upside down, frustrating critical agendas, inspiring critical and musicianly passions, and becoming a symbolic representative of the methods and political implications of free improvisation within “late modern” jazz. Over the course of the 1960s, however, Cherry spent little time in New York, opting instead to travel in Europe, where he met Albert Ayler, became a fixture in the European free music circuit (primarily in Scandinavia, but also France, Italy, and Germany), recorded several seminal “new music” recordings—*Complete Communion*, *Symphony for Improvisers*, and *Where is Brooklyn?*—with, among others, the Argentinian saxophonist Gato Barbieri. Eventually making a home in Sweden, in an old schoolhouse that Cherry, his wife, and children transformed into a school for the making and playing of traditional folk instruments, Cherry undertook a restless series of travels and explorations of traditional folk musics. He went to India to learn the scalar system of Indian classical singing, to Mali to study the doussn’gouni with local masters, and countless places in between. Cherry’s enthusiasms were relentlessly eclectic, and while he was a purist with respect to the value of

local traditions and of ordinary people making their own music (and instruments), he transcended genre boundaries and refused to be limited to a critically-enforced identity as a jazz player representative of the style of early “free jazz”; in the 1970s and 1980s he worked, for instance, with Lou Reed and the Talking Heads, among others, while touring and recording with both a world music trio, Codona, and Old and New Dreams, a band composed of alumni from Ornette Coleman’s group (Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden, Ed Blackwell).

If there is a historical connection between “jazz” and “folk” music, explaining it must take a detour through that strange terrain of the genre of “world music.” Jazz, and the blues, were arguably the first musics to have been mass produced and distributed for profit as commodified sound objects; in traditional cultural theory, the folk represents the “premodern” spaces of culture prior to the channelization of cultural practices into capitalist networks. Don Cherry, and a number of similar-minded improvising musicians of the 1960s and 1970s, were instrumental in attempting to highlight world folk musics as a viable “outside” that could form the raw material for jazz improvisation. Jazz historically existed in relationship both to the compositions of its own tradition and, crucially, to American popular music (i.e. Tin Pan Alley), in forming the repertoire for the nightly variations of improvisation. While many aesthetic changes can be tracked to the 1960s “avant-garde,” perhaps the most important is the attempted dismantling of the relationship between jazz improvisation and popular song.<sup>5</sup> What, then, in the absence of the popular music industry,

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<sup>5</sup> John Coltrane’s progressively more radical questioning of the tuneful ingredients of “My Favorite Things” can be useful as a sonic example of what’s going on here. It is the usual example of the dismantling of the harmonic and melodic structure of popular song, a process that can be traced to bebop’s famous extension and ornamentation of the song framework’s harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic form. I have borrowed the term “post-songform jazz” from Andrew Raffo Dewar, “Searching for the Center of a Sound: Bill Dixon’s *Webern*, the Unaccompanied Solo, and Compositional Ontology in Post-Songform Jazz,” *Jazz Perspectives* 4:1 (2010): 59-87. N.B. this “mid-level” methodological reliance on concepts developed in musicology. A crucial argument of this chapter, however, is that the displacement of the popular song, and in particular the Tin Pan Alley

would provide material for jazz musicians to explore, dissect, and recontextualize? One answer was to emphasize the compositions created by musicians themselves: this was the focus, from the beginning, of the AACM. “Free” improvisation, perhaps with few or no pre-set forms but which inevitably created patterns within its own performance, can also be seen as a form of composition. Another, many times overlapping, answer was to draw on borrowed or (re)created folk forms. Even, perhaps especially, free improvisation, unbounded either by inherited forms or conventional tonalities, such as in the music of Albert Ayler, also deployed “archaic” forms like marches or rags.

There are complex political implications to this widespread substitution of other practices for the traditional modern jazz excavation of popular song. For example, a 1964 trip to Morocco, Cherry later recalled, “was my first big adventure, the first time I entered a foreign land and felt like I was entering an earlier period of history.”<sup>6</sup> If, as Edward Said’s celebrated argument has it, Orientalism consists in a transposition of temporal onto spatial distance, the imagining of “foreign lands” as embodying and offering access to “an earlier period” of one’s own history, what prevents the embrace of “world music,” widespread in the jazz world of the 1970s and of which Don Cherry is an iconic representative, from the conceptual and political trap of the Orientalist construction of alterity? Even for critics hostile to the new music’s political aspirations, it was hard to accuse Cherry of cultural imperialism.<sup>7</sup> Cherry’s goal was the respectful study of the musical forms he was interested

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songbook, in 1970s jazz, did not disrupt the incorporation of music into jazz from its constitutive outside, but rather that the scope of that outside had radically changed to encompass a non-hierarchically imagined field of world creativity.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Davis, “Don Cherry: A Jazz Gypsy Comes Home,” *Musician* 53 (March 1983): 53-55, 91, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Mike Hennessey, “Don Cherry: In Search of a Musical Esperanto,” *Melody Maker*, 22 April 1967, 12. Hennessey constructs his portrait of Don Cherry as a study in contrasts between Cherry and the “anarchistic” music of the “extremists who play 367 bars of indescribable rubbish then put down their horns to rush into print with a blanket condemnation of all orthodox music and a determination to substitute one form of racism for another.” This, like other passages in the article, seems to be a veiled reference to Archie Shepp. Like other critics Hennessey here seems to conflate musical style and political rhetoric. Despite Shepp’s blues

in, and although he recorded the resulting efforts, he also took pains to credit his teachers, often noting that the most beautiful music he had heard was played far from the traditional centers of commercial performance, songs played by agricultural workers in the field, for instance. “I’m very connected with street musicians,” he told one journalist in 1968. “I always end up in that environment because people shouldn’t have to pay to hear music.”<sup>8</sup> What happens to an “intellectual history of jazz” if we foreground Don Cherry as an intellectual? A project of reframing jazz history around musicians has transformed our understanding of musicians by exploring their writings, public statements, and activism in the context of their musical production. Don Cherry’s work in the 1960s and 1970s, however, was not articulated in writing or political organization—nevertheless, as an itinerant musician traveling through disparate world contexts, learning from other musicians and passing on the styles and techniques he had learned, Cherry performed important intellectual work precisely as a creative musician, work that was intercultural, intersubjective, and affective, but work that was also ephemeral, lost in the experiential moment. Such a loss is not tragic, however, but as it should be: music, as Cherry often said, was a technique for focusing one’s mind on the present.

#### Beyond Origins, Retentions, and Progress: Free Jazz and Africanity

One of the consequences of the nationalist frame in which “jazz” has often been narrated has been that figures like Don Cherry, who eschewed the linear development of an enclosed jazz tradition in favor of an eclectic engagement with a range of global musical

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traditionalism, political rhetoric and anarchic improvisatory music merge together in the ears of critical journalists.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Houston, “An Amplifier for the Spirit,” *Melody Maker*, 23 November 1968, 10.



forms are rendered as exceptions to the overall, nationalist sweep of the narrative. In this version, all jazz travelers are (U.S.) ambassadors, and all expatriates are bitter “reverse racists” or Euro-philes. But the nationalism of jazz narratives also structures the paucity of work on the musical experimentalism that flourished after 1965, in the wake of the dissolution and critique of “jazz” as a category. All too often, “free jazz” is a category wielded in a polemical debate about the historical development of jazz music, either as the name for senseless, aesthetically vapid, and naively political departures from the traditions of jazz, according to one polemic, or as the event that liberated improvisational music from the stale inheritance of jazz modernism, according to another.<sup>9</sup> Even where the myriad points of connection between experimental jazz music and styles that developed earlier are connected within an overarching narrative, “free jazz” appears as a discrete subgenre, a niche market in the larger, transcendent sweep of the “development” of jazz’s “essence,” rather than a concerted, and collective, effort to dissolve musical category itself, to escape the romantic, racialized, commercial taxonomies that shackled musical practices within formal and aesthetic limits, and to give voice to, to literally *ensound*, an unfettered musical experimentalism that, while at the same time as it appealed to notions of African aesthetics, also demanded access to the institutional support and prestige characteristic of Euro-American art music.

The range of musical practices—and recordings, working groups, and individual musicians—usually subsumed within the category of “free jazz” are better seen as constituting a global art musicking derived from, but not limited to, the historical genre of

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<sup>9</sup> Influential exponents of these two stances are Stanley Crouch for the former, and Derek Bailey for the latter. See Crouch, *Considering Genius: Writings on Jazz* (New York: Basic, 2006), especially the introduction, and Bailey, *Improvisation* (New York: Da Capo, 1993). Note that Bailey is less of a polemicist than Crouch, but does hold the view that jazz represents a historically closed idiomatic form, from which free improvisation liberates itself. Other proponents of similar views in the 1980s were more polemical in their attacks on Crouch and Wynton Marsalis, and in their assertion of a postmodern relativism that rendered any discussion of jazz as a bounded collection of styles or inheritances obsolete.

jazz.<sup>10</sup> The concerted effort to break with, and to elaborate the musical break within, the historical “development” and the commercial deployment of jazz, disrupts later efforts to enframe the “free jazz” movement within a progressive historical narrative. Free jazz, in a sense, is not jazz.

At the same time, it is. Historians and other scholars have documented the complex process by which the category of jazz was produced and subsequently applied to a range of disparate—genealogically connected, but formally and sociologically distinct—musical practices.<sup>11</sup> Attempts to define the essence—the formal practices, such as improvisation, syncopation, or “swing”—or the social meaning—industrialization, modernity, primitivism—of the emergence of jazz in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are continually confounded by the aesthetic and social range of musical practices that are not bound by, and playfully disrupt, language. “Free jazz,” in a sense, like the earlier African American modernism of “bebop,” is both a departure from and a respectful continuation of earlier styles—and homage was paid, as much in 1969 as in 1945, to earlier musicians and to living representatives of styles supposedly rendered preterite by new innovations. Relations of inter-generational continuity—respect paid to past masters, and also listening carefully to, often quoting, and developing musical affiliation to previous artworks within the eruption of new styles—was as much a feature of the experimentalism of the 1960s and 1970s as it was of previous eras.

One of the crucial indices of the apparent transformation of “modern jazz” into “free jazz” is the idea of an aesthetic vanguard, with its relation to the twentieth century avant-garde movements: surrealism, Dada, and so on. One way of thinking about 1960s

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of jazz cultural studies in Chapter One.

“new music” is as the emergence of a historical avant-garde within both jazz modernism and in historical relation to capitalist cultural production, not the industrial capitalism of the historical avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century (bourgeois marketization of art), but the late capitalism characteristic of the late 1960s (hegemonic mass markets for art). In the early twentieth century, as the discussion of Adorno in Chapter Three covered, jazz was for many the symbol of commodity (and commodified) art, and in fact jazz records circulated globally along the circuits of late colonialism, arriving in Paris, London, Berlin, Shanghai, Bombay, and Tokyo, for example, only shortly after the music’s origination in the United States. The late 1960s avant-garde that arose within jazz music differed in some ways from the historical avant-gardes discussed in literary theory. For one thing, if the historical avant-garde was a reaction to the subsumption of artistic production within bourgeois art markets, by the 1960s such markets had reached mass penetration and effected what to many critics seemed a domination of the cultural and affective life of much of the world’s population.

A key misleading dichotomy that attempts to track the transformation of “jazz” musical practices in the 1960s is the one between improvisation and composition. The emergence of jazz criticism gave rise to repeated efforts to chart a developmental course for jazz that emphasized compositional sophistication. For example, in the 1950s, French writer André Hodeir described the “essence” of jazz as an immanent development towards the invention of new forms of symphonic composition. Hodeir described the emergence of jazz in New Orleans as the result of a series of “monstrous graftings” of diverse cultural and civilizational legacies in the cauldron of the French postcolonial Caribbean. His rather infamous denial that the blues constituted the ur-form of jazz was connected to his counter-hypothesis that French, Spanish, English, and African cultural influences coalesced in the

music's formation. Thus he noted the march and the European brass band as important influences on jazz instrumentation. For Hodeir, influenced by the popular historian Arnold Toynbee, cultural development was part of a process of cross-civilizational encounters, exchange, and borrowing. The New Orleans contact zone unleashed, however, a more or less linear historical process that had as its telos the development of a new compositional language. Where jazz had originally been collectively improvised, genius improvisers from Louis Armstrong to Miles Davis had, in Hodeir's view, refined improvisation to such an extent that it became the basis for an alternative counterpart to the European concert tradition, although the latter was considerably more advanced in its temporal development. For Hodeir, then, progress in jazz was a move from improvisation to composition.<sup>12</sup>

As its name suggests, "free jazz" apparently disrupts this desire for compositional structure in favor of "spontaneous" improvisation without preset limits. "Free jazz," though, it should be remembered, is more a marketing category than an analytic or an aesthetico-political affiliation, in this case derived from Ornette Coleman's seminal double quartet recording of 1961, and should not be taken as a reliable shorthand for the musical practices under transformation, critique, and innovation. For, of course, composition is central to the "new music," and the liberation of the composer simultaneously from inherited aesthetic formalisms, racialized divisions between "jazz" and academic composition, and from the

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<sup>12</sup> André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* trans. David Noakes (New York: Grove Press, 1956), esp. 41-45. I focus on Hodeir's work here rather than give a more comprehensive survey of jazz criticism because it is perhaps the most thoughtful and considered articulation of a linear, progressive narrative of 1950s jazz modernism. It is important to note, first, that although Hodeir influenced a number of U.S. critics such as Martin Williams, his ideas were not well-known outside the jazz cognoscenti, and were often spurned as an example of European condescension or over-analytical intellectualism that failed to account for the emotional vitality of the music. This latter comment shows that the reception of Hodeir and the drive for progressive development in jazz were inseparable from racialized affective structures that constituted blackness as vital emotion and Europeanness as sophisticated but arid, even dessicated, intellectuality. Hodeir, for the most part, admirably attempted to steer clear of this discourse, but his explicit anti-raciological and anti-primitivist color blindness also blinded him to the "Afrological" and vernacular resources of jazz that made a "Third Stream" compositional language both unpopular and potentially redundant. For the U.S. reception of Hodeir, see Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 188-189.

economic practices of the popular music industry would become perhaps its most celebrated motif, from the Jazz Composers Guild to the formation of the AACM and to the entry of improvising musicians into the academy in the 1970s.

It should be noted that the apparent opposition between composition and improvisation is a highly politicized one. For example, in Hodeir's urgent wish that jazz attain the compositional and structural complexity of European concert music—principally, it seems, so that its production could be more easily judged against stable aesthetic norms—lies a barely concealed privileging of the supposed “rationality” of the European (a)tonal system and a profound deafness to non-Western musical values. Like Adorno, Hodeir's admirable dismissal of the racial fetishism characteristic of much jazz writing has the effect nevertheless of rendering jazz development in a mythical, raceless space that ignores the constant, militant, satirical, ludic, or anguished engagement with race and racism within the whole history of jazz music. It also ignores the deep—meaning both underlying and philosophically, spiritually serious—connections made to African aesthetics by musicians across stylistic boundaries during the period of decolonization that was also the late modernist moment in jazz.

This is not the place to delve into the whole history of the anthropological and historical debate about the inheritance, transmission, and dispersal of African cultural values, states, and practices—the old debate about African “retentions.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it should be

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<sup>13</sup> For the classic articulation of the argument for “retentions” see the 1941 account by Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon, 1990.) One of Herskovits's most important interlocutors was E. Franklin Frazier, whose studies of the family in the U.S. and Brazil had suggested a significant “loss” of African cultural values. What was at stake in this debate was, in part, whether family life and sexual behavior could be attributed to the presence or absence of continental, civilizational, i.e. “racial” inheritances. Also at stake, although often implicit, was a historical characterization of the slave trade itself: whether its brutality was extreme enough to damage cultural reproduction. It is important to note, however, that Frazier's arguments cannot be assimilated to a “damage thesis” *avant la lettre*. See in particular the 1939 publication, Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). For an influential reframing of the debate along lines similar to Frazier's, although emphasizing the creativity of the enslaved in

noted that the issue of whether the musical, rhetorical, and political affiliations with Africa in modern and postmodern jazz are affirmations of a surviving culture or recreations of political solidarity is a complicated and divisive one.<sup>14</sup> Formulations such as the one in the preceding sentence tend to coalesce around opposite historical poles: one affirms the cultural Africinity of black diasporic communities as a heroic survival within the dehumanizing context of the slave trade, plantation control regimes, and post-emancipation state racism; another emphasizes the contingent and dynamic processes of cultural creation according to changing historical situations.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, Africinity is a code transmitted even through profound cultural transformations, a trace present in all black diasporic cultures (and thus, presumably, present in the dominant media forms derived from black cultures, such as rock music). On the other hand, Africinity is something chosen for strategic or

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recreating and innovating new cultural forms, see Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1976). Even the terminology used to frame this debate should raise eyebrows at this late date. The fact that so-called “white ethnic” immigrant communities in the U.S. continued to have a relation to inherited practices provoked little anxiety—it is rather the decay of such practices that leads to anxiety over acculturation or assimilation. No debate is required as to whether “retention” is even possible, as is the case for survivors and descendants of survivors of the African slave trade. Yet the history of the exclusion of black people from full citizenship in the U.S. records a repetitive racist connection between the potential inheritance of African culture and ability to adopt “American” identities. The previous chapter’s discussion of the historiography of slavery and its reliance on a psychotic foreclosure of black humanity is relevant here. In a sense, W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness” has an exterior corollary: racist and exclusionist thought and practice has historically enforced a fantasy that Africinity and American citizenship are mutually exclusive, and one must be (symbolically) erased to allow for the emergence of the other. Pernicious effects of this fantasy continue to this day. What sustains this imaginary is a persistent refusal to deal with the historical effects of the slave trade, to wish them away or relegate them to a distant past, to disavow their relevance even when those performing the disavowals were alive when second class citizenship was a matter of law in the U.S. That “mainstream” U.S. social memory has moved from foreclosure to disavowal is therefore a dubious record of “progress.”

<sup>14</sup> As Paul Gilroy writes: “The proposition that the post-slave cultures of the Atlantic world are in some significant way related to one another and to the African cultures from which they partly derive has long been a matter of great controversy capable of arousing intense feeling which goes far beyond dispassionate scholastic contemplation,” *The Black Atlantic*, 81. Gilroy’s statement is accurate and important to keep in mind. Also relevant is the context of a dehumanizing historiography and the strategic hegemonic-political question of how to displace it, also discussed in Chapter Four. For an example of an argument for Africanist cultural continuity that passionately opposes the implications of the “damage thesis” while also foregrounding cultural syncretism and invention, see Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Stuckey’s argument was first introduced in a 1968 article that forthrightly engaged and opposed the historiographical consensus on slavery that had obtained among white historians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery,” *Massachusetts Review* 9:3 (Summer 1968): 417-437.

<sup>15</sup> For influential versions of these two views, see Stuckey, *ibid.* and Mintz and Price, *Birth*.

ideological reasons, a creation or invention or political affiliation present at certain times or places. One perspective challenges the racism that had historically designated African culture as sub or infra-human by affirming the continuity of African modes of being. Another challenges the racism that would make of African culture a static historical essence. What is needed, however, and what scholars since the postwar period have worked to develop, is a view that can understand both long-term continuities and cultural transformation and the political (re)creation of solidarity—in other words, a fleshed-out understanding of the processes that produce what Amiri Baraka calls the “changing same” of black musical cultures.<sup>16</sup>

#### Mistranslating Jazz: the Constitutive Outside

Diplomatic, social, and intellectual historians have argued that the modern U.S. black freedom movement cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of the global, epochal ruptures that attended decolonization and the declining public legitimacy of white supremacy.<sup>17</sup> By at least the late 1950s the emergence and promise of African decolonization fueled an ongoing identification with Africanity among U.S. black musicians.<sup>18</sup> At the same

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<sup>16</sup> Thus the question, “Is jazz essentially African?” depends, of course, on what is meant by essential. At its most restricted, essential could mean, could jazz have been created in a radically different context without the creative work of people of African descent, without the histories of drumming in Congo Square in New Orleans, without the accumulated musical history of African Americans, without the blues. That is, of course, unthinkable. But the argument of this paragraph is that the question of essential identity, in the more expansive sense, is beside the point. What is needed is a theory of cultural continuity and change that goes beyond assertions of cultural hybridity.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Ghana declared independence in 1957, and by that time cultural and militant resistance had a long history in Africa, and solidarity with those movements, as well as the conceptualization of the U.S. black freedom movement as part and parcel of global struggles against colonialism, had been a feature of an earlier generation of black activists and intellectuals. See Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883-1950,” *Journal of American History* 86:3 (December 1999): 1045-1077 and Penny

time, the transnational circuits of interwar and postwar cultural production brought musicians across diasporic space into musical, social, and intellectual conversation. The U.S. State Department-sponsored tours of jazz musicians beginning in the 1950s were an attempt to harness musicians' travels for projects of cultural ambassadorship and route them through the hot zones of the Cold War. Unexpectedly, however, from the point of view of jazz's governmental and industrial "managers," encounters between musicians and audiences more often promoted identification with black American struggles for equality against the imperial project of the U.S. state.<sup>19</sup>

Not only the widespread travel and, in many cases, expatriation of musicians, but especially the global circulation of records as commodities, made jazz a transnational dialogic form akin to a language. To describe jazz, metaphorically, as a language departs from analytics obsessed with generic identity, those focusing for instance on the appearance and faithful repetition of certain musical forms (i.e. popular song, "swing," customary instrumentation and ensemble groupings, even improvisation), and moves towards a different analytic that privileges musical dialogue and the social, material, and linguistic networks that jazz performance fostered and nurtured. One benefit to disregarding established practices of generically marking jazz off from other musics and charting the subgeneric divisions of jazz into styles or "schools" is to reveal the constant cross-fertilization and interaction among seemingly disparate musical actors.<sup>20</sup> In other words, jazz

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M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Von Eschen. *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> For example, as will be discussed later in the chapter, the 1969 conjuncture of "free" musicians in Paris included some cross-generational and cross-stylistic collaborations—such as that between Archie Shepp and other "new" musicians with Paris expatriates identified with "older" styles like Philly Joe Jones—that were surprising in the (critically manufactured) context of stylistic fragmentation in jazz.



is constituted not by a set of inherited practices but by the cumulative results of countless dialogic encounters among improvising musicians.

Given the recent interest in practices of translation in forming diasporic solidarities, one might ask, is jazz a universal music, and is it subject to translation?<sup>21</sup> Jazz can be seen, again metaphorically, as a wordless language, which may partly account for the arcane linguistic subcultures, dialects, slang, and onomatopoeia that arose among communities of musicians and initiates: forms of communication that crossed national and racial borders and served as signs of insider status (or devolved into hipsterish dilettantism, or were coopted by corporate marketing, etc.). Those crossings, however, left complex legacies and were the product of temporally layered “creative misunderstandings.” Considering the play of opposites, the flipping and tarrying, the reversals and ironies that are hallmarks of black diasporic cultures, these creative misunderstandings are part and parcel of whatever communicative acts also take place within jazz performance. Marion Brown makes a point of this in explaining how he composed his *Afternoon of a Georgia Faun* (1970): music may create images in the minds of listeners, *even those listeners who are also musicians playing in the performance*, and those listeners and players may respond with musical acts inspired by the play of mental images and affective traversals the performance inspires, but one can never know the mind of the composer.<sup>22</sup>

Compositional improvisation, as another term for free improvisation, depends on the continuous mistranslation of mental states among improvising musicians. The magic happens when these mental states coincide. This is true in a variety of different styles, and as a general point will be important for the following chapter’s discussion of duos, which are a kind of laboratory for listening in and as the performance. For another example, the

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<sup>21</sup> See especially Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*.

<sup>22</sup> Marion Brown et al., *Notes to Afternoon of a Georgia Faun: views and reviews*, (NIA Music, 1973)

spiritualism of much 1970s jazz is often about the attempt to shape mental states through musical performance. Listen to the extended grooves of “spiritual jazz,” such as Pharoah Sanders’s *Deaf Dumb Blind* (1970) for example.<sup>23</sup> The music is on the one hand an extension of the “modal jazz” innovated by George Russell and closely associated with Miles Davis, Bill Evans, and especially John Coltrane, whose work and spiritual influence Sanders was closest to and emulated, mourned, celebrated, and stylized in the 1970s. The title track begins on a two chord piano vamp (Lonnie Liston Smith) and bass ostinato (Cecil McBee) that recalls Coltrane’s use of “My Favorite Things” as a vehicle for marathon improvisations and group interplay. Sanders’s ensemble constructs an extremely multilayered polyrhythmic texture: in addition to the drummer and two percussionists, all three horn players and the pianist all contribute percussion in various combinations, and on a vast array of instruments. Within this dense rhythmic fabric the wind instruments improvise as soloists, duos, and a trio. The result is compelling and at times hypnotizing, constantly shifting (both on and within “beats” and from one groove to another with slight changes in mood, intensity, and affect), while also in a way a very “static” performance that hovers in its groove for half an hour. The groove as a whole is interesting listening, but the real engagement points of this music are moments when subtle changes in the rhythmic interaction of the (as many as six) percussionists “lock in” to a shared sensibility, or when the improvisations seem to flow directly out of the underlying structure. Different listeners and one listener’s temporally distinct hearings, moreover, will experience different moments, different pieces of the recording, as expressing that feeling of interactive unity. Since affect, the way Brian Massumi theorizes it, is what cuts across contexts, situations, and subjectivities, the affective experience of the performance can change with each hearing (this is true in general, of

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<sup>23</sup> Pharoah Sanders, *Summun Bukmun Umyan—Deaf Dumb Blind*, Impulse! AS-9199, 1970, 33 1/3 rpm.

course: what's interesting about "spiritual jazz" is that its musical practice explicitly works to generate techniques to amplify this aspect of music, with the result that the uneven, unpredictable, and essentially unrepeatable and therefore unscientific results of *listening* to it are unusually evident).<sup>24</sup> The title, "Summun Bukmun Umyan" (deaf dumb blind) also offers a useful palimpsest for what happens in the music: the groove continues on, but the attempt to create situations of intensified musical dialogue, where an affective alignment draws together musician to musician to listener (as musician or as proxy participant) is successful only ephemerally. These moments are both unpredictable and in a strong sense unperceivable: one feels it, or doesn't, without knowing for sure to what extent that feeling is shared.

Therefore, to continue thinking about "spiritual jazz," the transcendence or "ascension" that was sought after in such performances is about both a content and a practice. What some writers describe as the "ecumenical" spirit of jazz in general is in "Summun Bukmun Umyan" made into an explicit thematic. In Jameelah Ali's liner notes, the title, while drawn from the Qur'an, refers more generally to a spiritual malaise haunting the world, making the world as such, its inhabitants and beauty, imperceptible, and thus contributing to the perpetuation of war, poverty, and hatred. As a spiritual content, the music is thought as a purification of perception, a revision, rehearing, and a calling of and for cosmic unification. As a musical practice, however, the creative mistranslation of mental states suggests a reading of "spirit" that avoids the "New Age" idealism that was, indeed, a significant cultural trend of the 1970s, and not just in jazz. Spirit might be thought as the name for what I am calling creative mistranslation (of affect, of thought, of experience), for the ineffable and ephemeral feeling produced in and by the music of closeness or

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<sup>24</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), esp. 209-256, 215-217.

interdependence, and therefore for a profoundly material (if also acoustic and therefore invisible, seemingly mystical) relation that exists between instrument, ear, and brain. Spiritual jazz therefore can be thought of as a particularly evocative example of Rancière's theory of aesthetics as the redistribution of the sensible. Like other musical practices of the era, Pharoah Sanders's music expands what we hear as "music" to sonic practices less bounded by the song form than extending indefinitely beyond even the mechanical boundaries of the phonograph record (as listeners we know that the performance could go on indefinitely even as it comes to an end of the commodity's enclosure). The album examined here explicitly suggests it wants to alter sensory experience, that it can be used metaphorically as a salve to treat sensory disability. In its practice, though, in the acoustic-material transmission of affect across subjectivities that cannot be fully bridged, the music "introduces lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies," implicitly reframing *Black Unity* (a 1972 Pharoah Sanders album using similar "spiritual jazz" creative mistranslation of affective states) as a necessary-impossible aesthetic project rather than a natural state.

Another example can be found in Nathaniel Mackey's *From a Broken Bottle of Perfume Traces Still Emanate* where he often translates musical dialogue into historical-philosophical arcana, or where record players emit thought bubbles to append sonic performances. This suggests among other things that it is language itself that is a constitutive outside of musical performance. If the mental experience of the other is a constitutive outside of musical dialogue, the aporia generating the continual reproduction of musical practice in search of an ephemeral but shared affect, then language also is a constitutive outside because, unlike in Mackey's imaginary examples, what happens in the music can never be encoded fully as

language. Mackey emphasizes this point by ironically contrasting descriptions of musical expression with the elaborate, learned disquisitions they apparently connote.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, another constitutive outside of creative music is composed of other musical styles that are brought in to the musical dialogue and thereby transformed. The key shift that occurred in the wake of jazz modernism was the severing of the unique and generative, but also often restrictive, relationship between jazz and American popular song. Jazz had always been triangulated between the blues, Tin Pan Alley, and European modernist classicism, but it was Tin Pan Alley that provided the metrical and basic harmonic framework for the vast majority of jazz improvisation. When that link was severed, what happened cannot be described as the disappearance of that constitutive outside, but its radical decolonization. For the three musical traditions named above as the “source” for jazz together formed a sort of occidental triptych: blues (popular as of the people/folk), Tin Pan Alley (popular as mass entertainment), and European modernist classical (high or serious or art). What opened up in the 1960s was the soundscape of world creativity, at least catachrestically free from the cultural hierarchies that had relegated non-Western musics to a background of imperialist folklore. What emerged as the constitutive outside for jazz was world music qua polymorphous diversity of global musical practice.

### Race and World Music at the Crossroads

How do race and the “modern declension of the race concept”<sup>26</sup> operate in the contexts of music as creative mistranslation, spiritual jazz’s search for an ephemeral unity,

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<sup>25</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate Volumes 1-3* (New York: New Directions, 2010). See especially the opening vignettes of the fourth volume, *Bas Cathedral* (New York: New Directions, 2008), where the mysticism extends to the band’s LP, which produces visible word balloons when the needle is dropped.

and jazz as a black musical laboratory of world creativity? Paul Gilroy has critiqued the “new analytic orthodoxy” that, by revealing the processes of the historical and social construction of racial identities, renders all efforts to establish “any unifying dynamic or underlying structure of feeling in contemporary black cultures” as tantamount to “essentialism or idealism or both.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet Gilroy remains a hostile critic of forms of black nationalism and what he sees as the consequent—and “compensatory”—appeal of ethnic absolutism. He writes, “The unifying notion of an open blackness has been largely rejected and replaced by more particularistic conceptions of cultural difference. This retreat from a politically constructed notion of racial solidarity has initiated a compensatory recovery of narrowly ethnic culture and identity. Indeed, the aura of authentic ethnicity supplies a special form of comfort in a situation where the very historicity of black experience is constantly undermined.” This “overarching Africentrism,” with “its own totalizing conception of black culture,” relies on “a heavily mythologised Africanity that is itself stamped by its origins not in Africa but in a variety of pan-African ideology produced most recently by black America.”<sup>28</sup>

For Gilroy, the fundamental issue is authenticity—the danger of appeals to authenticity, their tendency to slip into a conservative notion of purity that amounts ultimately to blood or heredity-based racialist frameworks.<sup>29</sup> In discussing Miles Davis’s and Wynton Marsalis’s mutual criticisms of each other’s musical style, Gilroy distinguishes between Davis’s charge that Marsalis is an anachronism who fails to realize that jazz is dead, and Marsalis’s charge that Davis’s playing with electric instruments and effects, and in new

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<sup>26</sup> The phrase is from Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 34, 179.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87. Further citations to *The Black Atlantic* are made in the text.

<sup>29</sup> See especially Gilroy, *Against Race: Political Cultures Across the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

styles, is a departure from jazz authenticity. He then expands to consider conservative responses to the musical developments of Miles Davis more generally:

There are many good reasons why black cultures have had great difficulty in seeing that the displacements and transformations celebrated in Davis's work after "In a Silent Way" [1968] are unavoidable and that the developmental processes regarded by conservatives as cultural contamination may actually be enriching or strengthening. The effects of racism's denials not only of black cultural integrity but of the capacity of blacks to bear and reproduce any culture worthy of the name are clearly salient here. The place prepared for black cultural expression in the hierarchy of creativity generated by the pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies blacks with the body and whites with the mind is a second significant factor. However, beyond these general questions lies the need to project a coherent and stable racial culture as a means to establish the political legitimacy of black nationalism and the notions of ethnic particularity on which it has come to rely. This defensive reaction to racism can be said to have taken over its evident appetite for sameness and symmetry from the discourses of the oppressor. European romanticism and cultural nationalism contributed directly to the development of modern black nationalism. (97)

The crucial question here is whether all varieties of black nationalism can be construed as contributing to the political project Gilroy outlines here, and whether there are other intellectual sources besides the cultural nationalism developed in Europe during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The problem for Gilroy, however, is not by any means confined to the romantic trappings of some conservative black nationalists, for the problem of authenticity in music and black diasporic cultures cuts to the heart of debates about cultural production more generally:

Pop culture has been prepared to provide selective endorsements for the premium that some black thinkers wish to place on authenticity and has even set this special logic to work in the marketing of so-called World Music. Authenticity enhances the appeal of selected cultural commodities and has become an important element in the mechanism of the mode of racialisation necessary to making non-European and non-American musics acceptable items in an expanded pop market. The discourse of authenticity has been a notable presence in the mass marketing of successive black folk-cultural forms to white audiences. The distinction between rural and urban blues provides one good example of this, though similar arguments are still made about the relationship between authentic jazz and 'fusion' styles supposedly corroded by the illegitimate amalgamation of rock influences or the struggle between real instruments and digital emulators. In all these cases it is not enough for critics to point out that representing authenticity always involves artifice. This may be true, but

it is not helpful when trying to evaluate or compare cultural forms let alone in trying to make sense of their mutation. More important, this response also misses the opportunity to use music as a model that can break the deadlock between the two unsatisfactory positions that have dominated recent discussion of black cultural politics.” (99)

Here we come around again to the problem of the incorporation of global folk musics into the marketing category of world music, for which authenticity is a major selling point. The 1980s debates about authenticity and tradition may obscure a history of (Third) World music as a resource for the revolutionary overthrow of cultural hierarchy. In this history, “free jazz” was invested in a project not to discard or betray the jazz tradition, but to shift its experimental allegiance from the (U.S.) popular music of capitalism to world music as the uneven global field of people’s music.

Gilroy also suggests using “music as a model that can break the deadlock” by developing what he calls later in the book an “ethics of antiphony.” Yet one obstacle to this is that the rhetoric of free jazz often took a form of black nationalism. The question is whether it is the same ideology Gilroy polemicizes against, or whether it is something else lost to history, a road not taken that thus requires some historical reconstruction to understand.

After all, the context of 1969 was one in which the range of possible outcomes to a series of global crises were far from pre-ordained. It was not clear to participants at Algiers that the project of revolutionary African unity would, after struggling against the remnants of Portuguese colonialism and South African neo-colonialism throughout the 1970s, become in the 1980s a nightmare of civil war and, finally, genocide. And it was not clear in 1969 that the crisis within the U.S. domestic political economy would not explode into some further destabilization of the U.S. regime. These and many other historical trajectories were uncertain, not only because the future is always unknowable, but also because “1968” had



opened a unique conjunctural window that took some time to close. African political unity in solidarity against neo-colonialism, the terrain of the debates over “blackness” and “culture” that took place at the Pan-African Festival, was despite setbacks a project many participants believed could win. In the U.S., black political solidarity and strategic alliances with other progressive forces was on the table in 1969-1972 not as a defensive posture but as a real possibility for the transformation of U.S. political culture. In retrospect it is possible to see how fractures along strategic and tactical lines, and along the faults of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and especially class, contributed to the defeat of this opening; moreover, the power of capitalism to transform itself and incorporate “cultural” challenges as part of its constant revolutionizing of the means of production now appears to be the ultimate lesson of 1968. But the ending of the project of African anti-colonial solidarity in a nightmare of neo-colonialism, of the project to transform U.S. politics in a deadlock between managerial liberalism and Christian-corporatist fascism, or of the project to socialize the mode of production with the ascendance of global neo-liberalism—these “ends” were not foreseeable in 1969, and as Walter Benjamin famously argued, a philosophy of history must break open the homogenous time of progressive narratives to let slip the “now-time” that infused each and every revolutionary constellation.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Now-time” is the translation of Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit*. I cannot claim to have followed the program to the letter, but this chapter is certainly in part inspired by Benjamin’s injunction in “Theses on the Philosophy of History”: “Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallized as a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical object only where it confronts him as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a messianic arrest of happening, or (to put it differently) a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history; thus, he blasts a specific life out of the era, a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method, the lifework is both preserved and sublated *in* the work, the era *in* the lifework, and the entire course of history *in* the era. The nourishing fruit of what is historically understood contains time in its *interior* as a precious but tasteless seed.” Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940* ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 396.

## World Music, Celestial Music

Before going to Algiers and its multiple political and ideological contexts, however, I want to open one more excursus on the stakes of defining “jazz” in the conjuncture of 1968-1972, and one more investigation of Don Cherry’s intellectual work to destabilize the assumptions carried in the discourse of jazz. In 1971, drummer Arthur Taylor (1929-1995) asked Don Cherry as he asked all his interview subjects in the essential *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews*, what he thought of the word “jazz.” In Cherry’s complex, digressive series of answers—Taylor kept asking as Cherry kept evading a clear-cut response—you can see the multiple implications of the word that made musicians’ positions on the word itself of such topical interest. Cherry himself brought up the word when asked how he classified his music, charting a history of jazz from Dixieland to swing to bebop to “what they call avant-garde or whatever.” This led him to an interesting digression that notes the historical disappearance of improvisation from European classical music. “Today there’s so much pressure to become professional and commercial,” he notes, “that you try to get a thing going which everybody recognizes as being specifically yours. That’s what stops high-quality improvisation. People who live in nature in Africa, China, or in the woods give their music a quality which is both earthy and godly, and that’s what I think should be preserved: this quality of earthiness.”<sup>31</sup>

Cherry’s digressive movement, away from a developmentalist narrative of jazz to a global account of improvisation that enfolds the historical suppression of improvisation in

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<sup>31</sup> Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews* (New York: Da Capo, 1993), 176. Taylor’s book is an excellent introduction to the various ways musicians thought through generic identity, race, and aesthetics during the 1970s. It also illustrates and goes some way towards explaining both the problems of defining or identifying with jazz, and the reasons for the repeated emphasis on political economic conditions in musicians’ discourse during this period. It has been a formative influence for this work in thinking about musicians in terms of political and aesthetic subjectivity. Further citations to Taylor in the text.

European classical music together with a neo-primitivist view of premodern musical practices “in the woods” raises the question of essentialism. Does Cherry’s contrast of both the Western classical and jazz traditions with other global musical logics succumb to a kind of romantic primitivism? What quality of earthiness or naturalism did Cherry seek among the “people who live in nature?” When asked specifically to elaborate his views on “jazz,” however, Cherry “deconstructs” the word in the course of an exegesis of the spiritual values he admires in the musics he studies:

If we’re going to speak about words, we could talk about a word like *aum*. Because you don’t say the word *aum*, you sing it. And you have to sing it where you use the *a* as *ah*, which is the throat. Then you’re singing, sustaining the tone *ah*. Then you go to the *u*, and then you reach the *m* and you’ve liberated the body. That’s a word. In the Bible they speak of the Word. First there was the Word. And then they speak of the word that was lost.

(Taylor) *But do you think of yourself as a jazz player?*

I consider myself a jazz player because I have been around some musicians who I felt had been sent here as messengers. They were called jazz musicians and they have showed me the way.

*But what about the word?*

You’re speaking like Webster’s or the Oxford dictionary or like something commercial. What do you call those people who feel they have control and who put that word on the music? There can be so many different qualities in our music; it can be intellectual music, it can be spiritual music, or music just for joy, or celestial music. John Coltrane was one person who attained this celestial quality. When he came on the scene, he realized that he had to carry the message, and he carried it very well. His thinking was spiritual, but instead of speaking of it, he would play and you could feel it. You could also feel it in the way he lived and carried himself as a human being. Albert Ayler, too. That was a very special period in jazz. I thank God for having been able to live during the time and period of their presence.

*I would still like you to classify the music.*

But that’s canning it if you put a label on it like jazz. Maybe we could say that jazz is a truth we realize because we are living it. That brings me to the point of when I met Ornette Coleman. Here was a person who not only taught himself to master an instrument but also realized we had a system of music that contradicts the Western system while still having the intelligence of the Western system. I’m speaking of the

way Ornette writes his music. He has a fantastic system. It's not bar lines, it's more or less where each note creates a melody of a wholeness. It's basically the same system as be-bop.<sup>32</sup>

Relations of continuity and discontinuity continually intersect in Cherry's evasions of Taylor's efforts to get him to take a position in the discursive wars around the meaning and social implications of the word jazz. While the sonic "purity" of Dixieland must be preserved, in Cherry's view, he identifies himself as a jazz musician only as part of a social formation, out of his respect for fellow musicians identified by jazz. The category of jazz inhibits recognition of the range of emotional and spiritual resonances possible in "our music."

#### Ketchauoua, New Africa: First Hearing

In July 1969, several U.S. musicians traveled to Algiers to participate in the Pan-African Festival of Arts and Culture. In the wake of Algeria's successful revolution against French imperialism, and the rise of independent African nations and revolutionary movements, the Algiers conference became an ideological battleground over the proper course of independent African development, and specifically over the relevance of Negritude and other concepts of cultural nationalism. This debate was embroiled in U.S. revolutionary politics, as arguments within the U.S. movement between the Black Panthers, cultural nationalists, and others spilled over into the symposia and streets of Algiers. The performance of Archie Shepp's band with poets Ted Joans and Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) and a troupe of local Tuareg musicians was implicated in, and can be read partly as intervening into, these political debates.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 176-177.

There were two performances captured and released as *Live at the Pan-African Festival*.<sup>33</sup> The first took place on 29 July and is titled on the album “Brotherhood at Ketchaoua.” Ketchaoua is the name of a mosque in Algiers near the site of the performance. The recording begins with the performance already in motion, dominated by the drums and raitas of the “unknown Algerian musicians” who performed with the American musicians. The three U.S. musicians—Shepp, Clifford Thornton, and Grachan Moncur III—improvise above the swirling, undulating layers of sound produced especially by the raitas, a double-reed instrument with a clipped sound weaving chromatic and micro-tonal patterns around the polyrhythmic drumming. Initially the sound might have suggested to some American listeners an Orientalist tableau constructed by countless examples of Hollywood film exotica: a North African marketplace, perhaps, with a soundtrack implying both romantic folk purity and chaotic danger. But this initial impression is confounded by the improvisations of the *raitas* players, who continually introduce new patterns and disturb the repetitions of the polyrhythmic layers of sound even as they are being created. The “unknown Algerian musicians” credited by the commercial recording of this performance were a troupe of Tuareg players attending the Algiers festival.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Archie Shepp, *Live at the Pan-African Festival*, 1969.

<sup>34</sup> *African Culture: Algiers Symposium, July 21<sup>st</sup> – August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969* (Algiers: Société nationale d'édition et de diffusion, 1969) and *The First Pan-African Festival Faces of Algeria* 13 (Algiers: [Algerian] Ministry of Information and Culture, 1970). Liner notes, *Live at the Pan-African Festival*. The “unknown Algerian musicians” label of course repeats a typical feature of twentieth century “field recordings” of world folk music by leaving the musicians anonymous. In that sense, the *Live at The Pan-African Festival* recording is interesting as a relatively rare example of the conventions of field recording intersecting with the conventions of recording live popular music performances. The Americans are “names” whose presence sells the record (if only a relatively few pressings), even if in the performance itself they stay in, or relegate themselves, to the musical background. The designation “unknown Algerian musicians” is misleading on another score as well. The Tuareg are a nomadic pastoralist people of the Sahara, who live across the national borders of North and West Africa. They are not Arab, but Berber. In the 1980s a cultural revival took place amid armed rebellions against regional governments. For example, the band Tinariwen, formed in 1982 (can be heard, for example, on *Radio Tisdas Sessions*, 2004) has seen significant exposure in the world music and mainstream rock press. See also Jane E. Goodman, “Singers, Saints, and the Construction of Postcolonial Subjectivities in Algeria,” *Ethos* 26:2 (1998): 204-228.

The mix of sound initially overwhelms the American players—over the course of the performance the sound is adjusted to bring the American improvisers to the foreground, yet there is a sense of unease, and through much of the performance the American musicians struggle to contribute, instead blowing meandering lines. (In addition, the sound quality of the recording is rather poor, and it seems the mix, or perhaps the performers’ proximity to the microphones, is shifting throughout.) According to Norman Weinstein, “While the nasal-sounding *raitas* snake through exquisitely executed microtonal trance dances, creating sonic bee-dances of nervous vitality, Shepp and his company sound as if they are playing outtakes from *The Magic of Ju-Ju*.”<sup>35</sup> That 1967 recording consists of an energetic marathon solo by Shepp over a dense percussion mix created by five drummers—Beaver Harris, Norman Connor, Ed Blackwell, Frank Charles, and Dennis Charles. For Weinstein, Shepp’s “intensely wrathful” short phrases over the layered percussion suggest “an exorcism in progress.” Musicologist Ekkehard Jost, who has written one of the few musicological analyses of free jazz, points out what he sees as the inauthenticity of *Magic of Ju-Ju*’s evocation of African rhythm: “the laws of cross rhythm and polyrhythm on which African music is based are in fact very strict.”<sup>36</sup> Yet those “laws of ... polyrhythm” vary among African musical cultures: the polyrhythms of Yoruba or other West African cultures operate

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<sup>35</sup> Norman Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1992), 138.

<sup>36</sup> Weinstein, 136, Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo, 1993), 113. Strict musicological accuracy was likely not the intended purpose of the composition, and it fits in a long line of jazz “imaginings” of Africa, to use Weinstein’s phrase. Since John Coltrane’s celebrated *Africa/Brass* in 1961, new music practitioners had explored various significations of Africa and Africanity. Soon after *The Magic of Ju-Ju* was recorded, Shepp told Nat Henthoff of his desire to visit Africa: “I’d like to work more and more with African rhythms. I’d like to take a trip to Africa soon, just look around, and absorb some of the contemporary folk material there as well as the older forms of music. It seems to me we have to keep developing a contemporary folk language. That’s one of the reasons I listen very closely to rhythm and blues singers—the late Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, James Brown. They exemplify what I mean by a contemporary folk language. We need more of that in jazz.” Henthoff, “Archie Shepp: The Way Ahead,” originally printed in *Jazz and Pop*, June 1968. It is significant that Shepp connected a possible visit to Africa with the renewal of jazz through the incorporation of folk elements. Even more illuminating is the suggested parallel between the African folk music and the R&B of black America. Both are forms of “contemporary folk language”; the “folk” is for Shepp not an indicator of timelessness, antiquity, or noncommodified performance, but rather literally the music of “the people”—music that *functions* by spurring ritual, dance, or sociability.

quite differently from the polytonal and polyrhythmic mix created by the Tuareg musicians in Algiers.

Despite the problems with sound quality and the musical gaps that open up between Tuareg rhythm and American improvisation, there is something deeply affecting about this performance, not least for its trance-like qualities, and for the way that, although unevenly, Moncur, Shepp, and Thornton do manage to respond musically to the experience of themselves being overwhelmed by sound—an ironic experience perhaps for these noted “free jazzers” who were accustomed to overwhelming their audiences.<sup>37</sup> Two-thirds of the way through the performance, Shepp begins blowing long tones and short, simple figures that allow the trance-inducing *raïtas* and the massive percussion mix to sound *through* his improvisations, rather than attempting to improvise *above* the background. In the last few minutes of the recording, Shepp, Thornton, and Moncur resort to a repeated rhythmic blues riff that is reminiscent of 1930s Midwestern swing. Ironically, this repetitive motif works better in the effort to blend with the Tuareg musicians, in a sense confirming emerging ideas about the blues as both a foundational language of black performance and an eminently translatable form of musical communication. This performance, fifteen minutes of collective improvisation, would be recreated, and mimicked, multiple times by groups of black American jazz musicians in the summer and fall of 1969.

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<sup>37</sup> Which is simply to call up the critical rhetoric around “free jazz,” especially Shepp, and the interpretation of it as an assaulting, disorienting, or emotionally challenging style. While this characterization may (sometimes) apply in particular to Shepp, it does not capture the emotional range of even his most “avant-garde” performances (and Weinstein’s description of his playing as “intensely wrathful,” while in no way falsifiable and indeed an elegant phrase, might be nevertheless questioned in the context of reading the habituated discursive framing of anger as the monolithic affect of “free jazz”). The stereotype of the enraged instrumentalist might best apply to Clifford Thornton, who was known among other musicians as a militant whose rhetoric could shock even Black Panther Party members. See Lewis, *Power*, 241. To my ears, however, his playing is often “challenging” not necessarily because of an aggressive tone, but because of a “harmonic style” that pushes and blurs and muddies intervals so rapidly it feels almost panic-inducing. But that’s me. Grachan Moncur III, incidentally, while certainly an avant-gardist (who made some beautiful, and indeed very delicate and subtle music on the Actuel label in Paris that year), had first been known as a “hard bop” trombonist and recorded several wonderful but relatively little-known albums for Blue Note in the early 1960s.

The following night's performance took place in a boxing ring, and again featured the improvisational interplay between U.S. African and local musicians. In addition to Shepp and Thornton, the American band included Dave Burrell (b. 1940), Sunny Murray (b. 1936), and Alan Silva (b. 1939), as well as the poets Ted Joans (1928-2003) and Don L. Lee [Haki Madhubuti] (b. 1942). Burrell remembers, "When I got to Africa and all of the countries were represented with their musicians, I heard drums all day and all night. Finally, it was our turn to play and they had us in a boxing ring in the town square. The boxing ring had an upright piano in it. I will never forget being led through the crowd to the boxing ring and getting in under the ropes. It was a very, very hot and intense evening. The music started to play itself and the people's energy made it easy."<sup>38</sup>

Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), who attended the Algiers festival, was also struck by the constant sound of music accompanying the social energies released in the wake of anticolonial revolution when he first visited Algeria in 1967. "I've always loved music," he remembered in his autobiography co-written with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, "and there I'd hear North African music all the time, everywhere, twenty-four hours a day. Much of it was revolutionary music, music of struggle, like our freedom songs, and I began to appreciate North African music. Though very different from black African music, there were resonances."<sup>39</sup>

The 30 July performance, "We Have Come Back," in recorded form, is a more than twenty minute exploration of the resonances between North African music and the liberation music of U.S. Africans, and it opens with a declaration of unity between the American musicians and the whole assembled group of delegates from independent nations

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<sup>38</sup> Fred Jung, "A Fireside Chat with Dave Burrell," [allaboutjazz.com](http://www.allaboutjazz.com), 10 Nov 2004, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=15409>

<sup>39</sup> Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 602.



and revolutionary groups across the African continent. Throughout, the performance is punctuated by poetic incantations from Joans and Lee, some of which are only partially audible within the dense sound mix, but the invocation that initiates the performance couldn't be clearer: "We are still black, and we have come back. *Nous sommes revenus*. We have come back and brought back to our land, Africa, the music of Africa. Jazz is a Black Power. Jazz is a Black Power. Jazz is a African Power. Jazz is an African music."

The audience's enthusiastic response was captured on the recording, applause building over the course of the statement, especially after the "translation" of the performance's title into French. The connections between jazz and Black Power, and the identification of Africanity with jazz, especially its more radical and free improvisatory elements, was a recurrent theme of this period. Ted Joans would publish, two years later, his *A Black Manifesto in Jazz Poetry and Prose*, and one can hear in the performance certain phrases and ideological resonances with that work. In a present moment increasingly skeptical of claims to cultural ownership but inured to the identification of jazz as a music with African American origins, however, the assertion of jazz's blackness, its Africanity, and its ideological association with African diasporic revolutionary unity might strike readers as either a simple truism, or as a simple, and retrograde, reversal of the problematic color-blind liberalism which had designated jazz a uniquely American music. The evocative sense of cultural and physical *return* in the 1969 performance might suggest to some listeners an attempt to disavow, or cover with an "essentialist" rhetoric of unity, the real formal and political differences that structured the field of jazz, and the heterogeneity of African music-making practices. In other words, do revolutionary zeal and a politicized aesthetic blind these black

American performers to the messy, hybrid development of jazz, as well as the gaps and fissures within diasporic identity?<sup>40</sup>

### Ephemeral Alignment: Second Hearing

In order to reconstruct the answers to these questions, and to interpret the ideological resonances the performances may have had in the context of the Festival, it will be helpful to explore some contextual material on African decolonization and Algeria in the late 1960s. The political histories that came together in the 1969 Pan-African Festival provide a context for a second hearing of the performance's recording that will give a different twist to the stakes of the declarative synonymy of jazz, Black Power, and African Power. The affective power of the appearance of the U.S. musicians with the Tuareg, and later (re)claiming jazz for Black/African Power, was intensified by the political contradictions that shaped the context for the Festival.

It is important to note that although it is customary to think of 1968 as a “global” event, mass political rebellions were for the most part confined to the major capitalist and state socialist countries—the “players” of the internationalist Cold War game, competing financially and ideologically for the allegiance of the non-aligned and newly independent countries. In Africa, for instance, a different periodization should be noted. Ghana in 1957 was the first African nation to win independence from European rule (Ethiopia had been briefly occupied by Italy after the 1936 invasion) and Kwame Nkrumah aspirations for building pan-African socialism there attracted the interest and expertise of a large number of intellectual emigrés. In Congo, Patrice Lumumba emerged as the leader of the newly

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<sup>40</sup> Ted Joans, *A Black Manifesto in Jazz Poetry and Prose* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1971).

independent country in 1960, only to face determined and well-financed opposition supported by Belgian and other European corporations and the U.S. state, the latter out of policy makers' fears, often racially driven, that the "irrational" Lumumba might abandon his program of nationalist and pan-African development and become a Soviet client state; his illegal assassination with the complicity of the CIA touched off multiple demonstrations around the world, including at the U.N. in New York, where activists, writers, and musicians demanded the U.S. be held accountable. Meanwhile a revolutionary war of independence was being waged against French rule in Algeria; the emergence of a nominally revolutionary socialist government there in 1962 after the French withdrawal made Algeria a destination and an example for radicals and socialists the world over.

By the mid 1960s however, some of the passions inspired by these developments had dissipated, South African apartheid and recalcitrant Portuguese colonialism (both enjoying U.S. financial and ideological support) had proved resistant to change, and Ghana, Congo, and Algeria had all experienced military coups: Nkrumah's pan-African socialism had been unable to restrain corruption and he was forced into exile; Tshombe, the client of neo-colonial powers had himself been ousted and exiled, and after a period of political instability Lumumba's erstwhile ally Joseph Mobutu had seized power and begun a thirty-year authoritarian reign; Algeria's post-independence government had also fallen to a military coup, and while Boumédiène's new government remained supportive of African and black American freedom movements, his rule was dictatorial and suppressed freedom of association, civil society, and movements of ethnic minorities. It is unclear to what extent the growing tensions of post-revolutionary Algeria were visible at the Festival or made an impact on the discussions there. From the promotional literature produced by the Algerian state both before and after the Festival, it is clear that the relatively new regime viewed it as an

opportunity to celebrate its success in creating social “harmony” and advertised its example as a model for the liberation of the continent. As will be discussed further below, however, the appearance of Tuareg musicians was perhaps a strategic effort to conceal, and nevertheless a reminder of, the growing tensions over language, ethnicity, and culture in post-revolutionary Algeria. The Tuareg and other non-Arab-speaking people were experiencing the first stages of the state’s attempt at “Arabization” in order to promote social and cultural solidarity, resistance to which would simmer through the 1970s and explode in the 1980s in a cultural revival. The Festival’s official rhetoric celebrated the diversity, richness, and unity of African culture—literature, drama, film, but especially music—and promoted the occasion as an opportunity to witness the display of representatives from every African nation and numerous performance traditions. The display of this diversity was intended both to undermine the influence of Negritude (both in subtle juxtaposition of intra-African variance and in overt state socialist rhetoric) and to recuperate cultural nationalism as a resource for building socialism, against Léopold Sédar Senghor’s bourgeois black nationalism. Pan-Africanism was the watchword of the festival, but it was a Pan-Africanism officially tailored to the interests of the post-revolutionary Algerian state.<sup>41</sup>

As Nathan Hare reported in the inaugural issue of *The Black Scholar*, the choice of Algeria for the conference location had contradictory significations within the transnational black freedom movement. On the one hand, Algeria had waged a successful war of national liberation against France, and thus was seen as a bastion of the necessity of anticolonial revolt as well as the promise of revolutionary nationalist development. On the other hand,

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<sup>41</sup> In a sense, therefore, the recruitment of Pan-Africanism as a rejoinder to cultural nationalism, in the service of a regime whose allegiance was solicited by the U.S.S.R. and its rigid ideological opposition to nationalisms of race or culture, made the Festival a site of forgetting or obfuscating the history of Pan-Africanist articulations going back to W. E. B. Du Bois, and most recently concatenated in Nkrumah’s Ghana, to which many African Americans contributed their work, hope, and allegiance. See Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Nkrumah’s Ghana*.

holding the conference in a North African nation revealed and exacerbated racialized tensions within the Organization of African Unity itself. Frantz Fanon, the Martinican intellectual whose adopted home was revolutionary Algeria, and whose ideas permeated the discussions at the Algiers conference, had warned in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) of exacerbating tensions between “Black” and “White” Africa; for him, “the names that are substituted—Africa South of the Sahara, Africa North of the Sahara—do not manage to hide this latent racism.”<sup>42</sup> Such racial tensions structured some of the ideological disputes on the subject of Negritude that were the basis of much of the Festival conversations. At issue was the relationship between culture and revolution and the status of Negritude given what most participants viewed as Senghor’s over-friendliness with U.S. imperialism. According to Hare, the leaders of the Algerian National Liberation Front “today seem rather more concerned with the pitfalls of cultural attachment on the part of oppressed peoples. They lambasted the ultra-devotion of many black intellectuals to jazz music and black art and other forms of ‘folkloric prestige,’ and denounced African intellectuals who are likewise so fascinated, who fail to visualize a certain solution for the present.”<sup>43</sup> While this view held sway with many Algerians and Libyans—North African state socialists—leaders from sub-Saharan Africa and the diaspora, even those on the socialist left, were by and large more willing to engage concepts of cultural nationalism. As Nathan Hare put it, “Even the most

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<sup>42</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, (New York: Grove, 1963), 161. This quotation is cited by Nathan Hare in a footnote. See Hare, “Algiers 1969,” *Black Scholar* 1:1 (1970), 4. Fanon expands on the character of this racism: “Here, it is affirmed that White Africa has a thousand-year-old tradition of culture; that she is Mediterranean, that she is a continuation of Europe, and that she shares in Greco-Latin civilization. Black Africa is looked on as a region that is inert, brutal, uncivilized, in a word, savage. There, all day long you may hear unpleasant remarks about veiled women, polygamy, and the supposed disdain the Arabs have for the feminine sex. All such remarks are reminiscent in their aggressiveness of those that are so often heard coming from the settler’s lips.” Fanon, *Wretched*, 161. Fanon identified such racism as derived from European imperialism, and criticized the nationalist bourgeoisie’s adoption of it.

<sup>43</sup> Hare, “Algiers 1969,” 4.

universal-minded black leaders and intellectuals seemed much less afraid of any dire effects of black African nationalism.”<sup>44</sup>

Considering the intense ideological disputes during the conference, especially over the question of culture’s relationship to political struggle, the jazz musicians’ performance with Algerian and Tuareg musicians might have carried special significance. Since tensions between “White” and “Black” African leaders on the question of cultural nationalism were running high, the claiming of jazz for Black Power and African Power by American musicians who had the night before played with a large group of North African musicians was perhaps experienced as an aesthetic sublimation of those tensions.

Given a first hearing, then, the declaration “We Have Come Back. *Nous sommes revenus*” sounds like a clear declaration of American African identity, which it is, in part. The audience’s eruption to the incantation of this phrase and its supplementary equation “Jazz = Black Power = African Power” seems to signal a populist ratification of a rhetoric of racial identification, a celebration and welcoming of these African Americans into the fold of Africanity and cultural unanimity. Taken to an extreme, this hearing provokes anxiety for a contemporary moment as it seems to issue forth from an other temporal moment, a *before* that denied or suppressed diasporic cultural difference, hybridity, and syncretism in its romantic enthusiasm for affirming the identity of race.

On a second hearing, the metropolitan limitations of the first hearing are made evident by a postcolonial political history.<sup>45</sup> The anxiety mentioned above is part and parcel

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> My use of the phrase “second hearing” is meant to recall Ronald Radano’s brilliant and troubling argument in *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). He writes about the antebellum U.S., “Black music consequently took public form only as a second hearing—within the slips and swerves constituting a musical ‘time lag’ of black contramodernity... African-America’s ‘first truth’ emerges from a second hearing, from the surfacing of blackness within and without of whiteness. The originary nature of the authentic grows from a comparative relation that unseats the stability of both blackness and whiteness as it constitutes an alternative racial sound world.” Ibid, 107. Radano’s theorization of the emergence of a

of a U.S. (or more precisely, Anglo-American) postmodern discourse of race that contends both with the ideological legitimation of colorblindness and the persistent inequalities both inherited from legal segregation and reproduced by insufficiently decolonized state and market structures. The narrative construction of “Black Power,” for instance, is inseparable from this metropolitan context, even when theorized in deliberate opposition to dominant ideologies. A U.S. national or even American continental frame of racial identity is, on a second hearing, belied by the political history of a decolonizing Africa.

A second hearing, given the revolutionary and sectarian debates going on within the conference, suggests a profound ambivalence both about the political signification of the musicians’ performance and the relation between musical affects and their political mobilization. Participants at the conference, many of whom were activists who had been debating questions of Negritude and anti-colonial resistance for some time, would have likely heard the performance within a rich discursive context of the possibilities of politicized art. As we have seen, the principal theme of the many symposia held at the Festival was the role of culture in the social and economic development of the continent.

The affective forces at play in the symposia and in the streets and stages of Algiers during the Festival are more difficult to reconstruct, but thinking about the social context they created can help understand what is at stake in the recorded performance (and its recording of the audience’s enjoyment). Like any academic conference, there was no doubt a wide variety of experiences to be had in the day-to-day unfolding of the Festival: some discussions were politically charged, and others were informative and detailed, and some

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discourse of black music in the encounter of Europeans and Africans through the violence of slavery, and his insistence on the cross-racial mutuality that is invested and suppressed/forgotten in racial identity itself is compelling and generative. When that theorization is used in the context of a war of position in contemporary academic debates that can be traced back to the 1968 conjuncture, however, it seems necessary to take the transnational political history of that moment into account even and especially while insisting on a theoretical rigor in thinking through claims of racial identity, identification, or solidarity.

were probably tedious. Added to that was the electric charge of the presence of emissaries from states and social movements the world over, some very famous (Hare reports that the Black Panther pavilion was crowded throughout the Festival). For many, to participate in the work of the Festival must have been deeply affecting, knowing that the intellectual and political work being done was integrally connected to a world historical moment, that the discussions of culture and political strategy were not being conducted in a vacuum but at least ideologically had the power to shape the trajectory of African independence, anti-colonial violent resistance, and the cultural and economic solidarity of an entire continent against exploitation and foreign rule. Tempers were on display, and ideological conflicts came into the open (while others murmured away in the background, such as the host regime's emerging practices of suppressing freedoms of speech and association). At the end of the work day, delegates would exit into the streets of Algiers and be plunged into the open air sociality of the city and the Festival: a city that had waged guerilla war against French imperialist terrorism and emerged independent was now thronged with representatives from all of Africa and the diaspora, encountering one another, arguing, connecting, expressing a politicized love, mutuality, and solidarity.

Enter into this context the two performances by the representatives of American “free jazz.” How did they signify? In the creative interplay between sound and text, performance and declaration, audiences may have heard a reaffirmation of Fanon's argument that intra-African racism “takes over from the Europeans and establishes in the continent a racial philosophy which is extremely harmful for the future of Africa.”<sup>46</sup> There is an interesting tension here, therefore, between the metonymic equation of “Black Power” and “African Power”—which seems to support the “cultural nationalist” position at the

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<sup>46</sup> Fanon, 162.



conference—and the presence of Tuaregs as representatives of the “African music” the night before that is part of the same equation. “Black Power” was both an affirmation of blackness, and a call for unity in dissolving color-based hierarchies. That “Black Power” was “an African Power” also signified doubly: a contextually subversive affirmation of the continent’s blackness and its racial solidarity with the diaspora over against the revolutionary leadership of the “white” North Africans, or a de-linking of blackness and “the race concept,” an invitation for all of Africa to unify in the transnational transformation heralded by Black Power.

Perhaps some in the audience reacted to the performance’s confirmation of the validity of cultural nationalism; perhaps others to its call for unity in the tired aftermath of ideological debate. Or perhaps it was a case of the way in which diaspora encounters allow for creative mistranslations across particular, local contexts. After all, Black Power in 1969 meant very different things to different people. Regardless of political intention, however, the naming of jazz as Black Power must be seen as a performative act, a kind of political theater whose meaning cannot be constrained by conventional measures of historical or musicological accuracy. In a certain context claiming jazz as Black Power music was a reversal of the twin ideologies of developmental modernism and American exceptionalism which had established hegemonic understandings of jazz as “America’s music.” It was nevertheless a dialectical reversal that opened spaces for a heterogeneous exploration of sonic possibilities and political stances. The Festival did not introduce black American participants to a unified and idyllic Africanity, but an Africa divided ideologically in a struggle against neocolonial domination, political corruption, and cultural imperialism.<sup>47</sup> As with

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<sup>47</sup> In a wonderfully evocative aside, Hare registers pervasive poverty and the encroaching forces of neocolonial retrenchment in Algiers, what later commentators would see as exemplars or harbingers of the corporate culture of globalized capitalism: “The next day [after a nighttime arrival and celebratory parade and carnival]

other diasporic encounters, the Festival experience, seems to have widened, not narrowed, the cultural significations of blackness—and the available musical forms to express improvisational freedom for these American musicians.

If we think about Paul Gilroy's suspicion of "overarching Africentrism" to the situation of the performances at the Pan-African Festival in Algiers, a number of inconsistencies result. Gilroy's polemic against certain forms of cultural nationalism and Afro-centrism notwithstanding, it is unclear whether it should apply to a situation like the one in Algiers, where the American musicians are not the inventors of a Pan-African ideology applied to a romantic, imaginary Africa, but definite "outsiders" and witnesses to an intra-African debate over the correct prioritization of culture and revolutionary struggle. While "totalizing conception[s] of black culture" were clearly in play at the Algiers Festival, they are less the product of a mythologized, compensatory neo-Orientalist Africa than precisely a Marxist account of cultural totality, a view of African art as fundamentally a people's art. Moreover, the name "Black Power" as a sign for jazz is subject to a radical artistic othering by the very material context of the ideological and geopolitical struggles and debates that played out at the Festival: in that context, the unity achieved by Black Power and, ephemerally, by black culture as a vehicle for the unification of popular struggles against oppression was profoundly constructed, unstable, provisional, performative, and a fleeting surge of hope before the onrushing tide of neo-colonialism.

Thus to return to the "second hearing" of the performance, we can imagine how the context transmitted and amplified the performance's affective power. During days of intense debate, boring recitations of tired ideologies, fervent denunciations and equally fervent

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saw a somewhat different Algiers, and what has been achieved since the revolution, not all of it yet so good. The air of celebration continued, but daylight revealed, in at least one major section, project housing tenements as dilapidated as any in the United States. Esso service stations appeared, and Shell, and Hertz, and Pepsi Cola (and company); and the French colonialists slipping back in predatory droves." Hare, "Algiers 1969."

hopes for the building of political solidarity, socialization with people from dozens of nations, crowds composed of representatives from all of Africa, in an atmosphere pervaded by music of every conceivable African style, ancient and modern, dance and costume and sociality not separated out from the music but fully integrated with it. The social and political context introduced tension, and the music and poetic incantation dissolved it: that is the second hearing available when taking into account the politico-historical context. For one ineffable and fleeting moment, the dream of African unity was realized in performance, and the ideological divisions and cultural-linguistic differences debated through the day dissolved into affective togetherness. This is the ambivalent “power of black music”<sup>48</sup>—it can create affective alignments, temporary mistranslations of mental states that produce sociality as a necessary illusion: an illusion because difference and “the multiple” are ontological conditions of humanity, and necessary because without music’s crossing the multiple of subjectivity there would hardly be a humanity as we know it, let alone art or politics. But these alignments are fleeting, their power ripples away into memory, to be recreated or reflected upon or looked back at with nostalgia. Politics attempts the slow, organized construction of the lasting solidarities that are felt and lost in musical performance. Therefore black music as ephemeral construction of political unity is necessarily citational—referenced, repeated, and reiterated in countless attempts to systematize an unsystematizable sonic alignment of affective experience.

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<sup>48</sup> Borrowing this phrase, I want to acknowledge the inspiration I’ve drawn from, and my differences with, Samuel Floyd’s account in *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History From Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

## The Return of “Pan-African Festival” as a 1970s Phonographic Susurrations

The records made between 1969 and 1979 on the BYG Actuel label represent a trans-generational recording project and an overlapping, complex bundle of aesthetic statements by musicians in a post-imperial, and neo-colonial, space of “overlapping diasporas”—characterized by not only the diasporic meeting of musicians of multiple nationalities, but by an intra-American encounter of generations, styles, and regional affiliations taking place on an outer-American stage.<sup>49</sup> The meanings (sonic and otherwise) of blackness for U.S.-based musicians were, in a sense, open to deep exploration and political resymbolization. The Actuel sessions are notorious in free jazz lore for the fact that the musicians often received no pay, and have in most cases received no compensation for the numerous reissues, reprinting, and repackaging of the music, nor for the high prices the original pressings now command as collectors’ items. The label therefore could offer a case study in the marginal economies of improvised music, the production of experimentalism often existing in a hazy area close to where formal and informal economies merge and where the legal protections of copyright and the publishing rights of composition are often unenforceable. Nevertheless, the Actuel records should not therefore be regarded only as material traces of exploitation, but also as the collective inscription—against some considerable odds—of a momentarily flourishing panoply of creative projects that together

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<sup>49</sup> I borrow the phrase “overlapping diasporas” from Earl Lewis, “To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas,” *American Historical Review* 100:3 (June 1995): 765-787, and to be clear I am referring to how postmodern migrations of black U.S. musicians themselves constituted a network of overlapping diasporas: New York-based experimentalists, whose styles were co-created by Afro-Europeans like John Tchicai and South Americans like Gato Barbieri, met Chicago-based experimentalists, who were themselves composed of “midwest” diaspora of musicians hailing from Fort Worth, St. Louis, and other locales; these experimentalists made musical and social contact with an older generation of European expatriates already in Paris and other cosmopolitan spaces, e.g. Don Byas, or musicians who had long experience traveling and working in Europe, e.g. Philly Joe Jones. In this sense, the Paris-Algiers encounters are a striking testimony of artists being both a part of and engaged in aestheticizing their membership in what Lewis calls the “dispersed communities” that constitute African American history.

considerably expand and extend the acoustic registers, and the geopolitical and conceptual terrain, of “free jazz.”

In the months after Algiers, Shepp, Thornton, Moncur, Silva, and Burrell used increasingly varied instrumentations and tonal textures to explore the relationships between avant-garde improvised music and other black American and Afro-diasporic forms. Through varying itineraries the musician delegates returned to Paris, a bustling center of black “outer-national” artistic activity in 1969, with the recent arrival of many members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.<sup>50</sup> Burrell remembered the period of the *Actual* recordings as being intimately related to the Algiers experience. “We were so high off of the experience of playing in Algeria that Paris seemed like dessert after the main course. It was like going to a big party every morning. Who are you going to record with today?”<sup>51</sup>

Malachi Favors and Lester Bowie of the Art Ensemble of Chicago joined Archie Shepp’s group, with master musician and expatriate Philly Joe Jones, for the recording of the album *Blasé* only three weeks after the Algiers performance. The album closes with “Tuareg,” Shepp’s attempt to recapture compositionally the sound of the Algiers performances. Interestingly, rather than literally recreate either the matted, swirling intricacy of the *raïtas* or his own blues shouts he returns to the busy freneticism of his previous avant-garde performances, yet adds several drone sequences to the sonic palette. Grachan Moncur III’s “New Africa” is a hauntingly beautiful meditation on open harmonies in piano and bass that begins in stretched out time and then moves into an almost nostalgic hard bop groove. Clifford Thornton’s “Pan-African Festival,” begins with chanting over a polyrhythmic quartet of drums, congas, and two basses, until Dave Burrell enters on piano playing a two-

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<sup>50</sup> “Outer-national” is Brent Hayes Edwards’ term. See his *The Practice of Diaspora*.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Sisson, “Freedom Summer,” *Stop Smiling* 36. Available online at [http://www.stopsmilingonline.com/story\\_detail.php?id=1137](http://www.stopsmilingonline.com/story_detail.php?id=1137).

chord vamp whose staggered rhythm adds to the dense layers of rhythmic patterns—the horns enter, improvising together to add commentary and complexity. Composition is a prism, filtered through multiple subjectivities that share space and the musical affects that traverse it, but that shared experience of a collective is a translation, and a necessary mistranslation at that, because mental states, like music, have no language and their alignment is a momentary fortuitous alignment that can be neither repeated nor verified. The politics of this sharing of affective alignments, and the politics made sensible by the musical practices that cultivate it, is the topic of the next chapter. Lastly, however, I want to step outside of the framework of the Pan-African Festival and its creative mistranslation into composition and listen, for contrast and for a sense of stakes that traverse and extend the politics of the Festival itself, to Jeanne Lee’s reconstruction of the sensible borders of speech and voice.

“Blasé” is one of the most haunted-sounding pieces in Shepp’s discography, set up by Favors’s ostinato with a slight, minor accent from pianist Dave Burrell.<sup>52</sup> Shepp announces the melody in a thin, warm register, lingering on the final notes of each phrase for long seconds, his tone wavering in a wide, deliberate vibrato (Adorno: “letting the rigid vibrate”). His solo works over the vibrato, now using alternate fingerings to exaggerate the poignant, almost despairing modulation in tone, the rhythm of the vibrato slowing until the note itself has become a kind of parallax, not quite this tone and not that but both. This warm and painfully sad reading of the tune alternates with sonic blasts, somehow both growls and shrieks, which just as quickly subside back into low, breathy vibrato. Its lyrics,

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<sup>52</sup> Archie Shepp, *Blasé*, Recorded August 16, 1969, BYG Actuel 529.318, 1969, 33 1/3 rpm. Two explorations of the jazz canon follow “Blasé”: Lester Bowie and Shepp perform a duet on the traditional “There Is a Balm in Gilead,” a song that Paul Robeson often sang; and a delicate reading of Ellington’s “Sophisticated Lady” follows that. All four tracks feature Jeanne Lee’s versatile and expressive singing; although Shepp often included poetry into his compositions and performances, he did not often perform with a singer prior to 1969, although he would repeatedly in the 1970s. Lee’s addition opens up the arrangements to a broader sonic palette than was typically the case in Shepp’s mid 1960s avant garde recordings.

interpreted masterfully by Jeanne Lee, are an ambivalent (“blasé”) declaration of wounded, but enduring love: “Blasé, ain’t you big daddy/ You, who shot your sperm into me/But never set me free.” Each of Lee’s three articulations of the song’s first line is radically different, expressing a dense emotional knot through an immensely variegated vocal palette. Her performance is literally indescribable, and the manipulation she works on words makes the transcription of lyrics a kind of emotional violence done to the hearing of the recording. To say that some of the lines are spoken and others sung would introduce a dichotomy into what is instead a redistribution of the sensible difference between voice and speech. Recalling that that difference is at the conceptual foundation of politics as such, the redistribution effected by Lee’s voice, which is a seminal example of what Mackey calls “artistic othering,” might contain political potentials that remain unpacked, stored away in the recorded archive, to this day.<sup>53</sup> Lee works in, along, across, and beyond the expected boundaries of song and poetry, foreshadowing the work she would do in the 1970s on an album like *Conspiracy* (1975) that often dispenses with language altogether to focus more exactly on the ability of the human voice, as only a voice, to signify and transmit affect with astonishing precision.<sup>54</sup> Her performance on “Blasé” also recalls a performance with Marion Brown a few months earlier on an album called *In Sommerhausen* (1969), desperate, paranoid, accusatory, and righteous denunciation contained in the phrase “I saw you do it” repeated as a frenetic mantra until the words lose all material but the call, the call to account or to responsibility, the call that forecloses the foreclosure of an other’s humanity. This opening of

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<sup>53</sup> With some exceptions, notably Eric Porter’s important essay “Jeanne Lee’s Voice,” *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 2:1 (2006), which includes a reading of “Blasé,” along with a track from an album she did with Andrew Cyrille and Jimmy Lyons, *Nuba*, Recorded June 1979, Black Saint BSR 0030, 33 1/3 rpm.

<sup>54</sup> Although this project is not interested in processes of creating alternate canons, an exception must be made here for Jeanne Lee, who is comparatively obscure these days when she is clearly, in my view, one of the “major” figures of this music. The lack of attention to Lee (again exceptin Porter) is symptomatic of a larger repression of women from the period and style of “free jazz” who are in fact major figures in composition (Carla Bley), in extending sonic territory (Alice Coltrane), and in instrumental brilliance and styling (Amina Claudine Myers).

dissensus is too powerful to stop at a single context (for instance, the historiography of slavery in the United States) but instead calls out and calls up everyone in hearing, including the (male) musicians, called to account for their spurning of her, their “blasé” use and abuse of her voice and song, and calls to account the whole dense structure of the exclusion of women, not in any one context but as a “foundational” structuring of social relations. The resonances and echoes of her voice throw into radical doubt even the lingering traces of the Algiers performance that were tossed up like drops from a rolling wave into the 1970s, tiny, now almost imperceptible moments where soon we will hear “the world” but in 1969 we might have heard Africa, and not just Africa but the rich and complex history that the Festival’s participants had to exorcize and mobilize in an attempt, one with a profoundly ambiguous legacy, to frame culture and art as the basis for making, sustaining, and building a revolution.



## Chapter Six

### Duos and Neoliberalism

[T]he play of heterologies always has an undecidable aspect to it. It undoes the sensible fabric—a given order of relations between meanings and the visible—and establishes other networks of the sensible, which can possibly corroborate the action undertaken by political subjects to reconfigure what are given to be facts.... The politics of works of art plays itself out to a larger extent—in a global and diffuse manner—in the reconfiguration of worlds of experience based on which police consensus or political dissensus are defined. It plays itself out in the way in which modes of narration or new forms of visibility established by artistic practices enter into politics' own field of aesthetic possibilities. It is necessary to reverse the way in which the problem is generally formulated. It is up to the various forms of politics to appropriate, for their own proper use, the modes of presentation or the means of establishing explanatory sequences produced by artistic practices rather than the other way around.<sup>1</sup>

—Jacques Rancière

#### Flexible Accumulation, Fluxing Ensemble

Neoliberalism is the name that has been given to the settlement of the social conflicts of 1967-1974, and suggests the increasing dominance of market relations in the organization of economic activity and theorization of society as composed of atomized individuals as rational economic actors. The period witnessed a collapse of the possibilities opened up by radical social movements, an emerging cultural dominant of the fear of public space and cross-class interaction, and a reshaping of material relations in the intensification

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, (New York: Continuum, 2006), 64-65.

of class/race segregation and an opening of new rounds of “flexible accumulation.” At the same time neoliberalism is a name for the form of political rule that attended an epochal transformation of the capitalist mode of production; it is the regime that governed post-Fordist or postindustrial or “late” capitalism. The latter terms gloss an economic transformation whose features were theoretically outlined in the 1970s: an expansion of commodification and market exchange to nearly every global space and into the smallest domains of everyday life; the shift of production to low-wage areas and the development of the “global division of labor” along North-South lines; the financialization of capital and the delinking of currency from gold reserves; and the use of shock and austerity measures to leverage crises to open new markets for consumption.

How should we think this conjuncture, which in many ways is also ours, without succumbing to melancholy or despair? After all, this conceptual paradigm outlined above that emerged during the 1970s is showing signs of wear in the conjunctural crisis from which this dissertation is written. “Flexible accumulation” continues apace, one might presume, but is supplemented by the resumption of “primitive accumulation” through imperialist warfare, and the strange dislocation between severe economic crises and the absence (so far) of oppositional political projects that are able effectively to contest a broad spectrum of “neoliberal” assumptions about the relations between marketization and the provision of social goods, the responsiveness of structures of governmentality, and the management of social inequality (assumptions that most everyone outside of economics departments, and many within them, knows are false, but yet they continue to rule). This is of course not the place or the text to think through how to theorize the current crisis, but since I have at various points in the dissertation placed some emphasis on the conjunctural and ideological forces shaping the production of narrative history, it would be remiss not to at least note

that as the project takes up neoliberalism as a trope to think about the 1970s, the emergent structures of rule condensed by that name are today in a state of global crisis and have lost the popular consent (or, in neoliberalism's case, tacit acceptance) without which hegemony becomes simple domination.

That shift to simple domination, naked police power, perhaps in some ways already here or visible on the horizon, would even more strongly recommend further intellectual investigation of the politico-aesthetic resources encoded in black musical production, since as was mentioned in Chapter Two, the apparatus and governing logic that Rancière refers to as “police,” as well as more explicit manifestations of the police power as a disciplining and oppressive force that dispenses with the construction of popular consent, were a constant “condition” of the music's history, as well as an accompaniment to black life in the U.S. more generally. In any case, this chapter is concerned with thinking about neoliberalism as a contingently emergent political economic framework that was unevenly implanted as a form of rule across the 1970s, its policing of the political openings of the previous conjuncture only provisionally secured by the end of the decade (and in certain senses, since neoliberalism also names elite domination matched with consumption as a space of privatized enjoyment, the regime was never hegemonic in the sense that popular consent was effectively removed from the functioning of class rule).

The chapter proposes that the “creative music” of the 1970s, after modernism, after the song form, drawing on the singular compositional languages of each creative musician as well as a “constitutive outside” composed of the entire undifferentiated field of global human music, may suggest some ways of living amid the depoliticization and alienating isolation of neoliberal governmentality. As Rancière suggests, the political valence of the aesthetics of the music's sensibility will not be transparent. Although I discuss some avowed

political commitments expressed by musicians in and out of performance, the politics of the redistributed relations of music and noise, voice and speech, cannot be reduced to a program of agitprop, mobilization, or populism. Instead, the cumulative rippling effect of ephemeral moments, captured and recorded, archived and stockpiled, locked into the commodity form as reified time, have to be unpacked, replayed, and recruited by a political project in order for the eventual scope of new sensory ranges to be known.

There was a radical opening of musical materials to be incorporated into creative music in the wake of the “free jazz” rejection of song form and its recruitment of “world” folk and popular musics as a vehicle to deprovincialize jazz performance. In addition to a dramatically expanded sonic palette and stylistic range, what is especially noticeable about the music of the 1970s is a newly expanded creative flexibility also in the social composition of the ensemble. To explain this, I have to indicate a few comparisons with the 1950s-1960s. The jazz avant-garde had always been characterized by a rethinking of conventions around the make-up of ensembles. The ensemble that gave “free jazz” its marketing label, Ornette Coleman’s 1961 album of that name, was a double quartet, initiating a recurring trope of doubling that can be seen more recently, for example, in Henry Threadgill’s *Very Very Circus* which similarly doubles the trio form against one drummer. Although Coleman was most well-known within a piano-less quartet (and the mobility of the piano, in and out of the ensemble, is another hallmark of after modern jazz), in fact he experimented relentlessly with the shape and composition of ensembles, from the shifting assemblages of his *Science Fiction* (1971) to his symphonic music for full orchestra accompanying his saxophone on the celebrated and challenging *Skies of America* (1972) to the later Prime Time funk bands.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, Coleman also has a well-known story of transnational musical exchange that can be seen as connected to ensemblic experimentation, in his famous collaboration with the Moroccan “Master Musicians of Jajouka,” who directly inspired what is perhaps the most generative archival recording of “free funk,” *Dancing in*

Nevertheless, aside from John Coltrane's larger groups put together for *Africa/Brass* (1961) and *Ascension* (1965), and several other exceptions, the jazz soundscape of the 1960s was for the most part dominated by the traditional quartets and quintets of bop and post-bop. Of course larger ensembles were more possible the more resources an experimentalist could draw together—Albert Ayler's oft-maligned but fascinating late work found him assembling varied, often quite large groups, to experiment with “fusing” popular musics and jazz.

There were also experiments taking place among the regional avant-gardes. Even more so on the economic margins, experimentalists were finding ways to make music without a drummer, without a rhythm section, or without anyone else. Milford Graves and Don Pullen, for example recorded together as a duo in 1965. The most far-reaching experiments in ensemblic form in the mid-1960s took place among the loose grouping of musicians who flowed in and out of Muhal Richard Abrams's Experimental Band, the cohort of Chicago musicians who would become the core founding members of the AACM. The collective was organized to support members' development of compositional projects and compositional languages—to encourage this process, members developed solo languages for performance and early recordings and solo concerts have ever since been a key component of AACM music (an early classic example is Anthony Braxton's *For Alto* [1968], but Abrams, Roscoe Mitchell, and Amina Claudine Myers, among others are also notable solo performers). Braxton together with Leo Smith, Leroy Jenkins, and Steve McCall formed an ensemble without any “harmonic” instruments (i.e. bass or piano).

By the 1970s the conventions of what constituted a jazz ensemble were radically dislocated, and the decade witnessed a prolific period of experimentation with solos, duos, and ambitious large-group projects. In order to think through the implications of this

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*Your Head*, (1977). On Coleman's interaction with the Moroccans, see Brian T. Edwards, *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America's Magrheb, From Casablanca to the Marrakech Express* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

transformation, this chapter will focus on the duo form, not exclusively, but as an entry point into theorizing ensemble in the 1970s as a context for developing musical, creative, economic, and (latent, oblique) political strategies for living with, and living under, the gradually emerging regime whose consolidation eventually put paid to the dreams of social transformation that had animated the conjuncture of “1968.”

The duo, as a form, is probably as old as music itself. Like many things in jazz, however, the history of duets has a mythic origin. In 1928 Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines recorded “Weather Bird,” which has been an object of intense interest for jazz aficionados ever since. In my earlier discussion of this recording, I emphasized what I heard as a moment of extreme, disorienting modernism in Hines’s rhythmic break. The performance as a whole is often thought to be a particularly rich and delightful example of improvisation as friendly competition. As jazz historian Jeffrey Taylor writes,

The mischievous sense of fun heard on their recordings, as well as the almost telepathic connection, is no doubt due in part to [their] strong personal attachment. And, of particular importance to spontaneous creations such as ‘Weather Bird,’ their familiarity most likely carried over into wordless communication: after spending long hours in each other’s company, they probably could interact through both musical *and* visual signals, guiding an improvised performance through gestures, facial expressions, body language, and other cues.

The trope of “wordless communication” as a sign of intimate friendship is an apt symbol for this chapter, and while it does not seem surprising that professional musicians who performed nearly every day would communicate with visual signals, the sense Taylor conveys of a special familiarity or telepathy catching those signals seems apposite. On the other hand, another jazz historian, William Kenney writes about the same record, “On the out-chorus on ‘Weather Bird,’ Armstrong or Hines called out or responded to solo figures which seemed to unfold in conversational dialogues. The empathy and sensitivity required to complement one another were enriched by their ability instantly to seize and creatively

extend each other's solo lines." Both historians were fascinated by the uncanny knowledge the two musicians had of each other's practice, but they employ different metaphors to comprehend the implicit communication in and around the performance. For Taylor, it is the wordless dimension of the two men's physicality and embodiment that fascinates, whereas for Kenney it is the music's emulation of friendly conversation. The tension between these two views of an ineffable interaction of sonic elements will be unpacked later in the chapter.<sup>3</sup>

Taylor notes that "Weather Bird" sat in the vaults for two years—duet recordings were highly unusual in the 1920s and the OKeh company seems to have been unsure whether it would be a profitable experiment. And indeed until the 1970s duo performances were neither unheard of nor particularly prominent. Duke Ellington composed a few duets for piano and bass, and in the 1940s Sidney Bechet recorded duets with cornet player Muggsy Spanier. Charles Mingus recorded with several of his regular band members, and very significantly for the rest of the chapter, when Ornette Coleman met Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins in 1958 Los Angeles they were performing as a duet.<sup>4</sup>

After this sparse history, in the mid-1970s the duo became, very quickly, one of the most prominent ensemble forms in "post-jazz" creative music. The dramatic expansion of duos in the 1970s was intimately related to shifts in the political economy of cultural production, although it also had far-reaching aesthetico-political implications as we will see. In a very practical sense, the duo was a useful ensemble form to learn and practice. Creative musicians under neoliberalism have in many cases had to adopt a near-permanent peripateticism as a matter of economic survival; the duo form is useful when meetings

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Taylor, "Louis Armstrong, Earl Hines, and 'Weather Bird,'" *Musical Quarterly* 82:1 (Spring, 1998): 1-40, 7. William Howland Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 139-140.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 96, 44, 225-26; Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz* (London: Continuum, 2008), 791.

between musicians are fleeting and temporary, but requires the development of a shared idiom of communicative give and take. Conditions were such that at times musicians could go months or years without seeing one another, then arrive at a festival or concert, meet up and play a set together that night, before once again parting and traveling in different directions. Duos are a material crossroads in the itinerant musician's life under the globalized political economy of neoliberal jazz performance, where festivals or tours in Europe and Asia separated by thousands of miles provided more regular work than any other context, even the erstwhile "capital" of jazz, New York City. Duos were also a metaphorical or speculative crossroads, a space in which to catch up and share a philosophical dialogue, to decide together where to go next, in dissensus and debate resolved through the extended working through of (aesthetic, affective) differences. Therefore duos are interesting both as an accommodation to neoliberalism and as theoretical meditations on ways out of it, ways of escaping the isolation that can be one consequence of the market saturation of lived experience, by inventing shared musical forms that explore and model ways of being-together.

#### "Jazz Discourse" and the Problem of Audience, Reprise

Jazz writers and historiographers often treat the period after 1970 as a holding period between the radicalism of the 1960s and the neoclassical resurgence. The aporia of the 1970s is filled in by suggestions of epigonality: the extension of "free" playing reaching a critical aesthetic impasse, defined affectively by boredom or ennui. Jazz was no longer an influential artistic medium, and only was revived by its transformation into the renovation of tradition in the form of nostalgic reverence. The deaths of John Coltrane (1967) and Albert Ayler



(1970), not to mention the passing a few years later of Louis Armstrong (1971) and Duke Ellington (1974), seemed to introduce a profound discontinuity that waited to be creatively sutured much later in a form of remembered inheritance by Wynton Marsalis and his New Orleans-New York traditionalist comrades. Moreover, market forces take on a leading role in narratives of 1970s jazz: a great many denunciations or critiques of fusion take as their starting point a mysterious “migration” of audiences away from jazz and towards pop, rock, and jazz-rock hybrids.

Particularly disconcerting are the lazy and essentialist generalizations about the “white” and “black” markets that show up surprisingly often in narrative attempts to gloss the 1970s. Supposedly, black markets migrated away from jazz and towards R&B, while white audiences who had long sustained jazz were turned off by racial militancy. The pop music market as an aggregate grew tired of jazz in favor of the “new” sounds of rock.<sup>5</sup> Available evidence to make empirical claims about race and audience is spotty at best, and certainly not strong enough to make such generalizations, even if they were not theoretically suspicious on a number of levels. What data there is suggests a general trend: African

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<sup>5</sup> The novelty of rock is marked out in this way not to suggest that it wasn't new in some respects. Certainly the Beatles, and many others, were significant musical innovators in song construction, use of studio technologies, etc. Yet it is always worth keeping in mind the musical beginnings of groups like Cream or the Rolling Stones. Whereas Paul McCartney always dreamed of being a pop-style “crooner,” the latter musicians began firmly within the “tradition” of jazz and blues. Although virtuoso musicians and brilliant performers, from a certain point of view it was the *rock* musicians who were the epigones, but they had the advantage of immense capital investment and market saturation to guarantee their (collective) success. Less charitably, we might reverse LeRoi Jones's epithet, “who are these ofays who appointed themselves guardians of yesterday's blues,” and say, “who is trying to push yesterday's blues as if it were something new?” But, however tempting such a move would be as a reversal of a habituated colonial thinking about creation, innovation, and social reward, a discourse of cultural ownership ultimately falls into some of the same traps of racial homogeneity it is attempting to dismantle and replace. Perhaps it is more productive to return again to Nathaniel Mackey's maxim, adopted from a 19<sup>th</sup> century anxiety about the integrity of an American national culture in the face of minstrelsy's popularity and evident authenticity: in rock, once again, the furthest reaches of Anglo-Saxondom are “ruled” by the Negro poets from afar; Anglo-Saxondom exists in a state of unknowing epigonality, while the “Negro farmer” simply turns his hoe (echoes of Wittgenstein and Cavell), each ignorant of the other's predicament and secretly in thrall to a belief that contradicts the established order of racial things. The resulting exchanges, blurring, and deformations of identity open up more creative possibilities, and are ultimately more interesting, than the static black/white “stalled dialectic” that continues to be reproduced in certain sectors of jazz historiography. Jones, *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow, 1967). For Cream as a jazz group, see Shipton, *Jazz*, 852-54.

Americans in the 1980s attended jazz events at a significantly higher proportional rate than whites.<sup>6</sup> While there is no doubt that many fusion records were wildly popular, the introduction of the market at this point in the narrative strikes one at times as a *deus ex machina*. Jazz had not been a popular music, in the national-popular sense, since at least 1950, and although in an absolute sense more jazz records were sold in the 1950s than any previous decade, even then the market share the genre commanded was in relative decline (of course this account assumes it is valid to use “jazz” to compare big bands qua mass culture and post-bop qua differentiated market segment). Moreover markets and capitalist forces had certainly profoundly shaped “jazz” since its inception (since, after all, jazz as a historical phenomenon is so intimately bound up with recordings as commodities). So why do capitalist forces, and various musicians’ supposed capitulation to, or accommodation of them, suddenly make an appearance as a primary actor just at the moment when new ideologies were reframing wide sectors of social thought, posing the market as a rational, autonomous actor that produced social goods?

The implication, sometimes explicitly made but often subtly woven into market-based narratives, that aesthetic or formal developments—creative agency along the historical progression from bebop to the various historical instances of jazz modernism and postmodernism—had a causal relationship to jazz’s market performance as a genre in the end reifies exactly those relations it ought to be examining. The thesis that the avant-garde turn in jazz caused the economic decline of other styles gives at once too much and too little credit to the powers of individuals or groups of artists to shape a generic identity or generic narrative. Chapter Three examined a specific effort—Archie Shepp’s claim that jazz was a music expressing historical black struggles, and his framing of the jazz business in terms of

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<sup>6</sup> Scott DeVeaux, *Jazz in America: Who’s Listening?* (Seven Locks, 1996).

“neo-slavery”—to hegemonize the jazz category from a vanguardist point of view. Implicit in that account was that Shepp’s project was idiosyncratic, not to be conflated with the avant-garde or black nationalism as such. While the articulation of his project, especially in musical performance, was hardly singular or individual, but made in the context of passing aesthetic and political alliances, it cannot encompass or on its own frame a musico-cultural narrative. The thesis that the media or critical identification of jazz with its vanguardist left wing alienated a populist audience tends to reify the marketing categories—such as “jazz” itself—that are the product of forces far larger than the creative act or performance of any musician, or even a generation of musicians; it also downplays the stylistic differences, not least along the spectrum of “free jazz” that resisted narrative totalization.

On the other hand, the defense of jazz (post)modernist aesthetic practices against their market fundamentalist detractors may run an opposing risk of reifying the “exterior” market conditions facing jazz musicians in the 1960s, especially the rise in popularity and capitalization of rock music. In his excellent recent analysis of Bill Dixon and the Jazz Composers Guild, musicologist Benjamin Pickut, for example, contrasts the economic context for the modernist innovators of bebop, in the 1940s, with the experiences of Dixon, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor a generation later:

While the innovations of bebop had eventually been reified into a commercial and even predictable genre, the New Thing never gained traction in the jazz marketplace. Much had changed since 1940, but while bebop had never been a popular music per se, it did not have to contend with the juggernaut of 1960s youth culture and its exploding popular music economy. In this rapidly changing landscape, even mainstream jazz was struggling to survive financially. Nor did New Thing composers have the success of high-profile experimental composers, such as John Cage and his associates, who were more adept at defining alternative sites of musical production and gaining institutional support for their projects. For the New Thing composers, this comparative lack of support was due largely to a set of associations that linked

black music with commodification and entertainment, the discursive opposites of “serious” high culture.<sup>7</sup>

We can take this account as a compelling statement of the current common sense in the practice of jazz history, including the routinized explanation of the causality that transformed postwar jazz from a putative national-popular to a post-nationalist eccentric epigone: caught between, on the one hand, economic and mass cultural factors (“exploding youth culture”), and on the other a residual racial discourse (“a set of associations”) that had yet to assimilate the value of jazz into the supra-economic realm of subsidized high culture, jazz practitioners were themselves blameless except for a historically overdetermined discrepancy between avant-garde “jazz” artists and “high-profile” composers like Cage in their abilities to navigate and exploit the networks of artistic patronage. The discrepancy between musicians like Dixon and Cage had less to do, perhaps, with relative diplomacy skills and more to do with the continuing investment of the category jazz with racial inequalities. Academic composers, especially famous ones like Cage, had access to grants and commissions only a fraction of which were available to composers carrying the “jazz” label even many years later.

Once again I’m focusing on Piekut’s essay because it is a particularly excellent representative of recent historical writing on this period of jazz, but it also expresses a common sense in jazz historiography that, like other tendencies I’ve questioned—the ideological bracketing of Adorno’s jazz essays, for instance—silently depends on a notion that “jazz” is a name for some actually existing thing, a bounded or coherent musical tradition, when in fact it is an empty signifier waiting to be filled in by a hegemonic formation. To construct a narrative about how economic forces outside of jazz caused “it” to decline across stylistic differences (which would likely involve significant differences in

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Piekut, “Race, Community, and Conflict in the Jazz Composers Guild,” *Jazz Perspectives*, December 2009, 191-231, 191.

audience constituency) is to accept the marketing label that aligns those differences into a genre category as an acceptable musicological or historical frame. Jazz is a container, and particularly under neoliberalism that container has been a logical contradiction only sensible, ultimately, in its market connotations. The power of such categories to rigidify the boundaries of musical analysis and history is staggering. For two examples: Cage's relative access to material resources "outside" the commercial market (but really inside the philanthropic, corporate, and state structures which are more or less opened to market forces) has been neatly repeated in the relative scope and visibility of academic scholarship on Cage since the 1980s compared to scholarship on composers like Dixon, and has helped to frame a musicological and historical discourse where each is isolated from the other (Piekut, it must be noted, especially in his new book *Experimentalism Otherwise*, is among those working against this separation).<sup>8</sup> Second, this dissertation, in all its efforts to provoke an immanent critique of the work of the jazz category, operates for the most part within the frame of jazz, pausing to note the fugitive movements of the music outside the category, noting its instability and challenges to it as a frame, but taking up an archive and a discourse and a set of naming conventions that, despite the articulated desires of musicians, and in contrast to Piekut's work, are framed by a relatively conventional bracketing of jazz from other musics.

One final note about the "common sense" of current jazz history writing. In the quote above, note how the passage's admirable verve to avoid blaming the aesthetic practices of Coleman, Taylor, and so on, for the shift in audience tastes away from "jazz," renders their aesthetics at least potentially irrelevant: when economic difficulties caused by extra-generic market forces affect, in different ways, not only experimenters like Taylor and

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<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

Coleman, but also “mainstream” post-boppers like Donald Byrd or Pepper Adams, and even celebrated masters like Duke Ellington, are not aesthetics reducible either to subjective taste, or to roughly comparable but unevenly successful strategies to gain shrinking market share? Thus the argument, sensitive to economic context, that aesthetic (post)modernism cannot be blamed for the erosion of the jazz audience, like the “ironic” argument that the effort to create a politicized black populism founded on the need to appeal to (white) modernist formalisms and funding streams (Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*), conceals a shared view of cultural expression/aesthetics as ultimately addressed to market forces or the legitimating power of the state. What if, however, an understanding of U.S. black experimental musical cultures of the 1960s and 1970s can only be premised on the ways they, both in economic and aesthetic/formal terms, were attempting to refuse the dictates of market fundamentalism?

### Periodizing Duo Performance

A number of fine threads connect the narratives of jazz historiography to the emergence and increasingly hegemonic role of neoliberalism. The duo as ensemblic form can be considered in an effort both to untangle these threads and to conceptualize musicians’ resistance to them as creative intellectuals, social thinkers, composers, and performers. By no means do I mean to suggest that duos were the most prevalent, or most important, type of ensemble during the 1970s, and it is important to note many other kinds of ensembles as well, from solos to large orchestras. But in the striking number of duo performances and records in the mid to late 1970s, a flourishing of the form unique in the history of creative music, we can find a way of hearing what had changed in the 1970s, and how resistance

might still be possible in the wake of the collapse of the radical social movements of 1967-1974. Moreover, duos, in their implicit stylization and theorization of musical dialogics, offer a way of thinking about the mutations of the ensemble more generally. The 1970s explosion of duo performances had a number of precursors that will be discussed later in the chapter, but three albums from the 1960s must be cited as particularly important precursors at the opening of the dissensus that was roughly and imperfectly closed during the 1970s: Milford Graves and Don Pullen's *Nommo* (1967), John Coltrane and Rashied Ali's *Interstellar Space* (1967), and Don Cherry and Ed Blackwell's *Mu* (1969).<sup>9</sup> Each of these albums in different ways set the stage for the explosion of interest in the duo form during the 1970s. What narrative and political contexts can help to explain this resurgence?

“Up until the 1970s,” writes journalist and popular historian Alyn Shipton, “the story of jazz is a straightforward narrative.... But in one fell swoop, all that changed, with the birth of the ‘information age.’”<sup>10</sup> For him, the postmodernity of the 1970s entailed a fracturing of Eliotic tradition, loss of the living memory of the past recovered through arduous study; according to Shipton's narrative, the Miles Davis electric bands, whose members were so important in creating the major fusion bands of the 1970s, were the last great example of the organic transmission of knowledge between generations within the genre. He continues, “From that decade onwards, a jazz musician's life became increasingly fragmented, often working with several groups at around the same time, wherever the work came from....”<sup>11</sup> While this is an accurate description of the working situation for many musicians in the early 1970s, it differed from other periods more in degree than in kind. The life of a “jazz”

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<sup>9</sup> Milford Graves & Don Pullen, *Nommo*, Recorded live at Yale University, SRP 290, 1967, 33 1/3 rpm; John Coltrane, *Interstellar Space*, Recorded February 22, 1967, Impulse! GRD-110, 1991, compact disc; Don Cherry, “*Mu*” *First Part*, Recorded August 22, 1969, BYG Actuel 529.301, 1969, 33 1/3 rpm; Cherry, “*Mu*” *Second Part*, Recorded August 22, 1969, BYG Actuel 529.331, 1969, 33 1/3 rpm.

<sup>10</sup> Alyn Shipton, *Jazz: A New History*, 873.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

musician has for the most part been an economically precarious one, especially in the mid-twentieth-century United States.

The mythology surrounding the brief association between Earl Hines and Louis Armstrong in 1925-29 can be considered a case in point; at that point in their careers, both “masters” were hard-scrabbling working musicians who took jobs where they could get them, tossing off a few recording sessions here and there for going out money. The very few records they made together are as canonical as any recordings in jazz history, but their encounter was short-lived. Hines took over the job of leading the band (which he called an “Organization”) at the gangster-run Prohibition palace, the Grand Terrace Café in Chicago, while Armstrong went to New York, also in search of opportunities (he played in the all-black Andy Razaf and Fats Waller revue *Hot Chocolate*, where he first performed Waller’s “Ain’t Misbehavin”).<sup>12</sup> Both men were shrewd observers of the social and economic conditions of their times, and were considered “symbolic hero[es]” of the Chicago scene by their peers.<sup>13</sup>

Long-term, financially secure ensembles—like the Ellington touring bands, Charles Mingus’s Jazz Workshop groups, or Miles Davis’s classic groups from 1955-1975—have

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<sup>12</sup> In an early example of the formation of collectives and mutual solidarity among musicians, Hines and Armstrong, along with drummer Zutty Singleton, apparently made an agreement to agree to jobs only if they were offered to all three musicians, Hines calling it “The Unholy Three.” This effort, and its evidently short-lived existence, presage later musicians’ collectives and the contradictions they struggled with, especially the Jazz Composers Guild. See chapter three and Benjamin Pickut, “Race, Gender, and Community in the JCG.” For the “Unholy Three,” see Stanley Dance, *The World of Earl Hines* (New York: Scribner, 1977), 53-54. On Armstrong in *Hot Chocolate*, see James Lincoln Collier, *Louis Armstrong: An American Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 211-214. William Maxwell points out that *Hot Chocolate* also produced Razaf’s radical lyrics to “Black and Blue,” another tune intimately connected with Armstrong, and echoed in the famous passages in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952). Maxwell proposes that the invisibility of Razaf in Ellison’s novel, the editing of his “wickedly punning” and gendered lyrics by both Armstrong and Ellison, and the general forgetting of Razaf in cultural history, is part of a wider forgetting of the context of black anticapitalism in 1920s Harlem. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 13-62, 15.

<sup>13</sup> William Howland Kenney, *Chicago Jazz*, 163-64. Ironically, considering his later lamentation of the decline of direct contact with the “masters” in post-70s generations of jazz musicians, Shipton celebrates Hines’s artistic development for occurring “in isolation, away from a group of fellow pianists,” which in his view allowed him to develop a unique, rhythmically inventive and melodic style that was a progressive move away from stride piano. *Jazz*, 184.



been relatively rare in jazz. And as we have seen, the early avant-garde musicians were for the most part completely shut out from the club economy, by necessity and with social purpose creating their own unevenly successful independent and relatively autonomous forms of economic organization and performance spaces.

By the late 1960s there had been a profound spatial dislocation of the economic infrastructure that supported jazz performance on an everyday level. This shift was simultaneously material and imaginary, as it involved the space of the nightclub, which was both the site of a political economy (one that was usually marginal, often exploitative, and occasionally dangerous) and was a palimpsest for the playing out of imaginary desires and conflicts. The American nightclub as the “classic” site for jazz was constructed differently at different moments and in contradictory ways by the antagonistic social formations that encountered each other there. In imaginary terms, the nightclub involved a strange suspension of the moral conventions and expectations that obtained elsewhere. Since the “Jazz Age” it was an iconic space where elites and bourgeois transgressed the moralities they enforced on the whole society during the day. Nightclubs were intensely regulated and were part of the inspiration for the adoption of modern municipal zoning, which was partly designed to create safeguards to keep nightclubs contained and segregated, making fine distinctions between spaces where African Americans were only admitted as performers to entertain white-only audiences, spaces reserved for black people where non-blacks were nevertheless “free” to come slumming (free from most legal and police harassment, although in practice there existed informal distinctions in Harlem and elsewhere between black spaces and spaces where slumming was likely to occur), and finally the so-called “Black and Tan” spaces of interracial mingling, which arguably provoked the most anxiety among regulators and police agents. Michael Denning describes the politicized interracial space of Café Society

as a key institution of the Popular Front, the site of Billie Holiday's performance of "Strange Fruit" and also an aspect of the left-wing recruitment of jazz, briefly, as the "music of the CIO." The war introduced profound dislocations in the nightclub economy, not least inducing an economic crisis within swing music that contributed to the irruption of bebop from a music created in the after hours gatherings among musicians (there is a mythic-imaginary element to this, famously critiqued by Ralph Ellison, but the social history of bebop suggested the diverse importance of the nightclub for the music's emergence).<sup>14</sup>

In the postwar period, the nightclub, which had once been the subject of a moral crisis, was advertised in the middlebrow press as a safe, unthreatening experience of a simulacrum of urban life for the growing suburban class. Another moral panic, this time around heroin and jazz, however, revealed the contradictions of the promotion of the nightclub as an alternative to the cinema for bourgeois urban tourists. Increasingly, jazz (as we know it!) found smaller and smaller purchase in the nightclub economy, as nightclubs increasingly courted an audience for whom safety, comfort, and familiarity were watchwords. The contradictory imaginary of the nightclub as a site condensing desire, fear, and nostalgia was connected to an environmentalist, functionalist, and behavior social science and policy discourse that saw moral problems as the product of the deterioration of the built environment. Even as the threat and danger of the nightclub was discursively and materially sanitized in the large postwar non-jazz bourgeois palaces, black business districts became the explicit targets of urban renewal and highway construction. Many of the clubs in black neighborhoods had both nurtured the musical practices of musicians, especially outside of the competitive environment of Manhattan, and allowed musicians to make social and

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<sup>14</sup> On clubs and cabarets, see Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, and Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). On zoning see Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Denning, *Cultural Front*.

aesthetic connections to the needs and desires of black audiences. These were displaced en masse when not simply destroyed in the remaking of the metropolitan built environment to eliminate, or at least conceal, “blight.” This process took place, in many local contexts, with the full participation of black elites, who shared the “environmental” belief in a connection among crime and vice, music and dance, and the condition of the built environment.

Destruction of marginal and policed entertainment zones, and the construction of public works projects like highways in their place satisfied the interests of both black and white elites.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, since jazz, especially post-bop, had less and less purchase on the large mainstream nightclubs, there emerged a specific “genre” of nightclub that catered to jazz audiences that gradually developed new performance conventions, and allowed relatively more creative autonomy to musicians based on a generic discourse that valorized (some might say fetishized) the famous musicians as spectacular natural geniuses. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the relatively small number of nightclubs that catered to jazz in New York, for instance, were being supplemented by the appropriation of ad hoc performance spaces such as lofts, coffee shops, squats, and even streets, parks, and (as legend has it) at least one bridge. The deteriorating club economy intensified the informality and exploitation of the few remaining jazz places, and competition for gigs grew apace. The ideological rejection of

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<sup>15</sup> Historian Nathan Connolly in particular highlights the agency of Miami’s local black leaders in reshaping the built environment. His study’s findings might turn out to have general resonance for the U.S. context. Nathan Connolly, “By Eminent Domain: Race and Capital in the Building of an American South Florida,” PhD dissertation, (University of Michigan, History, 2008). My own work in the context of Detroit cannot compare in terms of its excavation of political and policy histories through archival research, but in my search for discursive sites where nightlife was represented, it emerged that the African American *Michigan Chronicle* was crucial in the construction of an imaginary of Paradise Valley as a space of moral, sexual, and physical danger. The nightlife zone and its denizens were also depicted as scapegoats for the “image problem” of the black community as a whole. From the point of view of the *Chronicle*, Paradise Valley was often a symbol of and lightning rod for white racism. This view was maintained in tension with celebrations of the “name” musicians and performers who passed through the area, performing in the very zone that otherwise represented “blight,” vice, and moral disorder. Maclean, “Imagining Paradise Valley: the Informal Economy, Gendered Spaces of Nightlife, and the Politics of Black Culture in World War II Detroit,” (unpublished seminar paper, 2003).

clubs, the argument that they were not appropriate or respectful places to exhibit the music, emerged in the 1960s in the context of the erosion of the built environments of jazz performance. Yet the critique of the association of alcohol and the music's performance, which had been so habituated as to be nearly invisible, aligned with emerging black nationalist imperatives. By the time the nightclub economy collapsed in the late 1960s, it had already been rejected by many musicians as corrupted by the dense network of negative associations it carried.

The emergence of new ensemblic forms in the 1970s was intimately connected to the transformation of the built environment that is loosely sketched here: there were ideological reasons to reject the nightclubs, but at the same time, if working in the club economy is not the goal of forming an ensemble, there is no need for a leader to negotiate with the club owners and managers, and ensembles no longer had to keep to more or less stable and familiar forms. Moreover, economic necessity drove the same change from the other direction, making ensemble more informal and ad hoc and therefore promoting the development of skills in listening and reacting ("speaking" musically) simultaneously.

This summary could continue, but it should emphasize two points: first, the deep and overlapping connections between a material history of the metropolitan urban space and the emergence of stylistic changes in music—this is not a "determining" relationship in the way that term is often deployed as meaning a denial of creative agency, but in fact an ongoing creative engagement with and anticipation of a material context in dramatic flux. Second, that the nostalgia that currently dominates ideas of jazz, concatenated onto the mythic space of the nightclub as the romantic wellspring of virtuosity, is a properly catechistic nostalgia—a nostalgia for a space that never precisely existed, a cleansed and mystified space where all antagonism has disappeared. The spatial context of the nightclub as

a built environment was in fact cross-cut by multiple social antagonisms that constantly cut into the music—not as a constraint to a romantic, limitless autonomous creativity but as a cut into the music, the nightclub being a key point where social antagonism cut into the improvisations of (say, bebop) musicians and influenced or intensified their rhythmic density, urgency, or harmonic bravado.

Therefore, duos (re)emerge at a moment (c. 1967) when that contradictory, ambiguous, and antagonistic space of the nightclub can no longer adequately support musical research, however attenuated the latter was for most musicians in the club economy. And they multiply enormously not immediately after the disintegration of the club economy but several years later (c. 1975), at a moment when the spatial dislocations caused by the disappearance of the club economy and the evaporation of many recording opportunities has settled back into a relatively but not completely stable situation, especially with the renewal of lofts as an alternative site for the music, and for many musicians new recording opportunities were available beginning in the mid-1970s as smaller labels proliferated.

If, for Adorno's aesthetic theory, it is the artwork's encoding of social antagonism that gives it power as art, perhaps the duo form, as the post-nightclub improvisatory form par excellence, as a friendly meeting of musical colleagues, drains the antagonism out of the object. Such a view would depend on a relatively narrow situational reading of how artworks are determined even through the singular creative agency of the artist. It is also necessary to consider a political history context to think the mid-1970s flourishing of the duo form.

Social, cultural, and labor historians have recently recalled the ways that the period 1972-1974 marked a crucial discontinuity in a broad swatch of social life, in the U.S. and across the world. For Jefferson Cowie, these were “the last days of the American working class.” The late 1960s and early 1970s were a mostly-forgotten period of labor militancy in

the U.S.; a strike wave in 1970 was the largest in U.S. history since the postwar strikes in 1946, and the last major resurgence of union militancy to date. The 1972 presidential election exposed the fault lines in the Democratic Party, as union leaders backed “their man” Hubert Humphrey against the coalition of “freaks,” leftists, students, feminists and anti-war activists that supported McGovern.<sup>16</sup> There was exposed a huge divide between the traditional Democratic-liberal leadership of working class constituencies and the rank and file. Hopes for radical coalitions, the merging of “Soul Power and Union Power,” or a broad reconciliation of the various elements of the anti-Vietnam war movement in order to win electoral power, a progressive majority that combined feminists, freaks, hard hats, students, as well as black and brown militants—all these dreams began to come apart by the mid 1970s. The 1974 election of the first wave of “New” Democrats might be seen as a mythic origin point for what theorists and historians now describe as “neoliberalism.” The “liberal” post-Nixon Congress was socially liberal (and, crucially, tried to reign in the worst excesses of U.S. imperialism, the intelligence and corporate-directed clandestine wars against anti-colonial nationalism around the world), but it could find no fiscal or social policy solution to the persistence of unemployment and inflation. It entirely failed to mobilize the working classes or create a policy- and class-based constituency that would combat the continual resurgence of ethno-nationalist competition and racism. Since the mid-1970s both major political parties in the United States have been firmly committed to the idea that markets were an ethic to themselves, that markets would produce social goods naturally with minimum interference from the state or the actions of liberationist social movements. There

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<sup>16</sup> Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the American Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010). For a sympathetic description of McGovern's supporters as a coalition of “freaks,” see Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* (New York: Grand Central, 2006 [1973]). Thompson presents a vivid, at times hallucinatory, but meticulous picture of the splits within the Democratic party between established union bureaucracies and new constituencies, as well as an implicit argument that McGovern's failure to mobilize those constituencies *against* established powers across lines of race, gender, and culture was one key to his defeat.

were and remain many tactical disagreements, of course—for example, most “New” Democrats could not support, at least openly, what David Harvey calls “the first experiment in neoliberal state formation,” the 11 September 1973 ITT- and CIA-engineered, and Kissinger-approved, overthrow of Salvador Allende and the installation of Augusto Pinochet—but by the mid 1970s the Democratic Party had capitulated to market orthodoxy to the extent that no serious social equality legislation was even proposed to sustain and extend the securities (and constituencies) created by the New Deal and Great Society.<sup>17</sup>

The victory of the Right was, however, neither immediate nor total. In most cultural historical accounts, the second half of the 1970s is seen as a period of exhaustion, confusion, insularity, and even that approbation wrongly attributed to President Jimmy Carter, malaise.<sup>18</sup> Conservative movements in the 1970s consolidated and concentrated power in newly established think tanks that gradually marshaled influence and resources and opened a war of position against liberal public policy across the spectrum of government; in the 1980s these new institutions began to take a central role in shaping policy debates and public discourse. Meanwhile, grassroots tax revolts announced in the late 1970s not only the persistence of the ground organization developed for the Goldwater campaign in 1964, but a new resurgence of a rightist politics spatially located in the sprawling suburbs and exurbs that had absorbed the new waves of white migration that followed the conflicts over busing and desegregation in the early 1970s. The Carter administration disappointed leftists and liberals in its failure to

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<sup>17</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Beth Bailey refers to the U.S. people as being gripped by “malaise” in the introduction to her and David Farber’s illuminating collection of essays, *America in the 70s* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 2. Carter’s televised speech in the summer of 1979 is often referred to as the “malaise” speech but he did not use the word in it, rather speaking of a “crisis of confidence” that threatened traditional values because faith in family, neighbor, and God, as well as respect for state leadership, had been replaced the “worship [of] self-indulgence and consumption.” The text of the speech is available from the Carter Center: [http://www.cartercenter.org/news/editorials\\_speeches/crisis\\_of\\_confidence.html](http://www.cartercenter.org/news/editorials_speeches/crisis_of_confidence.html) It is interesting to note that in this, Carter was partially echoing such cultural critics as Tom Wolfe and Christopher Lasch. Wolfe famously described the 1970s as the “Me Decade,” castigating the apparent self-regard of Americans.

address economic inequality and its pursuit of intensified Cold War conflict in Southwest Africa and Central Asia. While the new political formations of the right, in tentative alliance with corporate capital and Christian conservative organizations, would eventually come to exert a dominating influence on policy and public debate, it is important to keep in mind that in the mid-1970s the fate of the political openings of the 1960s was uncertain, radical change increasingly unlikely but in the absence of a new hegemony. The 1970s were a period of deep uncertainty, and cultural politics proceeded in contradictory directions. In the performance spaces and within the economic apparatuses of cultural production in the 1970s, an imagination of the future was up for grabs even as it must have felt increasingly elusive. Musicians who had experienced the conjuncture of 1968 as a period of elation and enthusiastic experimentation sought ways to preserve and sustain the musical production and the political hopes of the moment. One of the key forums in which to reflect on the subjective legacies of the 1960s was the duo form, and one of its most prominent practitioners was bassist Charlie Haden.

### Liberation Music in the 1970s

Charlie Haden's *Liberation Music Orchestra* (1969) is one of the great "documents" of the "1968" conjuncture in the sonic archive, and arguably one of the most important works of art of the 1960s. It was a large ensemble of some of the best musicians of "free jazz" and as an album had a dramatic structure that was unusual for jazz: It also drew on musical resources that had rarely been taken up before, especially the songs of the Spanish Civil War that composer Carla Bley arranged for the group. Bley also wrote music for an intro, intermezzo, and interlude, giving the album's collection of radical nostalgia a narrative or



operatic sweep. In fact, Bley and Haden should be considered “co-authors” of the album, Bley writing most of the first side, and Haden the second (which also had a piece written by Ornette Coleman). The album constructs a wide temporal and international field of music-making as “liberation music,” juxtaposing memories of the Popular Front with an elegy for Che Guevara. In addition to the latter composition, “Song For Che,” Haden composed “Circus ’68 ‘69” for the album, which sonically recreated and sublimated an event that occurred amid the violence and political disappointment of the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention. On the convention floor, after the withdrawal of a civil rights plank from the platform, delegates began singing the movement anthem “We Shall Overcome” when the marching band was instructed to play to drown them out. Haden’s composition reversed the sequence, beginning with a cacophonous discord that is overpowered by an instrumental rendition of the anthem (carried by Roswell Rudd’s brilliant trombone solo).<sup>19</sup>

Haden’s other composition, “Song For Che,” itself became a kind of subterranean movement song in the 1970s. Playing in Lisbon with the Ornette Coleman (Dewey Redman, Ed Blackwell) quartet in 1971, Haden dedicated the performance to “the black people’s liberation movements of Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea”; the next day he was arrested by the Portuguese secret police, interrogated, and finally released after the intervention of U.S. embassy officials. By expressing his solidarity with the liberation movements, he bassist was acting along a fault line that was quickly opening in the geopolitics of the Cold War. The fascist Portuguese state was in the 1970s the last colonial power, leaving aside South Africa, to hold on to its possessions on the African continent. The U.S. played a delicate game with Portugal, avoiding criticism of the regime or of its colonial rule in order to safeguard the NATO base on the Azores; yet the U.S. needed to counter the growing sense among global

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<sup>19</sup> Charlie Haden, *Liberation Music Orchestra*, Recorded April 27-29, 1969, Impulse! IMPD 188, 1991, compact disc.

observers that it was playing an obstructionist role in opposition to anti-colonial nationalism. Later that decade, after the overthrow of the Portuguese regime, the conflicts of the Cold War had moved to center on decolonizing Southwest Africa.<sup>20</sup>

Haden's rhetorical affiliation with African liberation movements was a logical extension of the political philosophy he framed in the liner notes to *Liberation Music Orchestra*: a dedication to the emancipation of humanity from oppressive political structures and the founding of a new world society on the basis of creative activity.<sup>21</sup> In another transposition of sonic political theater onto crafted musical composition, Haden released an album of duets in 1976, *Closeness*, that included a track he performed with drummer Paul Motian called "For a Free Portugal." The duet was played amid and around a recording of Haden's declaration (and the crowd's response), and recordings made in Angola of MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) songs.

Haden's politics of affiliation with liberation movements around the world was in his music filtered through a creative lens: both "Circus" and "For a Free Portugal" are in a sense programmatic, but they are not agitprop and neither are they prescriptive. These overtly political recordings, however, also are only two representatives of Haden's aesthetic politics—arguably his commitments are even clearer in those performances where the contents of political antagonism are *not* immediately visible. One aspect of the politics of duos was the creation of an impromptu liberated space for musical dialogue: in duos, the space of performance can in principle be created almost anywhere. There is a politics to the

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<sup>20</sup> Liner notes, Charlie Haden, *Closeness*, Horizon SP-710, 1976, 33 1/3 rpm. The perception of U.S. opposition to anti-colonial nationalism, of course, was very accurate. The U.S. effectively waged war during the Cold War against many forms of nationalism in a variety of geopolitical arenas. Essentially any nationalism or left-wing political organization that was not a bourgeois power structure interested in opening its markets to U.S. corporations became both an ideological target, and in many cases a clandestine or military target. See Odd Arne Westad, *Global Cold War*. Also see Borstellmann, *Cold War and Color Line*, on Southwest Africa. A helpful source on the "proxy wars" waged in Southwest Africa involving South African and Cuban troops, see Pietro Gleisjes, *Conflicting Missions*.

<sup>21</sup> Liner notes, Haden, *Liberation Music Orchestra*.

stances musicians take in duo performance with one another: competitive, friendly or otherwise; contrast or counterpart, accentuating the sonic or timbral differences; harmonizer, etc. The testimonials dedicated to Haden, however, suggest his stance in the duets was one of pupilage and respect, a kind of graceful attention to listening to the other(s) performance).

Charlie Haden's second album of duets, *The Golden Number* (1977) extends the pedagogical and micropolitical themes of duo practice. Like the previous record, the album gatefold reproduces personal correspondence and testimony from each of Haden's duet partners—Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, Archie Shepp, and Hampton Hawes. According to Coleman's liner notes, the title is taken from one of his own parables of musical experimentalism ("When I was in France I was told a story about musicians whose music never had too many beats or too many intervals. But this music is perfect, and is being performed today.")<sup>22</sup> The record's packaging is somewhat unusual for the period in its inclusion not only of the multiple, overlapping texts of the musicians themselves, but also in its textualization of the music on the record through the technique of transcription. Three of the four tunes are reproduced as "head sheets" (or "fake book" versions), and Ornette Coleman's (first) trumpet solo on the album's title track is transcribed in its entirety. Complete with false notes, quarter tone notations, and "sentence starts and stops" rather than any traditional meter, the transcription (by Bruce Thomas) stretches the boundaries of the practice, showing both the precision, complexity, and deliberation of Coleman's distortions of both time and tone, as well as the difficulty (impossibility) of achieving any fully adequate visual representation of them. Listening to the solo while following the transcription, however, is an enlightening practice for those who read music (but, like this writer, lack "perfect" pitch): quarter-tone bends and slides, and intricate, muddy rhythmic

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<sup>22</sup> Charlie Haden, *The Golden Number*, Horizon SP-727, 1977, 33 1/3 rpm.

figures are presented “as if” they were the intentional realizations of a composer. This “as if” is both revealing and deceiving: it reveals the deliberation, and indeed intention, that structure a typical Ornette Coleman performance, the logic that informs a particular passage through or landing on a note outside the tempered scale. It deceives, however, in being unable to track fully the rhythmic placement of Ornette’s “sentences,” his interventions into the conversation with Haden occurring at the “subterranean” levels. Each phrase, marked with a phrase break but otherwise unmeasured, enters in a complex dialogue, even a dialectic with the rumbling cadences of Haden’s bass work. And likewise Haden’s own interventions follow a logic that is in turn dictated by a compassionate hearing of Ornette’s sentence.

In his contribution to the liner notes, Coleman refers to Charlie Haden’s music on *The Golden Number* as “human music,” as contrasted with the macropolitical designations of “Capitalistic, Communistic or Socialistic.” Haden’s “music does not dictate,” Coleman writes. “Why I call his music human is not the question; why not is both the question and answer. Charlie has attempted to solve the riddle ‘why not?’ But since why not exists in so many questions it must be the answer for all questions. The human song we are all in love with is about the mind warning us of hurt and destruction (Ref: Stevie Wonder’s ‘Songs in the Key of Life.’).”<sup>23</sup> This enigmatic statement, another Ornette-ian parable, offers in its deceptive simplicity a significant methodological challenge to historians of music and culture. Coleman’s “Why not?” emulates a childhood language game, but it is deployed, in my view, to effect a profound but oblique framing of Charlie Haden as a singular and exemplary figure. Haden’s music is an invitation, “[bringing] one stranger to another” in an exchange of affect; he creates dialogue, Coleman writes, at the expense of his own music and the furthering of his own fame. Preferring to create music in a collective, even the intimate

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<sup>23</sup> Liner notes, Haden, *The Golden Number*.

closeness of a duo, Haden gains access to the universal as a politics of love. Coleman's oblique description constructs Haden as deeply compassionate, a listener and a musical partner. All of this raises the question (perhaps Coleman is implicitly wondering), what has produced Charlie Haden, allowed a musician like him to exist? In the duo albums, Haden formalized and aestheticized a deeply ethical stance of approaching other musicians as a pupil and a listener, while also being a collaborator and equal. The testimonies written by Haden's duo partners on each of the albums, while none of them explicitly invoke Haden's whiteness, are collectively infused by a context that through the expression of care and connection implicitly frames Haden as a somehow exceptional white man. There is almost a mystification of Haden's generosity and humility, and as in Coleman's case a feeling of curiosity of how the bassist could have arrived at a subjectivity that had so completely broken with the anxious assertions of authority that so often characterized interracial communication in jazz.

Coleman's enigmatic answer is "why not?" and in turn Haden's subjectivity is imagined as invested in asking "why not?" The duo context as explored by Haden, the duo imagined as a space for learning and for listening, marks a break with the cultural politics of race in jazz, and a destabilization of the black-white dialectic. While the movement away from race and towards the human is a mode of universalization, the latter explicitly refuses a universal drawn from white supremacy, and in deed depends on a fundamental displacement of the unacknowledged gender dynamics of the genre. Haden's questioning of the "riddle 'why not'" which is "the answer for all questions" (Coleman) might suggest that a context for the deployment of "human music" was a deprovincializing of the universal as such. Why is what is (called) universal so persistently and wrongly assumed to spring from Eurological, patriarchal sources? Why is human/universal not the designation for what has surpassed or

shed this particular perspectivalism? Haden, who has, Coleman implies, as do the other testimony-givers on the record, gone through a certain process of unlearning his privilege in the service of music and musicians, can sound a universal language *despite* his whiteness, and despite his maleness, as the intricacies of race and sex are so thoroughly imbricated here that it is precisely white maleness, the privilege of identifying with the cultural particular-as-universal-designate, that must be replaced.

Haden was and is no doubt an extraordinary, even exceptional, figure, but he is not unique either. His “universalism” does not conflict with the (parodic) claim to cultural insiderism represented by a title like Julius Hemphill’s *Coon Bid’ness* (1975), which is no less framed by a universal form of address, a deformed or reshaped universality, but such a deformation might have been necessary to bypass the false universality of the imperial ordering of the globe, or as Hemphill’s poetic liner notes put it, “See the two sides; no front or bottom to / the ground., it’s a sickly disc; one-way rounded: / the world is flat!”<sup>24</sup> These two cases together illustrate that in the 1970s the racial valences of the relationship between universal and particular had in certain cultural arenas come flying apart. The resistance to thinking blackness and universality in the same frame that had structured colonialism’s episteme had been breached, in certain contexts, certain exceptional figures, and in certain labored articulations. I would like to highlight these labored articulations in suggesting that a deep politics joined musical experiment in the 1970s to a widespread and diversely articulated frustration with the limitations of textuality and textual modes of interpersonal address and, indeed, “closeness.” The duo form’s intimate dialogics created singular contexts for the exploration of the deep conceptual and affective structures of radical artistic subjectivity. The music, read as an historical formation, had an implied argument: the

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<sup>24</sup> Liner notes, Julius Hemphill, *Coon Bid’Ness*, Recorded 1972-1975, Arista Freedom AL-1012, 1975, 33 1/3 rpm.

importance for a radicalized way of being in the world of creative distancing of entertainment from commerce; sound from text; and art from politics. This might seem counterintuitive or strange, since this dissertation has argued throughout for an interpretive frame that imbricates politics and aesthetics via the distribution of the sensible. Yet as Rancière also says (in the epigraph to this chapter), art's "heteroglossia" breaks apart or breaks open the sensible but is not in itself a politics. As the case of Archie Shepp (Chapter Three) demonstrates, the activity of the creative artist can make visible/audible a reality other than, or foreclosed by, the official reality. Shepp's own political activity, however, fell relatively easily into established and routinized pathways of protest and demands for state and corporate resources. Political projects can mobilize the altered sensibilities created in and by art, but only if they are positioned to do so. Put into a more traditional language of historiography, the implications of new sensibilities can only be realized as political transformation if they are taken up by mass social movements. A further radical implication of this view has been articulated by composer Julius Hemphill: "I'm not trying to say that tooting this horn is going to solve all the problems in the world, particularly living under these wretched conditions over here. That's a bigger issue than any kind of thing we might bring in there in terms of entertainment or whatever. Because first it's got to be entertaining. If there's any deeper meaning or anything attributed to it, it's got to earn that."<sup>25</sup> Hemphill's disarming perspective, where entertainment is a first necessity from which follows intellectual and political practice, is a marked departure from the "high modernist" position in jazz writing and criticism that contrasted entertainment, aligned with commerce, with

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Lipsitz, "Like a Weed in a Vacant Lot: The Black Artists Group in St. Louis," *Decomposition: Post-Disciplinary Performance*, eds., Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Lee Foster, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 50-61, 50-51.

artistic modernist rigor.<sup>26</sup> Hemphill's perspective, shaped by the history of the Black Artists Group in St. Louis, the 1970s "loft jazz" scene, and global touring, divorces the entertainment value of musical performance in facilitating musical dialogue from its commercial investment. Meaning, his reflections may hint, is "earned" in the context of community dialogue and democratic dispute on a micro-political scale, by the music's ability to inhabit and inspire collective desires, rather than by its exchange value as accompaniment to privatized life. Finally, there is the question of language and its relation or correlation to sound/music, which the next several sections will take up. For now, however, I want to point to one important argument that is implicit in 1970s creative music. The distancing of music from language should not imply that words, voice, and speech were absent or excluded from instrumental musical performance; on the contrary, the creative collision of sound and text was crucial to 1970s experimental music. Rather, I am pointing to something different, and perhaps even more contentious: the "text" in an experimental musical performance, insofar as it is a part of the music and integral to it (inseparable from it in the case of a recording) does not signify as text. Words signify, and the musicality of voices signify, and even patterns of words arranged into a form not unlike a phrase, sentence, or poem—it is not that words lack reference, but that they are (also) sounds deployed in a musical framework and are musical elements radically decontextualized from the background texture that allows texts to signify. Once again, Julius Hemphill is a crucial figure for exploring this dynamic. The following section will first, however, discuss language metaphors in thinking about jazz performance.

### Private Personal Exchange

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<sup>26</sup> See, for overviews, Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz*, and Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*.



Taken as a variegated group or assemblage, the practices of duo playing in the 1970s both deepened and problematized the well-worn metaphors that compare musical improvisation to dialogic linguistic practice. If it is true that good solos “tell a story,” or that musicians are “saying something” without words, or, as Walton MUYUMBA suggests, that improvisation shares something with expressions of philosophical thought, then it is also important to attend to the ways musical practices exceed linguistic expression and proceed, in a way, “beneath” it. Like the murmuring heard behind a closed door, at one remove from signification, an experience of listening both frustrating and tantalizing, improvisations can suggest a deep reservoir of meaning without ever codifying any of it. MUYUMBA continues:

It is important to explain here that I am not claiming that every solo by every jazz musician equals a profound philosophical statement. Instead we should consider that improvisation (art) becomes experience when it is superb, excellent music making. Rather than see each improvisation of a particular artist as an individual aesthetic statement, we should hear them as being part of a larger, ongoing aesthetic process of stylization, self-identification.

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For a thinker like MUYUMBA, therefore, situated in the pragmatist tradition—his explicit reference here is John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* (1934)—aesthetic statements are philosophical in the sense in which they articulate personal historical experience. As he puts it,

When jazz musicians improvise they are playing out their own private individual jazz educations, their own jazz histories against the musical context in which they are performing. This usually means that they are improvising within the universe of the composed song and in exchange with their fellow performers whose personal styles and improvisations explain their own trajectories of education and history. When a musician takes a solo she is communicating an aesthetic statement about her personal jazz history, her existential self, and making art. And, although the goals of the performance ensemble carry their own weight, the most important is always entertainment.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Walton MUYUMBA, *The Shadow and the Act*, 147.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

The records of duo playing in the 1970s put some of these ideas in creative tension with other ways of conceiving musical practices. For instance, the meaning of the *private*, the *personal*, and the medium of *exchange* present a number of contradictions to the context of dialogue within the duo medium. The (visual) contrast between solo(ist) and context is rarely maintained. In other words, the implied geography of the bandstand, where soloists move in front of the contrasting context (rhythm players, other soloists sitting out), is distributed by duo performance, particularly on record. This discussion emphasizes the interpretive conundrums presented by duo playing, but it is important to signal that what I have to say about the stresses placed on established metaphors for jazz improvisation by the musical practices of the 1970s applies as well to other ensemblic forms, particularly the trio (in particular Air, the Revolutionary Ensemble, and Julius Hemphill's work with Abdul Wadud and Don Moye) as well even to solo performances. The idea of the "personal" or "individual" experience being what is expressed or transmitted by a jazz solo is strained in the practice of duo playing, for while there is an "intimate selfhood" (Dewey) at work in duo playing, the most successful, transfiguring performances occur when that selfhood is open to intimacy with another. The "private" reserve of the improvising body is, in duos, and therefore in ensemblic playing more generally, at least potentially open to a public intimacy that can be shared by musician/co-creator and listener alike, in different ways.

Just as a close look at duo playing in the 1970s requires us to question and complicate the use of the words "private" and "personal, the word "exchange" also reveals a set of contradictions at the center of discourse around the duo medium. For while the metaphor of exchange may be helpful in interpreting musical encounters, for instance in an extraordinary moment in "The Golden Number" when Haden immediately echoes a statement of Coleman's, when a phrase is repeated, literally exchanged across instrumental

registers, nevertheless exchange may unhelpfully reify the kinds of interaction across “personal,” experiential, and social and collective histories. After all, the recording studio, loft, or bandstand is not (quite) a marketplace, even if it is literally surrounded, colonized, and shot through with market relations. The temporal displacement of musical performance absents musician and listener alike from the rhythm of quotidian life, and indeed the rhythm of exchange, symbolized most brutally by the ring of the cash register that Charles Mingus famously excoriated from the bandstand.

### Decon/text/ualizing Voices

“Audiodrama” and “sound/play” are the two equivalent formal names that saxophonist Julius Hemphill gave to his 1977 double album *Roi Boyé and the Gotham Minstrels*. This section will undertake an extended reading of the album as a continuation of the exploration of duo aesthetics. This is ironic, however, since Hemphill’s album is not a duo, but a solo record that is in effect a trio or ensemble since there are usually three or more instrumental voices (all Hemphill, overdubbed) interacting at any given moment of the performance. Hemphill’s solo alto saxophone is accented by punctuation from a wind choir—on flutes and saxophone—or independent lines weave together in a creative interplay that is uncannily duo-like, or ensemblic, but composed and recorded entirely by Hemphill himself. As he put it in the liner notes, the project arose in order to find “an alternative performance vehicle for the solo performer.”<sup>29</sup> In making an ensemble/multiple of himself, Hemphill acknowledged that he was courting risks: did his use of tape threaten the “vitality” of the music, did it constrain improvisation by fixing it in musical time, (an other himself)

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<sup>29</sup> Julius Hemphill, *Roi Boyé and the Gotham Minstrels*, Recorded November 1976, Sackville 3014/15, 1977, 33 1/3 rpm.

forcing him into a predetermined sequence of musical events and thus ruining the unpredictability of (each successive) performance?<sup>30</sup> The fact that it was this objection in particular that Hemphill thought it necessary to address is telling, I think, of the transformation that had occurred in creative music performance in the previous decade. Recalling Adorno's complaint that jazz improvisation c. 1936 was locked into a fixed and invariable, enclosed duration of musical time, the idea that open-ended improvisation and the musical freedom to move in any contingent direction within performance were now a common-sense within the advanced sonic research circles of creative music suggests that Hemphill's music, among others, might be set against Adorno's aesthetics. Adorno identified the enchained improvisations of early jazz as a spontaneous "pure immediacy" that was false as an emblem for jazz as such since it masked the temporal regularity and fixity of the rhythmic structures that determined the time of improvisation. Indeed improvisation as ornament or advertisement for (primitivist) "vitality" was crucial to the function of jazz as a commodity in Adorno's view: the spontaneity of improvisation was a kind of commodified element within the commodity, an alibi but also a symbiote on the sheer surface of jazz's unchanging rhythm. What would Adorno have made of Hemphill's work that itself worried its technological layering might be seen to disrupt the vitalist functioning of immediacy itself as the badge of authentic improvisation?

In thinking about how to interpret Hemphill talking or playing back at Adorno, and by implication thinking about the immanent (and latent) theorizations of improvisation in

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<sup>30</sup> Hemphill's answer to this problem is interesting in itself. He writes, "The use of prepared tapes in no way hampers the fluidity and creativity of the performer. The relationship between the two entities (performer and tape) is purely a matter of proximity. At his discretion, the performer may posture himself, his responses, in any number of stances. The dictates of this relationship with the tape are not necessarily any more imposing than the range of considerations a performer may have to transcend at any given performance. The language ought to make that clear." Liner notes, *Roi Boyé*. Thus Hemphill literally recorded a series of duets with himself, layered in succession to create the composition. Incidentally *Roi Boyé* was bookended by two wonderful albums of duos with Oliver Lake, *Buster Bee*, Recorded March 1, 1978, Sackville 3018, 1978, 33 1/3 rpm; and Abdul Wadud, *Live in New York*, Recorded May 28, 1976, Red Record VPA-138, 1978, 33 1/3 rpm.

and among the ensembles of the 1970s, particularly duos (but duos as, in another interpretation, the doubling of improvisation as such, the multiplying or additive make-up of the ensemble, its potentially endless (re)iteration of adding an other), in relation to Adorno's later aesthetic project. Does the creative music of the 1970s offer a future for Adorno's critical aesthetics, a music that (no matter Adorno's individual sensibilities, deaf, dumb, or blind) later listeners can hear as sonically echoing the stringent dialectical requirements of *Aesthetic Theory* (1969)?

I do not have a thorough answer to that question but I would like to suggest a few preliminary thoughts by way of some remarks on Adorno in light of Hemphill's project in *Roy Boyé* et al. As I have indicated elsewhere in the dissertation, a fundamental "lesson" of Adorno's aesthetics is the art work's radical openness to its outside, to the social forces (antagonism) that attend its making: to simplify brutally, Adorno privileges art that encodes the social contradictions that pervade it thoroughly and immanently. It is often said that for Adorno, art and theory are like a message in a bottle thrown into the future with the hope for a revolutionary context that will be able to use it, metaphorically storing away negativity and contradiction for a seemingly impossible future to which hope has returned. A reading of *Aesthetic Theory*, however, contradicts this story as an effective gloss of Adorno—on the contrary, art works are in fact so historical that their existence challenges historicist approaches to the history of art objects:

The historical moment is constitutive of artworks; authentic works are those that surrender themselves to the historical substance of their age without reservation and without the presumption of being superior to it. They are the self-unconscious historiography of their epoch; this, not least of all, establishes their relation to knowledge. Precisely this makes them incommensurable with historicism, which, instead of following their own historical content, reduces them to their external

history. Artworks may be all the more truly experienced the more their historical substance is that of the one who experiences it.<sup>31</sup>

Contrary to the message in a bottle legend, Adorno wrote and thought in and for his own present.<sup>32</sup> To make the obvious implication: Adorno has no special authority to pass judgment on how artworks temporally removed from his moment “surrender themselves to the historical substance of their age,” nor does he claim any. To my way of thinking, Adorno’s account of how music in particular encoded a historiography was limited by his (historical) attachment to Viennese twelve-tone composition, and therefore to the tempered scale.<sup>33</sup> It all depends on what “surrender” means. For Adorno it meant the rigorous application of compositional method: by deliberately cutting off the conscious importation of historical elements, the composer all the more deeply and thoroughly surrendered the work to the historical forces animating her. Outside of the logic of a specific “school” of composition, it is unclear how this is to be accomplished, and indeed the idea seems to reach its apogee with John Cage’s aleatory methods. Adorno also emphasized what he referred to as the dialectic of part and whole, the relation between the compositional element and the structure of which it is an expression. (Popular music, of course, did and does fetishize the part, the hook, the chorus, over the whole, which is rendered banal by the obsessive repetition of one striking element.) Improvisation, which although he had much to say about

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<sup>31</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 182. I do not want to turn this point of the text into a methodological excursus, but the idea of art being a “self-unconscious historiography,” which we could compare to Jed Rasula’s idea that recordings mean historians confront an always already inscribed jazz history, has been extremely influential for this project. That said, it still remains somewhat unclear how Adorno theorizes the way a non-historicist historiography would be able to discern and “follow” the historical content of artworks.

<sup>32</sup> All the message in a bottle stories share the image of Adorno standing forlornly at the ocean’s edge in Los Angeles. According to one of Adorno’s biographers, the phrase actually originated with Horkheimer. It was also circulated as a joke made at Adorno’s expense: Hans Eisler is supposed to have said that the message was “I feel *so* awful!” Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 161.

<sup>33</sup> “[I]n music, for example, in accord with the harmonic and melodic demand that complete use be made of the available tones of the chromatic scale.” Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 155. It is not really that Adorno has chosen a specific musical culture for his allegiance, and that others might choose differently, it is that the 1960s dismantling of European dominance in the theory of tonality has made nonsense of Adorno’s “demand.”

it was an aporia for Adorno, and the liberation of non-tempered tonalities, and singular instrumental timbres (the jazz soloist's distinctive "sound") as compositional elements upsets any clear understanding of the "surrender" Adorno recommends.

Returning to Hemphill's *Roi Boyé and the Gotham Minstrels* with that in mind, the recording's final part presents an opportunity to examine the way voice and word are employed in the music without quite becoming text. Hemphill speaks a series of phrases as his other voices, multiple instrumental tracks, swirl around the speech, comment on it, and mirror it. What follows is a transcription of the words of the recording:

Coming up with flawed noise, you guys. Can't make my raggedy mind adhere to proper research. Siamese lungs foul recycled air just filling up. Sho can't send no intelligent message to those sanctified worms. Went to the doctor and the doctor said, "Who sent you here? That'll be 75 dollars, no checks. What's your name? Hello." Said oh, woo, have mercy, hmm. "The Blues! Aha!" Colored gradations. You feel awful. Need a bath, a poor credit risk, you're in perfect disarray. You're an artist? It's creative! Have a nice day? Next? There's a bon bonanza just the other side of the key of life. Chocolate in technicolor. Have mercy. But chocolate, sweet as it is, is notoriously hard on the teeth. Just the sight of it prompts one to bite into anything, from marshmallows, to rock candy, to ants, to Ex-Lax, to nightmares, to Earl Butz, to Soweto even. A great tour on a wrinkled circle line, or scat! Hands up, nigger! You're under arrest. Freedom gonna cost you your eyes. Put out or shut up. Oh wow! Dig that din from above the print shop. The phone book says it's amalgamated, light manufacturing. But what with urban renewal and all, it's probably some bored rich dude experimenting with growing wildflowers in the dark, to lighten up his bank account. Say, scum, you got fenders on your ass? Get outta here. I don't want them bugs smeared all over my windshield. Dogs to the curb. What? You sick? Don't give me that. The DT's ain't nothing but the jitterbug. All God's chillun got rhythm. I need food from Madagascar, and Lockhart. I need blood from guitars, bourdeaux, and moon-eyed ladies. I need love to know one constant rhythm. I need water to do my tap dance with its irregularity. Well you know it's hard to feed four square needs, but the water is the hardest. All round here the rivers be polluted. I hear it's industrial waste from upstream. That ain't nothin. That ain't nothin. I been experimented on for a long time. For a long time. It's the shit, makes me mad.  
*Records, watches, Mickey Mouse, dildos.*<sup>34</sup>

To recall the discussion earlier in this chapter about the transcription of Ornette Coleman's solo on Haden's *Golden Number*, the transcribing of instrumental performance in creative

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<sup>34</sup> Julius Hemphill, *Roi Boyé and the Gotham Minstrels*, my transcription.

music is a fascinating but profoundly limited practice. Even with the addition of a flurry of diacritics and other specially contrived marks to convey the pitch bending, ghost notes, phrase structures, and other non-text-able elements of Coleman's sound, the transcription still comes up short, not only as a perfect representation of the recorded performance (which is strictly impossible) but as an adequate writing of it. We might ask, could a virtuoso musician repeat the performance, produce a plausible facsimile of it, by using the transcription? Now, the textual representation of Hemphill's voice reproduced above is far less accurate than the transcription of the Coleman solo. There are no diacritics or metrical marks to indicate rhythm, timbre, or notes to indicate tone, or a textual correlate to signal what syllables or parts of syllables are intoned and which are not. The starts and stops of phrases might be intuited from the text, but in Hemphill's recitation the pattern of pauses and the length of syllables are both extremely musical and rhythmically unpredictable. Beyond the "pure" musical elements of the words, Hemphill's voice is culturally inflected, the recitation spanning perhaps a half-dozen different accents or registers. The only phonographical citation made in the transcription is the use of italics to indicate that the tape is sped up to double speed during the speaking of these words. Beyond these issues, what makes the recording especially listenable is the constant accompaniment of two or four or more "other" Hemphills, flutes and saxophones weaving around the words, accenting them, doubling them, and so on.

If we were to read the transcription as a text, what could be made of it? At first glance it suggests a Dada word salad, short phrases cut up and randomized. But why these words, why this cultural palette? Can the text indicate the shifts in tone and register from "Soweto" to "Freedom gonna cost you your eyes"? The text clearly encodes the mimicked voice of the police that occurs between these two phrases, but even if the text gives us



reason to guess at the irony-laden upturn in Hemphill's voice at "Soweto" the affect of its unexpected arrival at the end of a list of things "to bite into," that disorienting moment of onrushing signification is betrayed by the text's simultaneity, its inability to conceal the train of surrealistic mental images.<sup>35</sup> It is, finally, the musicality of the voice that brings up the most surprises, the quick burst into song, doubled by at least one other Hemphill, that occurs on "The DTs ain't nothing but a jitterbug." The rich and bitter irony of this sing-song phrase as a commentary of the history of jazz would be lost in any *reading* of it.

In the liner notes Hemphill writes that he "makes use of orchestral language that proceeds from the rhythmic impulses of the spoken word and does not obey the dictates of meter nor of melody except for the expressive inflections associated with speech in generally colloquial situations." According to Aldon Lynn Nielsen, such a musical impulse corresponds to "the textual music sought by a number of ... black jazz composers of [the] time," but while Hemphill's music is perhaps textured, in more than one sense, it is animated by the dismantling of text as the paradigm of human communication. However contrary to the prevailing intellectual culture, invested in seeing the world as text, in seeing the outside of text as an impossible, or impassable horizon, Hemphill hears language as a voiced, inflected, and tonal music. His overdubbed, layered, conversational solo album emulates the sound of voices without there being any (or at least, much<sup>36</sup>) textual support or reference. It is not, as Nielsen knows well and in fact insists on, that Hemphill or like-minded composers denied the referentiality of language or its relation to meaning. But in this instance, as in many others in Hemphill's work—and here he is philosophically akin to many other musicians, particularly Eric Dolphy—the sound of colloquial conversation is detexted, or

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<sup>35</sup> Compare Hemphill's, in a sense, quasi-dream speech to the African diasporic surrealist tradition discussed by Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> While this passage insists on the absence of text from the phonograph qua inscribed sound, the phonograph as cultural object and commodity is inevitably framed by text: name, title, etc., and in this case Hemphill's relatively elaborate notes.

decontextualized, to reveal a sustaining power or interest in sociality as it is vocalized. It is language as *human music*, not outside the text but neither relegated to the contextual background.<sup>37</sup>

To be clear, the above is not an attempt belatedly to rehearse an argument for what Derrida has labeled “phonocentrism,” or to enter into the debates about the primacy or originary status of orality or literacy, speech or writing. Indeed, it is my view that a static binary between oral and written “cultures” has often hampered writing about black experimental music, and obstructed the development of a deprovincialized music writing more generally, particularly in the discipline of musicology, although that binary, closely related to the divide between ethnomusicology and (Western, logocentric) musicology, has been considerably weathered. Rather, insofar as post-Ayler creative musicians can be said to have fashioned or played with a kind of “language music” or with vocal textures, it is precisely the liminal space between speech and voice that they have explored. Instrumental musicians have an embodied voice, shaped not only by education and personal history, or by that spectral embodiment termed *influence*, but also by physiology, by technique, by the size and bore of instrument, mouthpiece, the hardness of the reed, and so on. A texted or written sound is in principle infinitely repeatable, reproducible, as in the ceremonial and ritual texts of churches, courts, and other ritual sites. The (spectral) voice, on the other hand, even if malleable or subject to the action at a distance that is emulation, parody, or mimicry, and even if shaped to the particular ensemblic context, is necessarily embodied, until subject to capture by the mechanical or digital apparatus of sound recording, and transformed into a replicable commodity.

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<sup>37</sup> Incidentally, Don Cherry recorded a duo album in 1970 with electronic music composer Jon Appleton called *Human Music*, Flying Dutchman FDS 121, 1970, 33 1/13 rpm.

Records, as I have argued before, are quintessential fetish objects. Much of this is due to the physical object, its weight and feel and visuality—the words and images that accompany it. Yet if the record is digitized, it is transformed but no less a fetish; its new properties—transmissibility, malleability, its tendency to be cut or sampled, dissected and recombined—are no less subject to the inhabitation of magical properties and theologico-spiritual disputes. All those voices, digitally or analogically encoded, singing or sounding out from a distance, from the beyond of death, or at present the beyond of that which Dewey calls “experience,” that shape of living and perception of feeling that is not contained within but emanates through the art object.

## Coda

### Primitive Turbulence

Still, what was of musical value that I heard that night does remain, and the emotions . . . some of them completely new . . . that I experience at each “objective” rehearing of this music are as valuable as anything else I know about. And all of this *is* on this record [...] But since records, recorded “live” or otherwise, are artifacts, that is the way they should be talked about.

—LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), “Coltrane Live at Birdland”<sup>1</sup>

In August of 1976, the saxophonist and composer Roscoe Mitchell rushed to the stage in Willisau, Switzerland to perform a solo concert in place of Anthony Braxton, who could not make it to the scheduled date. After warming up for an hour, Mitchell took the stage and played a compositional fragment, a sharp, darting, angular passage contained between two long tones. The first tone was at the high end of the normal range of the alto saxophone, and the second was in a middle register. Between them was a deceptively simple staccato figure that demonstrated quick intervallic leaps across the instrument’s range. The figure took between four and seven seconds to play. Readers unfamiliar with this performance of Mitchell’s composition “Nonaah” will wonder why it is worth taking the time to describe the opening musical structure of a solo “improvisation.” But many improvising musicians and scholars of improvised music will know that the figure, its structure, and the almost limitless sonic potential contained within it, were the centerpiece of

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<sup>1</sup> LeRoi Jones, *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow, 1967), 65.

an unusually fractious and interesting encounter between a composer-improviser and a “jazz audience.”

For Mitchell in fact continued to play that short figure, repeatedly, for the following seven minutes with only subtle variation, and then for another two minutes having dissected and deconstructed its temporal dimensions and rhythmic unity. Switching dramatically between tonalities, Mitchell then proceeded to explore the tonal and timbric possibilities of all the notes that had blurred by in the intervallic leaps of the structure’s original articulation. Returning to a staccato articulation and a blared gauzy tone, he then reversed the figure, folded it back in on itself, mirrored it through a hallway of combinatorial compositional possibilities. His sound growled around the bottom reaches of the instrument; split into harmonics in multi-octave leaps; and shook with an unstable, fluctuating, but precisely controlled vibrato. At around seventeen minutes into the performance, he began worrying a single tone, low in the instrument, bending and slurring, distorting it in pitch and timbre, the note wavering across more than a “half-step” in the tempered scale. But the tempered scale, its twelve-tone structure, and even the “quarter tone” liminal steps that multiply it, cannot come close to describing the range of tonal “positions” Mitchell’s instrumental voice moved through in playing the one note, still less its stark, guttural, watery and wavering growl. Several virtuoso expositions followed, finally deconstructing the fragment so completely that the “subject” of the performance was now the sonic grain itself, Mitchell’s labored, precise, but elegant voice as it came through the instrument; even still, the ghosted traces of the original figure can still be heard, structuring the performance but now almost inaudibly. Mitchell’s performance explores nearly every conceivable variation of the compositional fragment, stretching the boundaries of the sonic “language” of the saxophone. While the

fragment can be (and was) notated, (re)inscribed, Mitchell's variations, his scientific versionings, cannot be.<sup>2</sup>

In the first section of the recording, captured, preserved, and released as the first track (coming in at over twenty-two minutes) of the 1977 double LP *Nonaah*, Mitchell restricts his variations within the rough temporal-rhythmic framework of the compositional framework as notated. At first, it sounds as if Mitchell is intent on repetition, on drumming the fragment into the minds and ears of the listeners, the variations perhaps merely random, aleatory, or whimsical. On a second hearing, however, the deft logic of Mitchell's versioning becomes clear. He extends the first and last long tones, executing vibratos, dips, growls, and distortions—one tonal-temporal element at a time, he builds a kind of mathematical proof of how improvisation can work on a written composition, and how instrumental voice extends laterally, invisibly, from the notated page at right angles to its two-dimensional flatness. Each repetition is different, each one precisely at variance with the others preceding it through the introduction of new sources of distortion, progressively engraining the composition and demonstrating the fine, imperceptible lines between composition and improvisation. The “changing same” of Mitchell's repetitive phrasing encodes into ephemeral performance the “second hearing” normally possible only through recordings, forcing the audience to experience the (im)possibility of infinite reproduction. It is not too much, I believe, to say

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the excellent brief description of the same performance by Samuel Floyd: “[Nonaah's] arresting, wide-ranging, angular melody, is a study in building tension through insistent and almost exact repetition with an eventual, although gradual, increase in timbral, pitch, and rhythmic variety.” *Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History From Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 193. While Floyd's description is apt, and his attention to AACM's experimentalist aesthetics (especially Braxton and Threadgill, McCall, and Hopkins's Air trio) in an “Afrological” framework is important and noteworthy, what I want to emphasize here are the ways Mitchell's repetitions were *not* exact and how the performance stretches the referentiality of notions like pitch, melody, and even rhythm, therefore pointing out the necessary inadequacy of written descriptions and the limitless (im)possibilities of musical description. The latter inadequacy is, I think, immanent to music and sound per se, but its recognition and thinkability, on the other hand, is historical—and the history that throws established languages of musical description into radical epistemic doubt is precisely the terrain this dissertation covers, and, I would argue, one of the key strategic-structural alliances that connect diverse and disaffiliated articulations of the “jazz avant-garde.”

that, if “jazz” as a historical referent is intimately bound up with the emergence of a “spectacular virtuosity” that can potentially both cut and suture the racialized expectations attending black performances (as I suggest in Chapter Two), then Mitchell’s compositional work (in conjunction with numerous others) marks a moment where the manipulation of the spectacle had become a science.<sup>3</sup>

What has most fascinated the few writers to take up the 1976 performance of “Nonaah” is the audience’s complicated reaction to Mitchell’s subtle versioning. It is the social dynamic between performer and listeners, tantalizingly close to audible on the record, which allows Mitchell to be fitted into a historical narrative of improvised music. One can hear in the recording the audience’s restlessness with Mitchell’s repetition, the alienation that attended Mitchell’s exposition of sound science. Whitney Balliett’s famous phrase to describe jazz—the “sound of surprise”—takes on its dialectically negative meaning in the audience’s (well, part of it, at least) audibly shocked and dismayed initial reaction to Mitchell’s insistence on continuing his sonic exploration. The jeers, however, are mixed with and possibly overcome by the return of surprise in its “positive” affect, as the saxophonist’s remarkable virtuosity elicits eruptions of applause and cheering. One can almost (but not quite) trace a progressive narrative through the performance as Mitchell “wins over” the initially hostile crowd. Not quite, because the recording is unreliable evidence of what happened in that space, in those moments, in the complex transmission, imbrication, and conflict of affects

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<sup>3</sup> “Nonaah” on Roscoe Mitchell with Muhal Ricahrd Abrams, Anthony Braxton, Malachi Favors, Joseph Jarman, George Lewis, Wallace McMillan, and Henry Threadgill, *Nonaah*, Recorded August 23, 1976 to February 25, 1977, Nessa N-9/10, 1977, 33 1/3 rpm. Music writer John Litweiler counts sixty-six repetitions of the phrase in “interplay with an unruly audience”; by “the forty-third repeat he is smearing tones, to a sudden cheer of recognition.” Litweiler’s writing is justly considered among the best and most sensitive accounts of the music, and his lyrical and respectful treatment of Mitchell’s (and other composers’) music in this book is commendable. But I think there is reason to question the narrative embedded in his count, a narrative that emplots Mitchell’s progressive winning-over of a resistant audience. The indexing of “smears” repeats Mitchell’s own narrative of the performance’s dialogics, but constructs it as a heroic overcoming of conflict through mutual recognition. As I suggest below, a close reading of Mitchell’s language opens up other possibilities for thinking the social, “extramusical” dimensions of the music’s unfolding. Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958* (New York: Da Capo, 1990), 282.

that accompany any musical performance, but which leave only faint traces in the material objects that contain and disseminate the sound of the occasion. Put bluntly, we do not (and cannot, I believe, even with the aid of oral testimony or journalists' accounts) know who left and who stayed, who shut up and who cheered, who grinned and bore it, and who were tacitly delighted. We do not (and cannot) know when and where the fractured and split voice(s) of Mitchell's saxophone worked a momentary alignment, where affect traversed subjectivities and shaped or deformed them, where Mitchell's "intention" and the audience's instantaneous hermeneutic reconstruction of possible intentions overlapped to unleash enjoyment. We do not (and cannot) know the mental states of the performer at any given precise moment of the performance's unfolding, and we cannot with any certainty know whether those mental states "communicated" with even a fraction of the collective auditors.<sup>4</sup>

What we have is an object, a commodity (although an extremely marginal one, see below), and a technological transfer of sound waves that doubles, and mirrors, Mitchell's own repetitions by allowing for the infinite repetition qua reproduction of what *was*, ontologically speaking, a fleeting, unrepeatable, and ephemeral series of moments punctuated—retemporalized, reperiodized—by sonic events. This object holds out the tantalizing possibility of *hearing* those historical moments, of providing a material basis to reconstruct a past/passed sound world and the affectivities that crossed and infused it, of grounding the language of (jazz) historiography in an "authentic" encounter with performance. But the recording is already a historical inscription, even if it is not quite writing and not at all a text, leaving any subsequent writing in a reactive, secondary position—all history a(n/other) reinscription. So Mitchell's performance—and this is part of

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dana Reason, "Navigable Structures and Transforming Mirrors: Improvisation and Interactivity," in *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue* ed. Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 71-83, 80-81.



why I think it right to think of it as a *science* of sound—troubles linguistic capture in another way: not only in the un-writable “third dimension” of (instrumental) voice; but also in the fact that stripping away all surface-level “intrageneric” referents except for the compositional fragment, rendering inert any effort to find lines of “influence,” suggests we might consider the recording as an inscription of its own historical moment. “Nonaah” as recorded track is an imperfect transcript, no doubt, but one that cannot but predate any secondary attempt at description. Immanent to the object-form of recordings, but unmistakable in examples like Mitchell’s that rigorously avoid the sedimentation of a recognizable style, is “an insistent previousness evading each and every natal occasion,” what Mackey calls the “sexual cut” that erects rickety bridges over the chasms of social memory. The way the record holds out these (interpretive, affective) possibilities while at the same time undermining them is, of course, part of its allure as a fetish object, part of the specific array of social forces and social relations it condenses, encodes, and conceals as part of the network of commodities.<sup>5</sup>

The commodity, then, is not a framework that limits the meaning of recordings, but the medium in which recordings signify. The theoretical and affective implications of recordings and commodity fetishism, sketched above, suggest a certain degree of skepticism about interpretations of Mitchell’s sonic intervention into a racialized cultural economy. Throughout this dissertation, I have questioned the image of the avant-garde as a performance of sonic violence or assault. More precisely, the dissertation has attempted to displace the idea that a *politics* of avant-garde aesthetics is contained by the latter’s energetic or frenetic ruptures with established forms, that the affective range of post-sixties

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<sup>5</sup> George Lewis’s seminal essay on the Art Ensemble of Chicago suggests another resistance in Mitchell’s compositional practice, embedded in works like “Nonaah”: “Even the titles of individual AEC pieces simultaneously extend and signify on the recondite impulse that might well be behind a name like [Charlie] Parker’s ‘Klact-o-veed-sed-stene.’ Titles like ‘Duffvipels,’ ‘Tnoona,’ ‘Nonaah,’ and ‘Dautalty,’ the inspirations of Roscoe Mitchell, all have one property in common: their pronunciations are unavailable to the naked textual eye.” Lewis, “Singing Omar’s Song: A (Re)construction of Great Black Music” *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 4 (1998): 66-92, 77. For the rigorous avoidance of style, see *Ibid*, 74.

improvised music can be limited to violence, aggression, or confrontation. The avant-garde, in some of its many contradictory articulations, could certainly involve acts of musical destruction, ecstatic iconoclasm or methodical dismantling. Yet to think, for example, of Roscoe Mitchell's performance of "Nonaah," his insistence on the versioned repetition of the composition's fragmented kernel, only in terms of an aggressive challenge to an imagined audience, as a denial or withholding of pleasure, would be to miss important affective dynamics of the performance, and, I think, ultimately to miss the actual nexus where politics and aesthetics meet, the shape, parameters, borders, and distribution of intelligible sensation itself. Mitchell's own reflection on what happened at the Willisau performance perhaps *could* be interpreted as an aggressive, implicitly politico-critical, stance *against* the audience. His comments, however, are more precisely directed:

I went out there and got this tension thing. It was a battle. I had to make the noise and whatever was going on with the audience part of the piece. The music couldn't move till they respected me, until they realized that I wasn't going anywhere, and if someone was going it would have to be them. It was very interesting, and it helped to create the environment the piece was to take place in... building tensions... and when I finally did release it my alto had just given in to me (it said, "OK, you can play me now"). I started to open it up soundwise by putting in smears and different sounds, and by the time it finally reached the end at the encore piece it all pulled together.<sup>6</sup>

Like other examples of musicians' discourse that this dissertation has analyzed, here Mitchell encodes a multiple, shifting, enigmatic and indeed dialogical series of implicit metaphors about the social unfolding of the music in a space that, while deeply invested by the artist's subjectivity and interiority, is also importantly beyond or outside the self. Mitchell's solo performance is here imagined as an affective quartet: the audience, the player, the horn, and the music all hang in a tense stasis, waiting to move, each waiting for the other to give way, to open up, to make space. It is not a mystification or personification of "the music" as an

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Terry Martin, liner notes to *Nonaah*, Nessa N-9/10.

autonomous social actor, but instead the music, “the piece” is thought as a precise temporal event that unfolds in a co-created “environment.” The dialogic space in which the music takes place is also a hegemonic battlefield where Mitchell wages a “war of position” over his occupancy of both the stage and a stance of aesthetic autonomy. But it is an enigmatic battlefield where the horn, the multi-layered sounds of the performance space, and the affective struggles of both musician and listener work cooperatively to create the musical event. We might distinguish this view of composition in/as improvisation from a view that sees the performance’s aesthetics as a literalization of conflict and aggression by way of analogy to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of “reparative reading.” She questions the paranoid tendencies of critical theory, the “hermeneutics of suspicion” that often collapses into a restrictive accounting of cultural practices, sorting and splitting cultures into hegemonic and resistant elements. “The desire of a reparative impulse, on the other hand,” she writes, “is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self.” Mitchell’s performance confronts the audience, indeed, but not with an unremitting sonic assault but an offering of music as social reparation. The music emerges in the moment as if “it” were a semi-autonomous subjectivity, an interjection from some other scene, an event that is the product of Mitchell’s artistic labor, of course, but that also resists and escapes his own meticulous control of form. The saxophone *said* “you can play me now”—instrumental virtuosity emerges here as a haunted material practice, an objective resistance on which artistic subjectivity works, and a spirituality that is rigorously anti-metaphysical.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 123-151, 149.

## Resistance of the Object: Why the Avant-Garde Is Not a Formalism

In the last chapter I proposed a qualified endorsement of Adorno's musical aesthetics. In particular, the musical abstraction and subtlety of diverse ensemblic forms in the 1970s suggests the relevance of Adorno's "deep" political aesthetics, where art objects are critical to the extent that they encode "self-unconscious[ly]" the social antagonisms that pervade their production. Adorno's attention to form, and especially compositional method in music, is not, I would further suggest, a species of formalism (qua idealism) but a profoundly materialist understanding of art objects as not only inseparable from the contexts of their social production, but pervaded by the social in their innermost "essence." Adorno's "deafness" to music that exceeded, indeed transcended, the strictures of twelve-tone composition, however, led him in the case of music to halt his dialectical analysis at an inopportune moment. Limited to a twelve-tone—implicitly textual—(a)tonality, Adorno thought that (notated, written) compositional practice would most effectively encode social antagonism the more it abandoned social reference and adhered to the arbitrary rules of compositional methodology. The core compositional practices of the working-class musical collective the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), articulated by Muhal Richard Abrams as "the necessity of the avoidance of style," might be thought of not only as analogically related to Adorno's more restricted version of compositional rigor, but as a dialectical advance beyond his own position on music. Roscoe Mitchell is arguably an AACM "avoider of style" *par excellence*, well known for employing extremely restricted tonal palettes and rigorously conceived rhythmic patterns in his compositions, precisely to push improvisers out of the routinized habits that sediment into "stylistic" playing. Therefore, in thinking back over *Nonaah* as a prism to view the project of the dissertation,

we might wonder: do compositional/improvisational practices like Mitchell's, and the artifacts and traces they produce, work like Adorno's art objects, encoding deep social antagonisms as "messages in a bottle" addressed to a (proto-) revolutionary future?<sup>8</sup>

Mitchell performed and recorded the whole composition "Nonaah" multiple times in the 1970s, in a variety of different ensembles—the 1977 album *Nonaah* opens with the solo version described above, and ends with a version for a quartet of alto saxophones, where the Willisau fragment can be heard as one thread of an immensely complex compositional fabric. Litweiler describes the quartet version (with Joseph Jarman, Wallace McMillan, and Henry Threadgill) as "a parable of disintegration—by the end only centrifugal force contains the primitive, dangerous turbulence."<sup>9</sup> This formulation is both evocative and deeply troubling—the unexpurgated legacies of the primitivist reception of early jazz (see Chapter Two) shadow Litweiler's attempt to find a concept adequate to the recording's surging, rolling, recursive, lurching energy. The fact that he hears (that one might hear) "the primitive" in Mitchell's almost obsessive, mathematical precision of intricately constructed counterpoint is suggestive of the continuing unconscious power of racializations forged during the era of plantation regimes, state racism, and imperialism. Beyond that, however, the paradox of attaching the label "primitive" to a music of unerringly complex structures is amplified by a further paradox in Litweiler's formulation, the ambiguous confusion of centrifugal and centripetal forces. It would seem more intuitive that it was centripetal motion that kept the four parts from disintegrating completely, flying off into space. If we take the formulation literally, however, the opposite is true: the music risks collapsing into a sterile unity, and it is only the relentless drive towards the "outside" that maintains the musical

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<sup>8</sup> Abrams quoted in Lewis, "Omar's Song," 74.

<sup>9</sup> Litweiler, 283.

meaning in the repetition, only a permanently reenacted breakdown of musical unanimity that sustains the intricate complexity of the composition's rhythmic and tonal structure.

More than that, what about the “dangerous turbulence” that threatens to break out or undermine the coherence of the performance? What if, again reading the unconscious repetition of “primitive” to the letter, the danger here is not only that the primitive will return, but also that it had all along been the “primitive” that introduced complexity, sophistication, reflexivity, the “deformation of form” characteristic of modernism, into the world? That what unconsciously evokes the primitive is a signifier of the social antagonism that produces and elaborates stylistic mobility, syncretism, and hybridity? In this way, Mitchell's performance might relate to another argument of the dissertation, that a consequence of the displacing of the American popular song as jazz's raw material was the (potential) emergence of “undifferentiated world musics” as composition/improvisation's constitutive outside. If so, it comes from an unexpected direction: unlike, for instance, Don Cherry, who spent much the 1970s exploring explicit and protean juxtapositions of myriad global musical traditions in large group formats, Roscoe Mitchell is known for the rigor of his singular compositional method, his solo performances, and nuanced duos and trios with compatriot AACM composers.<sup>10</sup> Even within the Art Ensemble's vast stylistic heterogeneity, Mitchell is often considered the intense, “introverted” composer's composer, in contrast to the surrealist satire of Bowie or Jarman. Yet in numerous interviews, Mitchell has expounded

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, Don Cherry, *Eternal Rhythm*, Recorded November 11-12, 1968, MPS 15 204 ST, 1969, 33 1/3 rpm; *Organic Music Society*, Recorded 1971-1972, Caprice 2001:1, 1972, 33 1/3 rpm; *Relativity Suite*, Recorded February 14, 1973, JCOA 1006, 33 1/3 rpm; *Hear & Now*, Atlantic SD 18217, 1977, 33 1/3 rpm. For Mitchell, see especially *The Roscoe Mitchell Solo Saxophone Concerts*, Recorded 1973-1974, Sackville 2006, 1974, 33 1/3 rpm; *L-R-G/The Maze/S II Examples*, Recorded July-August 1978, Nessa N-14/15, 1978, 33 1/3 rpm; and Roscoe Mitchell with Anthony Braxton, *Duets*, Recorded December 13, 1977, Sackville 3016, 1978, 33 1/3 rpm.

his belief that great musicians must be able to play in multiple styles, as well as his own voracious drive continually to learn new instrumental techniques.<sup>11</sup>

To return to the specter of the primitive and the turbulent distortions which primitivism leaves jazz writing as a lasting legacy, there is perhaps a continuing, as yet not fully realized “danger” still lurking in the shadows. As I said above, that danger may consist in the delayed recognition, not only that primitivism was and is a technology of empire, but that its specific function has been to conceal “modernity’s” dependency on, indeed, the labor and controlled bodies of those deemed primitive, but also that modern subjectivity is borrowed, stolen, or mimicked from the expressive forms innovated from within the projections of racist discourse. “We” privileged heirs of modernity are not primitive by way of occasionally emulating idyllic pre-industrial simplicity in order to feel catechistic nostalgia for what we have “lost” (but never had). “We” are primitive at the core of our (post)modern selves—“we” moderns learned our modernity from the fearful gaze that was cast by “our” ancestors at what Adorno conceived as “mutilated subjectivity” but what was in fact a vast heteroglossia of creative, improvised and mutable stances that together constituted a technology (in the sense of *techné*) for living amid the machinery of terror, exploitation, and war. Jayna Brown has recently unpacked the horrifying but revelatory ironies at the heart of American urban modernity: just as the state and the police order was enforcing continued and new spatial confinements, and as white Americans crafted new bodies and new selves to fit a post-Victorian middle class identity, those same bourgeois subjects came to craft their identities in grotesque imitation of the expressive forms and gestures of increasingly disfranchised African Americans, particularly through a painfully disavowed mimicry of black women as icons of hard labor. The cakewalk, the black bottom, the shimmy, the

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<sup>11</sup> For an example, see the interview Mitchell did with Anthony Coleman, “Roscoe Mitchell,” *BOMB* 91 (Spring 2005). Available online at <http://bombsite.com/issues/91/articles/2730>.

Charleston, and so on: the privileged denizens of urban modernity shaped their embodied gestures in imaginary emulation of black subjects, while violently foreclosing the mutuality and dependence that was betrayed in their very bodies.<sup>12</sup>

And so it goes. But if the processes suggested by the ghosting of the primitive and the disavowal of “the primitive’s” intimate knowledge of and creative adaptation to modern terror do continue, in modified forms, to this day, the history of black performances has also continually deformed, warped, and rerouted those lines of continuity. In this project I have suggested the importance of rethinking how we approach the history of “jazz” in relation to the “avant-garde” sonic practices innovated since the late 1950s. The dissertation has unfolded its arguments on three interrelated levels. First, I have tried to show the value of developing and continuing an ideology critique of the “uses” of jazz discourse, because historically jazz was such a protean signifier—indeed, a master signifier of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—that it is impossible to separate once and for all the valid or invalid uses of the term. Rather, it is important to unpack the contradictory labors of the term in disrupting and recasting the ideological infrastructure of regimes of racial control.

Second, the dissertation has attempted to intervene into a variety of debates about cultural history theory and methodology, suggesting that the complexity and mobile signification of works of art require developing a set of tools that relate politics and aesthetics in ways that go beyond, around, and beneath the functionalist accounting for political art that reads surface forms instead of grappling with the dialectics of artworks as exchangeable commodities. In particular, *After Modern Jazz* has tried to explore and demonstrate some techniques of interpreting sound recordings as historical evidence that escape or at least stretch the bounds of populist readings of culture. For with cultural

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<sup>12</sup> Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).



commodities, the dissertation argues, appeals to populist sentiment will resolve, in the absence of political intervention, into market populism. To return for a moment to *Nonaab*—I chose this album as a lens through which to re-examine some of the dissertation’s arguments not in order to “unearth” a forgotten artifact. Indeed, in scattered, electronically mediated communities of musicians and listeners, *Nonaab* is far from forgotten: it is much more accurate to say it is revered as a *legendary* or perhaps even *ancestral* part of the history of creative music. As a *commodity*, however, the album is distinctly marginal, produced as an act of care and passion for the music, a collaboration among the eight musicians involved and the record’s producer. Until it was re-released on CD in 2008, the album was out of print for nearly thirty years, existing copies traded back and forth or spoken of with frustrated longing. This economic marginality, I argued in Chapter One, produces silences both in the cultural and music-historical archive, but even more so in the narratives of historiography. In an intellectual culture inevitably shaped, if only negatively, by market populism, this kind of marginality tends to convey either a subcultural cache or a willfully resistant abstraction. Either way, the idea that such marginal works of art might have something to offer the most general historiographical narratives is a very difficult proposition. From a common sense perspective, it seems ludicrous to construct larger narratives of cultural history absent the mass participation that tends to drive the mainstream historiographical narratives.

Nevertheless, an attempt to do exactly that has been the content of the dissertation’s third major argument. An important way to contest the operation of market populism is to confront its effects on the question of which historical narratives are significant, and which are of limited or niche interest. Rather than explore “free jazz” as a hip, intellectual subculture, or an out of joint residue of another time, I argue that the declensions and

deformations of the “jazz concept” are central to understanding the periodization of the 1960s and 1970s. In particular I believe the disintegration of jazz ideologies offers a point of view that highlights decolonization and the contestation of the political economy of internal colonialism as a material driving force in the shift towards Black Power. The political meanings of the transformations of musical practice grouped roughly and provisionally into categories like “free jazz” or the “avant-garde,” and ultimately into the quasi-mystical surrogates that those in the know are fond of—“creative music,” or simply “the music”—cannot be fully understood in terms of functionalist endorsements, aesthetic literalizations, or social alliances between and among musicians, other intellectuals, and activists, however important those networks and affiliations were. This dissertation has tried to show how, in the 1960s and 1970s, the aesthetic work that musicians did to expand the domain of the sensible, to contest the intelligible boundaries of the jazz concept, to reclaim as “in-common” what had been segmented into a market niche and tied to a critical infrastructure—these acts were political not despite or in addition to but precisely insofar as they were aesthetic, insofar as they made audible as intelligible voice (no matter how many repetitions or insistent articulations it required, as in the case of Roscoe Mitchell at Willisau) what had been only the noise of desublimated enjoyment. In this the musicians of the period attempted to make good on a drive immanent to “the tradition” ever since disparate performances began to be grouped together under a sign of instrumental “spectacular virtuosity”—(quasi-)vocal expressions that were rarely recognized as (political) speech, created by musicians who have collectively redistributed the sensible over and again, fundamentally transforming what can be heard as art, redrawing the boundaries between noise and music, and therefore unleashing powerful and unpredictable social energies.

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