

Mediating Sounds: Race, Musical Appropriation, and Literary Intervention in the Cold War

By

Adam Schuster

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(English)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2022

Date of final oral examination: 7/1/2022

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Ramzi Fawaz, Professor, English (Chair)

Yanie Fecu, Assistant Professor, English

Jérôme Camal, Associate Professor, Anthropology

Johanna Almiron, Adjunct Assistant Professor, American Studies, Rutgers University

Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, Professor, English, Pomona College

© Copyright by Adam Schuster 2022
All Rights Reserved

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Amending the Blues: Big Bill Broonzy’s Archive of Asides	37
Chapter 2: <i>The Real Ambassadors</i> , Reappropriating Jazz, and the (Mis)recognitions of Empire	81
Chapter 3: ‘Boundaries Bind Unbinding’: Jazz and Cold War Cosmopolitanism in the Margins of Langston Hughes’s <i>Ask Your Mama</i>	126
Chapter 4: Synthesizing Sounds: Vibration, Poetry, and Belonging in Sun Ra’s Space Age.....	163
Conclusion.....	207
Bibliography.....	216

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the immense support I received along the way. I am both humbled and profoundly affected by the faculty, friends, and family who have lifted me up through this process.

First and foremost, I am immensely grateful for the support of my advisor Ramzi Fawaz. From our first-year graduate course to my final dissertation draft, Ramzi always encouraged me to push further and refine my ideas, and he offered precisely the candid and compassionate mentorship I needed. You've made me a better scholar, educator, and thinker, Ramzi. Cherene Sherrard-Johnson has also supported me since my first year as a graduate student, and her depth of knowledge and incisive feedback left an indelible mark on this project. I am also thankful for the support of Johanna Almiron, whose passion and generosity is unrivaled. I'll forever cherish being the Scottie Pippen to your MJ. Yanie Fecu's guidance in these last few years has also elevated my thinking on music and sound, as well as my ability to write about them. Thanks to Jérôme Camal as well, whose kindness and commitment as a reader is greatly appreciated. Finally, I was lucky to have worked with Teju Olaniyan just before his passing in 2019. I wish I had more time to show you what this project became, but I am so lucky to have worked with you as long as I did.

I am appreciative of the two years of support I received through the UW-Madison Graduate School's Advanced Opportunity Fellowship. Thanks also to the UW-Madison English Department for their semester of fellowship support as well. This dissertation benefited from the security and flexibility that both forms of financial assistance provided.

I would also like to thank the many generous readers who provided feedback throughout this process. Thanks to *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*—in which a

version of chapter three initially appeared—as well as to my fellow workshoppers at the *Futures of American Studies Institute* at Dartmouth, where I shared sections of chapter one.

I so appreciate the generosity and community I received from my fellow graduate students here at UW-Madison. Thank you Andrew Thomas and Sara Gabler Thomas for being some of the best neighbors and colleagues a guy could ask for in these last few years. I will miss our record listening sessions. Ryan Holley, you have been there since the beginning. I could not ask for a better companion and commiserator. Thanks also to Seth Umbaugh. You've become one of my closest friends over these years, and I cannot thank you enough for the encouragement and camaraderie you provided. Let's plan our next Cubs-Dodgers game soon. Finally, thank you to Tori Yonker. You dealt with my constant complaining and anxiety for four years (how?), and somehow you are still willing to be just a phone call away. I could not have done this without you.

Everything I have achieved I owe to Frank and Lisa Schuster, my wonderful parents. There are no words to express my gratitude. Mom, you answered every call and listened with unimaginable patience as I ceaselessly spun my wheels. You continue to teach me how to be hopeful and positive. Dad, you have always been my rock and reassurance. To both of you, and this is true: this is as much yours as it is mine.

Abstract

This dissertation explores how postwar black artists turned to literature to intervene on the racial scripts that redefined and coopted black music during the mid-twentieth century. I argue that artists like Big Bill Broonzy, Langston Hughes, Louis Armstrong, and Sun Ra intervened on these musico-racial discourses and responded to appropriation of the blues and jazz by turning to literary forms like poetry, the musical, and autobiography. By embracing forms of aesthetic border crossing—what I term *intermediality*—these artists refashioned responses to appropriation, neither entrenching themselves in essence nor closing off aesthetic exchange across racial divides. Instead, they reimagined and redefined this music and exceeded prescriptive understandings of racial belonging. My project intervenes on Cold War logics that occlude alternative forms of political engagement and imagination, offering an alternative account of appropriation's effects wherein new aesthetic forms were developed and new political and social attachments pursued.

Chapter one examines Big Bill Broonzy's alternative constructions of the growing 1950s blues archive. Analyzing archived recordings and Broonzy's autobiography, I reveal Broonzy's counterarchival approach, which indulges romantic recastings of the blues while simultaneously undermining those stereotypes fashioned at this time. Chapter two analyzes Louis Armstrong's musical *The Real Ambassadors* to show how artists touring for the US government distanced themselves from the state's imperial interests. I reveal how the musical's narration and music intersect and re-envision the songs' discursive power, modeling a form of intervention that interrogates and reconfigures the state's mobilization of jazz. Chapter three examines Langston Hughes's *Ask Your Mama*, arguing that the text's intersection of music and poetry invoke a form of cosmopolitanism that negotiates alterity and re-examines inherited attachments, whether

cultural, racial, or national. The final chapter focuses on the 1970s sound poetry of musician Sun Ra. Conceiving of bodies as vibration, Ra translates the newly-invented analog synthesizer into a relational model whereby bodies might be better coordinated to fit a collective, non-identitarian “sound.” Through a turn to literary forms, these artists expanded what this music could mean, who it could speak to and how, and what other possibilities for belonging might lie beyond liberal integration and racial consolidation.

INTRODUCTION

By June 1961, Lorraine Hansberry had had enough. Two years after her acclaimed *A Raisin in the Sun* debuted on Broadway, Hansberry published a scathing takedown in the *Village Voice* of what she termed the “new paternalism” of white artists and critics. While the essay begins as a response to Norman Mailer’s review of Jean Genet’s play *The Blacks*, it quickly unfolds into a larger critique of the “romantic racism” on display in both men’s work, and in the work of other white men of the period. In her assessment of Mailer specifically, Hansberry returns to his infamous 1957 essay “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster,” a work she claims received so little attention from black writers in years since simply because “who knew *where* to begin in the face of such monumental and crass assumptions?” (“Genet, Mailer”). Mailer’s article anoints the white male hipster as a radical new figure in popular US culture, one who has broken from the conformity of the age and embraced life on the margins, the “rebellious imperatives of the self” (339). Of course, the archetype from which Mailer fashions this attitude is the black American male: “[h]e lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence” (341). In a midcentury moment that remembered the totalitarian regimes of World War II and now found itself ripe with possibilities for nuclear annihilation, Mailer celebrated what he saw as an embrace of private life over mass culture, of profane indulgence. And for him, this rebellious hipster pose was nothing more than a natural absorption of “the existentialist synapses of the Negro” (341).

Hansberry's essay, published as the playwright was transitioning from Broadway breakthrough to prominent black cultural critic,¹ represents a clear challenge to the postwar cool and hipster aesthetic that both followed and helped bolster these stereotypical constructions of blackness. Hansberry calls Genet's play "a conversation between white men about *themselves*;" she censures writer Nelson Algren—famously critical of *Raisin*—for believing that "materially deprived Negroes are, somehow, the only 'true Negroes;'" and she accuses Mailer of carrying a "distaste for the middle-class Negro." These "new paternalists" projected an image of black life—natural, lurid, romantically malcontent—and mined it for spiritual sustenance. As Daphne Brooks writes, "Hansberry takes her time to rigorously critique this seeming white ally public for its myopia and insularity" (231).² Pursuing spiritual invigoration, these new paternalists were guilty of racial invention and cultural essentialism, not to mention class constraint.

Crucially though, in her confrontation with Mailer, Hansberry turns directly to the musical linchpin in his white hipsterdom: jazz. Mailer writes in "The White Negro" that the development of the hip "is probably due to jazz" (340) and that "jazz is orgasm" (341). He states that jazz "spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond" (341), and that the "condition of psychopathy"—which he found to be a desirable response to 1950s American life—can be found in jazz musicians (345).³ Hansberry challenges Mailer's "insider" knowledge here, and in a move that establishes a counter-discourse of sorts, she turns to friend James Baldwin and his essay for *Esquire* that same

¹ As Daphne Brooks writes, "along with her close friend [James] Baldwin, she largely invented a new category for the culture at midcentury: that of the modern Black public intellectual" (220).

² Joel Dinerstein similarly claims that for Hansberry, the individual male rebel and his romanticization of black life was politically dubious, and had very little to do with the actual lived experience of black Americans (405-406).

³ Mailer's hipster resonated with figures like the Beats who felt that jazz "represented the pursuit of Dionysian freedom, the uncensored expression of the soul's impulses" (Saul 286).

year: “Negro jazz musicians, among whom we sometimes found ourselves, who really liked Norman, did not for an instant consider him as being even remotely ‘hip’ and Norman did not know this and I could not tell him...They thought he was a real sweet ofay cat, but a little frantic” (qtd. in “Genet, Mailer”). Mailer’s hip credentials—which gave him license to characterize black urban life and then translate it into an adoptable white affect—relied on both racialized musical projections and inflated fantasies of self. As far as Hansberry was concerned, Mailer had “manufactured an absurdity and locked himself in it.”

Hansberry not only reveals Mailer’s mistake as a consumer of black culture; she corrects him as well, and in doing so turns to another musical form, the blues: “That is why, blues or no blues, life roots or no life roots, Negroes of all classes have made it clear that they want the hell out of the ghetto just as fast as the ascendancy of Africa, the courts, insurance money, job-upgrading, the threat of ‘our image overseas,’ or anything else can thrust them . . . Misery may be theatrical to the onlooker but it hurts him who is miserable. That is what the blues are about.”⁴ In her takedown of erroneous authenticity claims tied to the blues, Hansberry expands outward, articulating a connection between music, Cold War containment, diplomacy, and civil rights. US failures on issues of race relations doomed the publicity campaigns the State Department so desperately crafted to curry favor with newly-liberated countries, leaving hope that “our image overseas” might result in measured gains in civil rights here at home.⁵ African ascendancy also might, one hoped, lead to the revised social status of African Americans. While Mailer was ready

⁴ In an earlier draft Hansberry responded to these misguided understandings of the blues with more of an edge: “‘you mean you thought we was being folksy to give you something to believe in? Honey, we was just surviving’” (qtd. in Brooks 232).

⁵ Historians like Mary Dudziak have contended that given the US’s vulnerability to Soviet criticism on race relations, from an international relations perspective, limited advances in civil rights would actually help bolster the US’s international cause with a newly decolonizing world. See Dudziak 15.

to “[admit] the failures of radical politics” (Saul 68) and embrace what he saw as black America’s detachment and sensuous survival strategies, Hansberry placed black life at the center of American politics. And in articulating Mailer’s misstep, she redefines the blues for him. Music here is not the measure of sensuous rebellion from society, as Mailer would have it; it is the means by which its artists and adherents could articulate (and even challenge) their vexed and variegated place within it.

What we see in Hansberry’s essay is a recognition that black music by midcentury had been adopted as the lingua franca of American cultural life, the means by which one side of the racial divide understood the other and came to fashion itself. Indeed, even as she turns her gaze to Africa and to perceptions of black Americans overseas, Hansberry keeps her discussion contained within a musical frame—particularly insightful, given that at the time of publication the State Department’s Cultural Presentations Program had sponsored twelve jazz tours through the Middle East, Southeast Asia, South America, and Africa (Monson 124). At the same time, a blues revival was just getting underway in the US, with white audiences and collectors “rediscovering” country blues artists, digging through old record bins to find that authentic blues sound. These moments in Hansberry’s writing—with jazz reconsidered and the blues redefined—reveal just how integral this music was to the formation of a Cold War cultural selfhood; how bound up it became in the increasingly international conversations around liberation; and how its prominence as a cypher for black life left it in need of rearticulation, and a specifically textual intervention.

I trace at length Hansberry’s dispute with Mailer to open up a larger exploration of the incisive yet overlooked responses to US discourses of appropriation and musical (mis)hearing, what Daphne Brooks calls, invoking Hansberry, “the violence of simplifying Black cultural

forms” (231). Specifically, my dissertation explores how postwar black artists turned to literature as a means of intervening on the racial scripts that redefined and coopted black music during the mid-twentieth century. In the 1950s and 1960s, white listeners embraced rural blues as a romanticization of black Southern life and as a strategy for revitalizing a US consumer-populace. Meanwhile, the US government exported jazz as a tool for Third World diplomacy, sponsoring musical tours and broadcasting radio programs to convey a colorblind democracy. In response to these overlapping sites of appropriation, black artists like Langston Hughes, Louis Armstrong, and Sun Ra turned to literary forms like poetry, autobiography, and the musical to intervene on these musico-racial discourses. If popular and governmental appropriation of the blues and jazz yoked this music to strategies of American integration and imperialism, the realm of the literary became an unexpected avenue to open new discursive and aesthetic possibilities. What we see in the *Village Voice* is a major literary figure in Hansberry turning to the polemic essay to challenge, in part, the repurposing and redefinition of the blues and jazz by white critics in search of a new sense of self. The chapters that follow intensify these literary-musical exchanges, looking specifically at how the two modes intersect and what their effects might be in the wake of these appropriative practices. For instance, in his poem *Ask Your Mama*, Langston Hughes mixes musical cues and poetic verse in the margins of the text to signify on jazz’s increasingly international circulation and to create pockets of aesthetic excess, where meaning could proliferate and new, cosmopolitan affiliations could be experienced. This interchange between music and poetry is an example of what I call *intermediality*, a strategy of aesthetic border crossing that encouraged listeners to symbolically associate movement between mediums, genres, and styles with movement beyond narrow or prescribed identities and categories of belonging. From reconceptualizing the contents and construction of a blues archive to

reimagining jazz's racial and national attachments, the case studies in this project represent a variety of explicitly *literary* interventions—many made by the musicians themselves—into the dominant listening practices that defined midcentury America.

Ostensibly a historical and formalist study of musical appropriation and aesthetic exchange, my project is also invested in expanding our understanding of political engagement beyond familiar discourses of accommodationism and resistance. Often, discussions of black cultural production during this period are forced to navigate familiar historical and political binaries: on the one hand, the complicit, assimilationist logics of Cold War liberalism, and on the other, the brands of black radicalism that either declined in the wake of the Popular Front or resurged as Civil Rights gave way to Black Power.⁶ For many historians, the postwar, post-Popular Front fracturing of Communist, trade unionist, and civil rights activist ties rendered impossible a more radical push for social change. Scholarship has documented “Cold War anticommunism’s triumph over radicalism,” with “Anticommunist persecution undermin[ing] civil rights by labeling them ‘subversive’” (Arnesen 6). The bounds of permissible dissent narrowed, and organizations like the NAACP adopted a liberal anticommunist stance to ensure their survival.⁷ Civil rights and labor leaders like Walter White and A. Philip Randolph “threw their political capital behind what they believed to be the achievable goal of developing a strong civil rights plank within the Democratic Party platform...[which] also meant sacrificing the black left and elevating anticommunism to an unprecedented centrality within antiracist politics”

⁶ Nikhil Pal Singh writes of Ralph Ellison’s and Richard Wright’s “profound if unsuccessful effort...to imagine an independent black radicalism beyond the emerging antinomies that defined the Cold War period: liberalism versus Marxism, anticommunist patriotism versus international solidarity, civil rights at home versus human rights around the world” (170).

⁷ As historian Manfred Berg writes, “the anticommunist hysteria...blurred the distinction between dissent and treason” (75). Historian Mary Dudziak similarly states, “[u]nder the strictures of Cold War politics, a broad, international critique of racial oppression was out of place” (11).

(Singh 165-166). On the other side, outspoken black artists and intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Richard Wright rejected the strategic containment of civil rights advancement within the “liberal-nationalism” and expanding universalism of the US state. As E. Franklin Frazier writes in “The Failure of the Negro Intellectual,” “For most Negro intellectuals . . . integration and eventual assimilation means the annihilation of the Negro—physically, culturally, and spiritually (278).⁸ By the late-1960s, “Black power would expose the limits of contained racial liberalism when confronted with the vicious defense and accumulated history of racial inequality” (Singh 173). And while we should be careful not to reduce the complexity of black political activity and sentiment in this moment, particular divisions are still mappable given the devastating ideological power of anticommunism and the Cold War consensus.

The case studies that define this project work to make visible an alternative ideological space where new ideas about race and cultural belonging were forged, the likes of which exceed both the integrationist model of the Cold War based on a universal conception of American belonging, and those modes of cultural protectionism that prioritized particularity in response. Whether it is Langston Hughes’s pursuit of a cosmopolitan aesthetic in his poetry or Sun Ra’s imaginative desire to use his synthesizer to “retune our vibrations,” these writers and musicians were committed to multiple political values based on something more than unitary identity. In this way, they reimagined responses to appropriation, neither entrenching themselves in racial essence nor closing off aesthetic exchange across racial divides. Instead, they retheorized and redefined the music they took as their subject, and thereby exceeded prescriptive understandings

⁸ Singh cites this moment as well, writing “Frazier bitterly condemned his generation of black intellectuals for having been ‘seduced by dreams of final assimilation’” (167).

of racial belonging. My project intervenes on the Cold War logics that occlude alternative forms of political engagement and imagination, as well as offers an alternative account of appropriation's effects, wherein new aesthetic forms were developed and new political and social attachments pursued.

In what follows I briefly survey the critical conversation at the intersection of race, sound, and literature, and I provide historical context around the midcentury moment in which these artists were working, a time of profound technological innovation and aesthetic exchange. I then elaborate my use of intermediality as a critical concept and explore its usefulness as a lens through which to approach these works. In the second section, I turn to the question of appropriation and I discuss how it was carried out with respect to the blues and jazz in this moment. I also briefly show how it intersected with broader logics of resistance coursing through the Cold War and black freedom movements, and I discuss how the intermedial work these artists produced deviated critically from conventional responses to musical appropriation. In articulating these unique stances and aesthetic practices, they opened up new spaces for self-making and social belonging that exceed the familiar logics of complicity and resistance.

Race, Sound, and Text: Intermediality at Midcentury

The last two decades have seen substantial work at the intersection of music, race, and literature, with particular emphasis on the racialization of sound. Pim Higginson's recent tracing of jazz's interwar reception in France describes the process of "scoring" race, that is, how a genre like jazz became understood by white audiences as "the essential expression and guarantee

of racial essence” (2).⁹ Such work also calls to mind Jennifer Stoever’s “listening ear,” as well as Jérôme Camal’s “listening regimes,” two additional theoretical frames that speak to the universality of racialized sound, not to mention the ability (if not necessity) for those experiences to be localized. Stoever for her part writes largely of the US context, cataloging the myriad ways that the color line has been historically upheld through sound. She defines the listening ear as the “historical aggregate of normative American listening practices,” capturing “listening’s epistemological function as a modality of racial discernment” (13). For Stoever, the sonic color line produces and polices racial difference, “posit[ing] racialized subject positions... as historical accretions of sonic phenomena and aural stereotypes” (11). In other words, we might consider the “listening ear” facilitating something like the “scoring” project Higginson sees determining both jazz’s reception and the roles artists are made to perform as part of that score. Jérôme Camal’s “listening regimes” take us beyond the US context and into the Caribbean, allowing closer attention to how dominant listening practices intersect with empire. According to Camal, not only was colonial listening a project defined by misrecognition; it “was informed by previous listening habits, by the myths, desires, and projections that circulated through European travel writings, with each new text echoing those that came before” (37). From “titillating” accounts of slave dances to recastings of drumming and singing practices as positive instances of catharsis and accelerated productivity, the stories these early colonizers and slaveholders told about the sounds they (mis)heard both justified their subjugating regime and overdetermined the listening

⁹ Higginson situates jazz within a centuries-long chronology of musical and racial “scoring.” Philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Schopenhauer placed music largely in the domain of leisure, of emotion and physicality, pre-lingual and therefore beyond the signifiable and the rational. The scientific racism of the nineteenth century would quickly link these traits to blackness and alterity, the “natural musicality” of black people an assumption that folded easily into what the artform was already instantiating. Put simply, “nineteenth-century racist theories that connected music with blackness were prepared by Western aesthetics’ persistent merging of music and difference” (35). This history would ultimately frame how jazz was received in France in the twentieth century.

practices that followed it. Put simply, power relations “[structure] and are structured by” hearing (37). All three of these scholars help illuminate the historical contingency and disciplining power of listening as a cultural practice, particularly as it relates to race.

Not only do Higginson, Stoever, and Camal reveal how racial fictions are perceived and perpetuated through listening; they also demonstrate how these practices are informed by textual and extra-auditory experience. In their shuttling across different subjects, objects, and modes—from musical performance and recording, to fiction, travel narrative, and film—they extend their critical reach to larger cultures of aurality, or as Camal puts it, the “less-than-transparent field[s] of sonic relations” (8). Each of these critics then, to varying degrees, can be mapped onto a trajectory set forth by Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman two decades ago: “Intersecting the musical and discursive, [the racial imagination] becomes a ‘soundtext’ that circulates within as well as across national boundaries” (5).¹⁰ Recognizing the textual as enmeshed with the aural turns us to literary studies, which has been a crucial site for articulating the exchanges between black music and writing, with pioneering works by Houston Baker, Sascha Feinstein, Stephen Henderson, Nathaniel Mackey, and Aldon Lynn Nielsen, to name a few.¹¹ The last decade has seen a surge in critical investment, with major works coming from scholars such as Daphne Brooks, Brent Hayes Edwards, Meta DuEwa Jones, Carter Mathes, and Anthony Reed.¹² In her

¹⁰ Radano and Bohlman’s “racial imagination” not only extends conceptions of race beyond a primarily visual phenomenon (much like Stoever’s listening ear more explicitly achieves later), but as Jack Hamilton writes, it “avoids ideas of fixed racial essence and suggestions of race as a purely psychological construction” (7). Instead, it is a “shifting matrix of ideological constructions of difference,” remaining “forever on the loose, subject to reformation within the memories and imaginations of the social” (Radano & Bohlman 5).

¹¹ See Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1987); Feinstein, *Jazz Poetry: From the 1920s to the Present* (1993); Henderson, *Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References* (1973), Mackey, *Moment’s Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose* (1993, co-edited with Art Lange); Nielsen, *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (1997).

¹² Part of Brooks’ expansive *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (2021) involves carefully attending to a neglected archive of popular music criticism

work *The Muse is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word* (2011), Jones examines the intersection of the written and the aural in jazz poetry, performing multimedia analyses of poems as written text and as vocalized, recorded performance.¹³ Reed similarly studies the intersection of poetry and audio recording, what he terms “phonographic poetry.” He places these objects within a larger practice of black “soundwork,” a process “of black collective thinking that opens onto new configurations of the social” (14). Additionally, Carter Mathes’s *Imagine the Sound: Experimental African American Literature after Civil Rights* (2015) tracks how writers such as Henry Dumas, Larry Neal, and Toni Cade Bambara turned to the disruptive potential of free jazz in the 1960s to reimagine narratives of progress and resistance in the wake of Civil Rights. For each of these critics, aesthetic exchanges between text and sound open up new possibilities for critical interpretation, political investment, and social formation.

My own project extends these lines of thinking to not only continue tracing how the discursive is entangled with the musical when it comes to race, but also how literature can explicitly intervene upon it, that is, how artists like Louis Armstrong or Big Bill Broonzy—whose own roles were often “scripted” in the US’s musico-racial drama—could turn the discursive back on itself and spark a literary intervention. By suggesting that many of these artists actually spearheaded these approaches themselves, I follow Stoeber’s call to “amplify

written by black women, thus revealing how overlooked genres of critical writing “intervene in the framing practices of others who have either denied or discounted their work” (36); Edwards similarly explores the more “ancillary” writings of and about music, but he also considers writing by musicians themselves, and his investigation into the “interface between sound and writing” (20) demands we rethink the parameters of literature as such.

¹³ By considering the jazz poem a “material and cultural artifact” that exceeds the printed page (19), Jones infuses literary examinations of jazz poetry with a performance studies bent, attending to the larger aural phenomenon of such writings.

black performers and writers as theorists of listening” (17), and I explore how the literary is not just bound up in the musical but can act as an intervening force with resignifying potential.

Before elaborating on the means by which these artists accomplished this maneuvering, it is crucial to note how ripe the midcentury moment was for innovation and aesthetic exchange. From the early 1950s to the 1970s the US saw a shift in how sound was circulating. As Michael Denning describes, following the advent of magnetic tape recording during World War II, “sound could be recorded not only accurately, but flexibly. The ability to splice and mix recordings, to bounce and layer tracks, and to create effects in the studio, led to an era that was less about recording specific musical performances than about making musical recordings.” As a result, “[n]ew forms of listening emerged, as car radios, jukeboxes, and portable transistor radios played pop 45s, while high-fidelity stereo systems and FM radios played LPs in living rooms” (70). Additionally, shifts in radio broadcasting brought on by national network television created the ability for suburban listeners (a new demographic itself) to seek out and consume music associated with those identities largely absent from the neighborhoods in which they resided.¹⁴ Along with these innovations in recording and listening, the 1950s witnessed an industry boom in recorded music. Record sales would increase with each passing year, so much so that by 1959 the total number of records sold more than doubled that of 1954 (Anderson, *Making Easy Listening* 67). By 1970, the industry’s sales of records and tapes had reached \$2 billion, “exceed[ing] the sale generated by movies and all sports events (\$1.6 billion and \$600 million respectively)” (Saul 272).

¹⁴ As Leerom Medovoi writes, “If suburbia defined itself as a zone of unmarked domesticity that was neither rural nor urban, and that contained neither class nor racial difference, then radio potentially offered suburbanites access to other places that were rural and urban, that did contain class and racial difference, and that, from a suburban point of view, might sound nondomestic. Radio, to put this in other words, became a particularly promising medium for appealing to a dystopic, dissatisfied suburban imaginary that was eager to hear the sounds of places outside itself” (100).

Along with music recording's innovation and proliferation, there was a coterminous intensification of writing about and with music. The field of blues historiography “exploded in visibility and volume,” with Samuel Charters’ *The Country Blues* (1959) sparking an increase and legitimization of (predominantly white) scholarship on the blues (Garabedian 491). A few years later Amiri Baraka (then Leroi Jones) would publish *Blues People* (1963), an early articulation of cultural nationalist self-determination and a challenge to white dominance in black music criticism. Additionally, album liner notes enjoyed the “peak of their cultural and critical influence and sophistication” during the fifties, sixties, and seventies (Brooks 6), and poets like Sonia Sanchez and Michael Harper sparked literary subgenres like the “Coltrane poem,” thus weaving together musical homage, instrumental style, and literary form.¹⁵ Drawing attention to previously overlooked or understudied works—with texts ranging from archived recordings to blues autobiographies, musicals, and jazz poems—I examine this moment of remarkable production and innovation at the nexus of music and writing and I articulate the methods and stakes of these formal entanglements.

To make sense of how artists used formal experimentation to intervene on musico-racial discourses in the mid-twentieth century, I turn to the concept of *intermediality*. I use intermediality to describe how aesthetic modes converge, as well as how artists engage one aesthetic medium through others. This might involve the translation of literary devices into musical composition or recording, or the transposition of instrumental tactics or sonic traits into writing. These exchanges often involve a process Daniel Albright defines as *pseudomorphosis*. Borrowing from Theodore Adorno, he writes, “when, in a work in a single artistic medium, the

¹⁵ For more on the Coltrane poem, see Meta DuEwa Jones, “Jazz Prosody: The Gendered Contours of the Post-Soul Coltrane Poem,” in *The Muse is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word* (2011).

medium is asked to ape, or do the work of, some alien medium,” we experience a pseudomorphic event (212). Brought on by *figures of consonance* that capture similarly functioning figures traversing aesthetic borderlines, pseudomorphic processes can be both formal and thematic in their disruption of medial divides. Langston Hughes’s *Ask Your Mama* is one example of this phenomenon, the poem importing musical cues like the orchestral *tacit* (or *tacet*)—a call to silence a voice or instrument—into poetic lines that introduce breaks or pauses in the poem. As Brent Hayes Edwards’ writes, “pseudomorphosis—working one medium in the shape of or in the shadow of another—is the paradigm of innovation in black art” (19).¹⁶ Intermediality, as an umbrella term, then involves one aesthetic mode’s “evocation or imitation” of features that are traditionally associated with another mode.¹⁷ I do, however, understand intermediality in a much broader sense. The concept can describe one medium’s guidance, provocation, or enhancement of another, what some critics have called “cross-media influence,”¹⁸ or it can simply involve the merging of traditionally distinct media into a single media product, what Irina Rajewsky names “media combination” (51).¹⁹ Everything from formal mimicry, transposition, structural reference

¹⁶ It should be noted that Edwards does not use the term intermediality, instead asserting that “scholarship on *intermediality* tends to employ the term in a normative fashion in a manner that could be accused of technological determinism (taking for granted the ‘independent properties of the medium’ rather than understanding any medium to be not only a given ‘channel of communication’ or the ‘specific material with which a particular kind of artist worked,’ but also—and unavoidably—a ‘form of social organization’)” (273).

¹⁷ Irina Rajewsky calls this narrower understanding of intermediality “intermedial reference,” which involves the “evocation or imitation of certain...techniques” associated with one medium by another: “Rather than combining different medial forms of articulation, the given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another” (52-53).

¹⁸ See Edwards, *Epistrophies* 9.

¹⁹ Birgit Neumann offers a similar definition: “intermediality in literature refers to both the verbal evocation of a distinct medium (be it through explicit thematization of a specific medium or the structural imitation of media-specific forms of world-making) and the direct integration of another medium” (513). On the question of integration, modernist critic Patrick Milian also writes, “intermediality occurs when the artwork as a meaning-making event draws from the representational and expressive capacities of multiple mediums. It is in this sense a complex of compositional strategies and communicative registers—something a text *does* rather than something a text *is* or *has*” (1).

and influence, to simply a sustained engagement with features from another medium fall under intermediality's purview. Examples can include the earlier translation of orchestral instruction into poetry, an autobiography that incorporates blues lyrics and parrots blues recording practice, or a work of musical theater that combines scripted dialogue and musical score. Intermediality then involves not just the refashioning of formal features as they cross aesthetic borders, but the commingling, mutual constitution, and shared influence of aesthetic categories.

Though critics might favor terms such as transmediality or multimodality to describe the works in this study, intermediality's etymological affordances carry a unique utility for this project. To speak of intermediality is to invoke ideas of intermediation, middles, and in-betweenness.²⁰ The artists I discuss relished muddying aesthetic divides. Louis Armstrong was a prolific writer, publishing essays and reviews in jazz periodicals like *Down Beat* and *Melody Maker* and popular magazines like *Ebony* and *Esquire* (Stein 8); he even released two autobiographies, *Swing That Music* (1936) and *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (1954), and is said to have written ten thousand letters in his lifetime, many on a portable typewriter he took with him on tour (7). Additionally, Sun Ra's work as a poet was so important to him that at times he referred to his music as simply "a pretext to make [his poetry] possible" (Szwed 319). Taking seriously the writing of these musicians and others, "one encounters again and again an approach to aesthetics that resists any easy distinction between 'writing' and 'music,' instead viewing both as components in a broader sphere of art making and performance" (Edwards 12).

But more than aesthetic borrowing and border crossing, intermediality speaks to the tenuous ideological locations in which these artists found themselves, often on the edges of some

²⁰ Gabriele Rippl cites Bernd Herzogenrath when she writes, "Since 'medium' etymologically means 'middle,' 'intermediate' and 'between,' and since 'inter' means 'between,' intermediality 'can very literally be described as between the between'" (10).

of the major political blocs of the period. Critics have described Langston Hughes's late-fifties work as a moment of diminished political investment, his radicalism tempered in previous years and his testimony in front of the McCarthy committee in 1953 tamping down any remaining activist impulses (Smethurst 1225). Indeed, James Baldwin's 1959 review of Hughes's new poetry collection stated that "[Hughes] is not the first American Negro to find the war between his social and artistic responsibilities all but irreconcilable" ("Sermons").²¹ And while Louis Armstrong's role was crucial to the success of the musical satire *The Real Ambassadors* at the 1962 Monterey Jazz Festival, the performance followed his own 1960 state-sponsored tour of Africa, with his October performance in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) lining up disturbingly well with a CIA plot to assassinate prime minister Patrice Lumumba (Higginson 9). The artists considered in this dissertation thus sit uncomfortably—or have been uncomfortably wedged—between, on the one hand, stances of accommodationism, industry opportunism, and sanctioned state cooptation, and on the other an acceptable activist orientation that could be indisputably aligned with the black freedom movement. While I elaborate on these unique positions in the next section, intermediality lends itself to both the formal convergences these artists pursued and the ideological struggles they weathered and on which they intervened, the term serving as a conceptual hinge between aesthetics and sociopolitical experience.

Rather than construct rigid boundaries around what intermediality means or which works should qualify, I am more invested in what intermediality can reveal, that is, what attuning to its processes unearths. Put simply, if midcentury discourses defining the blues and jazz constrained the genres' interpretive and political possibilities, artists reimagined these aesthetic parameters

²¹ Hughes biographer Arnold Rampersad called the review a "nonchalant dismissal" (295), and at Newport in 1958 Hughes also reportedly "caught more than a whiff of hauteur" during an exchange with James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison (Rampersad 296).

by turning to literature as a way to revise the discursive spaces that contained them. During a time of profound technological change in music recording and when new forms of music writing were emerging, artists leveraged aesthetic innovation as a way to address the racial scripts that determined how black music was heard. As Gabriele Rippl writes, drawing from Birgit Neumann, “the concept of intermediality, by opening up a space of semiotic and material in-between-ness, may intervene in the social fabric of existing medial configurations, reworking them in a way that allows readers to experience, see and imagine the world differently” (15). The dominant listening practices of the day both adhered to and reinforced limited understandings of musical blackness. Intermedial exchange thus became a strategy through which to intervene on those practices, to alter the listener’s interpretive methods, distend their unconscious associations, and break their signifying chains. As Neumann writes, intermedial disruptions like these “may . . . be productive because they can be used to change dominant representational codes and to challenge seemingly stable constructions, which lie at the heart of essentialist and totalizing worldviews” (525). If the reception and political capacities of a particular aesthetic form could be overdetermined, then having its edges reshaped and its operations reimagined just might create space for something new. To quote Cara L. Lewis, “[d]ifferent forms...can do different things” (10). Only by examining these formal configurations can we truly grasp the intervening work of these artists, many of whom had been cast off as politically retrograde.

Appropriation’s Effects: Imagination and Innovation Beyond Complicity and Resistance

While intermedial aesthetics are compelling in their own right, as I have already hinted at, what makes these artists’ works so significant is how their intermedial responses allowed them to gesture beyond familiar conversations around appropriation, authenticity, complicity, and

resistance. To be sure, appropriation is a *loaded* term. In its more innocuous uses, it can refer to “an act of transport” or “[t]o *make something appropriate* for another context” (Jackson 1). More commonly though, it recalls white America’s parasitic desire for and consumption of black culture and music, with particular attention given to the transportation, representation, use, or procurement of specific styles across racial and cultural lines. From Eric Lott’s “love and theft” to bell hooks’ “eating the other,” critics have articulated how, in the words of E. Patrick Johnson, “cultural usurpation has been a common practice of white Americans and their relation to art forms not their own” (4). I understand appropriation to be the practice of repurposing culture,²² and though it is indisputable that cultures intersect, mix, and grow in relation to one another, when it comes to appropriation and cultural harm, the question always returns to power.²³ As philosopher Erich Hatala Matthes states, cultural appropriation becomes “harmful because of the way in which it interacts with *dominating systems* so as to *silence* and *speak for* individuals who are already *socially marginalized*” (349).

Often, and rightfully so, discussions around appropriation prioritize the act and extent of harm and the question of cultural proprietorship. In addition to the literal violation of property rights that can occur, appropriative harm can include “an attack on the viability or identity of cultures or their members” (Young and Brunk 5). These can include everything from misrepresentation and caricature, exploitation and denial of economic benefits, failures of recognition, and even the broader experience of assimilation.²⁴ On an epistemic level, critics

²² I borrow from Lauren Michele Jackson, who uses this term to begin her own study of white appropriation of black culture in *White Negroes: When Cornrows were in Vogue...and Other Thoughts on Cultural Appropriation* (2019).

²³ Jackson makes this claim quite succinctly: “When the powerful appropriate from the oppressed, society’s imbalances are exacerbated and inequalities prolonged” (4).

²⁴ See Young and Brunk; also Coleman, Coombe, and MacArailt.

have also noted how cultural appropriation incites concerns over communication and credibility, with Matthes describing how acts of appropriation “creat[e] and exacerbat[e]...credibility deficits” in marginalized groups (353). By trafficking in distorted images and stereotypes (at worst), or simply representative gestures that usurp credibility (at best), the appropriating body makes it so that audiences are “incapable of hearing” members of the marginalized group, unable to recognize their own unique credibility, contribution, or authority (350). As Greg Tate so succinctly put it, appropriation involves taking “everything but the burden.”

These concerns are especially heightened when we consider the history of race in American popular music.²⁵ To quote Tate once more, “Readers of Black music history are often struck by the egregious turns of public relations puffery that saw Paul Whiteman crowned the King of Swing in the 1920s, Benny Goodman anointed the King of Jazz in the 1930s, Elvis Presley propped up as the King of Rock and Roll in the 1950s, and Eric Clapton awarded the title of the world’s greatest guitar player (ostensibly of the blues) in the 1960s” (3).²⁶ Indeed, within jazz specifically, the genre’s increased popularity and legitimation during the 1950s emphasized its ties to European and classical music, and white musicians of the cool or West Coast styles like Dave Brubeck (who alongside his wife Iola and Louis Armstrong is the subject of chapter two) received unprecedented acclaim. As historian Iain Anderson writes, “white musicians fit promoters’ image of the new jazz framed by the press and music industry, while African American artists struggled for a share of the rewards” (76).²⁷ We can expand this beyond just

²⁵ See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993); Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (2010); Jack Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination* (2016).

²⁶ A quick note, however. Tate switches Whiteman’s and Goodman’s respective monikers here, with Whiteman actually dubbed the “King of Jazz” and Goodman the “King of Swing.” The point he is making is still correct.

²⁷ Musicologist Ingrid Monson also notes that readers’ polls in jazz magazines like *Down Beat* and *Metronome* during the 1950s celebrated white musicians like saxophonist Stan Getz and drummer

white artists performing historically black music. As discussed briefly before, during the midcentury moment, the increased popularity of traditionally black genres like the blues and jazz led to their appropriation not just by white performers but by white audiences and the US government. On the one hand, the blues was embraced as a romanticization of rural black life and as a response to urban bourgeois values arising at midcentury. During the 1940s and 1950s a new culture of record collecting took off, which helped steer the blues canon towards an archive of rural listings through white listeners' dedicated salvaging, cataloging, and re-releasing of obscure material. Brought on by a particular (white) projection of black vernacular music, this accumulating catalog of obscure rural sounds—including recordings by country blues artists Son House, Charley Patton, and Robert Johnson—would become the standard for blues music. Jeff Todd Titon described this revival as a “stylized revolt against bourgeois values” (225), while Steven Garabedian goes further, calling it a “*re* trenchment in the liberal romantic racialism of the past, where African Americans were embraced as symbols for white redemption rather than as agents in a world of their own making” (491).

Jazz, on the other hand, had its capacity for individual improvisation within a collaborative ensemble seized upon as a model for US democracy and disseminated to foreign audiences vulnerable to Soviet persuasion. In total, from 1956 to 1969 the State Department sponsored twenty-eight musical tours of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and South America for jazz and R&B groups (Monson 123-125). And just as it was being enlisted as a Cold War weapon abroad, the genre was becoming fodder for white fantasies of self-fulfillment, distinctiveness, and rebellion here at home. The Mailers, Kerouacs and Ginsbergs of the world heard in bebop and later forms a solution to 1950s cultural stasis. Consider Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel *On the Road*:

Shelley Manne, leading her to write, “[i]n the eyes of the broader American public, jazz in the early 1950s had a decidedly white face” (66).

“The behatted tenorman was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea, a rising and falling riff that went from ‘EE-yah’ to a crazier ‘EE-de-lee-yah!’ and blasted along to the rolling crash of butt-scarred drums hammered by a big brutal Negro with a bullneck who didn’t give a damn about anything but punishing his busted tubs” (197). This exuberant nowness and intoxicating immediacy that Kerouac and Mailer ascribed to jazz was perhaps only a more bombastic exclamation of a larger phenomenon in white music consumption. In 1960, mainstream jazz magazine *Down Beat* found that ninety-two percent of its readers were men, and as critic Scott Saul describes, given their age and employment status, these readers “fell largely into the demographic category addressed by *The Lonely Crowd*, *The Status Seekers*, and *Growing Up Absurd*—a new service economy, working for a salary but aspiring to a life that was not batch-processed” (34).²⁸ In short, across the blues and jazz we have white artists adopting black musical forms and white America consuming and redefining those forms, a repurposing of musical culture in order to achieve its own economic, social, and political ends.

Within the jazz world specifically, the response to this process by the 1960s was a politicization of jazz aesthetics and an explicit concern over the centrality of race in jazz music. *Down Beat* published two panel discussions on race and jazz, the topics ranging from its increased politicization by black artists, the celebration or denial of black cultural and musical difference, and whether reverse racism existed in the industry.²⁹ Indeed, a predominant strain of thought would recognize the burgeoning free jazz and avant-garde sound (or the “New Thing,” as it was often referred to) as an expression of particularity and political opposition. Many of these artists saw their decisions to break from traditional performance expectations—

²⁸ It is also worth noting that *Down Beat* “employed white editors and columnists almost exclusively” (Anderson 79).

²⁹ See Monson, 240-273.

conventional chord progression and tonality, clear time signatures and timbres—as musical extensions of “a radical, assertive, political consciousness” (Monson 160). The avant-garde turn was heard by many as a response to histories of white encroachment and economic inequality in the jazz world, realities whose fit within the larger political crisis was abundantly clear.³⁰ At times, the artists themselves adopted stances of “ethnic assertiveness.” Free jazz pianist Cecil Taylor stated, “jazz is a Negro feeling,” while bassist and composer Charles Mingus claimed “white people have no right to play it” (qtd. in Anderson 80). As Amiri Baraka put it: “[t]he success of this ‘appropriation’ signaled the existence of an American music, where before there was a Negro music” (“Jazz and” 13).

As the decade carried on, writers and thinkers of the Black Arts Movement continued to weave these newer forms into a distinctly black aesthetic. Baraka criticized white critics’ willingness to sideline race in their discussions of this music, and as he developed his theory of the “changing same,” he would enlist the jazz avant-garde into a system of black cultural identity expression, “different musical ‘projections’ of core cultural ‘forms’” (Porter 197).³¹ Additionally, Larry Neal’s “Black Boogaloo: Notes on Black Liberation” (1969) devoted a section to black musicians, urging them to “combine energy” and issue “wild screaming sounds” as a call to mobilize. As Jason Robinson suggests, “in the Black Arts Movement as a whole, black music as black identity is a recurring trope” (22). Iain Anderson similarly suggests that the

³⁰ Prominent jazz critics were increasingly opposed to the politicization of jazz. As Monson describes in the case of *Down Beat* critic Ira Gitler’s review of *Straight Ahead*, Abbey Lincoln’s 1961 album, Gitler “accused Lincoln of ‘becoming a professional Negro,’ poor intonation, ‘banal’ lyrics, excluding whites from the direct address of her album, and mistaking propaganda for art” (239).

³¹ As Eric Porter elaborates, “By theorizing rhythm and blues and ‘new music’ as different reflections of a core black culture, Baraka defined heady, self-consciously avant-garde expression as a socially relevant art form that was consistent with the spiritual and communal needs, if not the tastes, of a black popular audience” (198).

musical interpretations of thinkers like Baraka, Neal, A. B. Spellman, and others represented free jazz as “a rejection of integrationist ideology” (98).

What we see across this short history is how concerns of appropriation came alive in discussions of black music in the 1950s and 1960s. White audiences and the state were coopting and redefining this music, and thinkers like Baraka, Spellman, and others responded by placing hard lines around *what* this music was and *for whom*. What is striking about this moment is that given the political circumstances of the Cold War, Civil Rights, and global decolonization, these questions of artistic ownership and agency took on larger significance as they bled into the discourses of complicity and resistance that dominated contemporaneous discussions of racial justice. As Monson claims, “many of the issues hotly debated in the context of the civil rights movement were largely the same kinds of issues that emerged in the jazz world” (160). These genres were integral to Cold War concepts of identity as well as civil rights calls for self-determination. They were heard as marketing ploys to make the US palatable to decolonizing countries, as fodder for white self-fashioning, and as the reclaimed sounds of a revised black consciousness.³² They were made to signify an authenticity that could be borrowed and put to work, only to then be reclaimed and reinvented to curb such borrowing. In some ways this is a history of the unique bind in which black artists found themselves. There was the way of Black Arts and the avant-garde: to take those racist understandings and redefine them, fashioning a self-determined and self-contained identity category whose cultural products were their own; or

³² Robert Bennett captures these overlaps in his tripartite interpretation of the music, defining jazz “as an indigenous cultural resource of, and an ideological cover for, an emerging American empire, as a cultural and political engagement in the struggle for civil rights, and as a global music of transnational Third World solidarity” (60). The blues, though perhaps not a transnational phenomenon in the same way, does appear to fit as well when we consider its dual celebration as a revitalizing mode of listening for white record collectors and as black “autonomous music” (Jones, *Blues People* 147).

embrace the universalist rhetoric that allowed the state to claim ownership and promote this music, and white artists and listeners to have their participation validated.³³ Thus, while this brief introduction almost certainly fails to do justice to the richness and immensity of this musical history, we can still detect an overdetermination of the forms of political awareness and engagement that could be legible during this moment.

My project enters into these discussions, but it turns instead to those artists whose work failed to register precisely within these discourses of appropriation and authenticity, or the logics of complicity and resistance that dominated discussions around Cold War Civil Rights. Consider again Louis Armstrong's work with Dave and Iola Brubeck on *The Real Ambassadors* in 1962. As a comedy-satire born out of his time touring for the State Department in Africa—a tour we recall coincided with Lumumba's assassination—the musical reimagines the “jazz ambassador” as a figure capable of inspiring genuine transnational, diasporic connection even under the auspices of the state. And yet, the fame and unrivaled promotion of jazz pianist and composer Dave Brubeck, Armstrong's white collaborator on the project, was a “sore point among African American musicians in the fifties and early sixties” (Monson 179). Additionally, by this time in his career, Armstrong's performances and film work were received as old-fashioned and out of touch, his “grinning and eye-rolling antics” leading to his dismissal as a politically conscious entertainer (Lefkovitz 7). But when Arkansas governor Orval Faubus blocked school integration in Little Rock in 1957, Armstrong was one of his most vocal celebrity critics, and the jazz legend even went so far as to call President Eisenhower “two faced.”³⁴ All of this—his collaboration

³³ Monson uses similar language when describing *Down Beat's* “Racial Prejudice in Jazz” panel discussion, with white participants Don DeMichael and Bill Coss attempting to get Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach to “affirm a universalist ‘above and beyond race’ perspective” to have their own roles in the jazz world validated (247).

³⁴ See Anderson *This is Our Music* 77.

with the State Department and Brubeck; his reception as outmoded; his late political activity—frustrates our ability to map Armstrong’s work within the received categories of the moment. There is a muddying of easy binaries, a refusal to stake a claim in the debates around musical ownership, and yet still a profound sense of engagement in terms of the political potential of decolonization and the forging of international community. There is also in the work an investment in blackness as a category of identity, but one that need not be closed off aesthetically as Baraka and others would come to imagine it. And crucially, as I show in chapter two, this complex ideological space, somewhere within and beyond cooptation and resistance, is made visible through the intermedial exchanges alive in the text and performance of *The Real Ambassadors* itself.

Thus, rather than respond with claims of a necessary or authentic blackness—as many Black Arts thinkers would—or uncritically concede to the appropriative processes that redefined this music in the first place, all the artists considered in these pages proliferate the signifying potential of these musical genres, both in terms of race and nation, many collaborating with white critics and musicians to do so. This project is an attempt to think through how artists responded to these appropriating procedures, not by entrenching themselves in essence or closing off aesthetic exchange across racial divides, but by retheorizing the appropriated objects themselves, redefining them, and thereby rearticulating what their racial attachments might be.³⁵ Amid competing camps struggling for control over black artistic production, these artists seemed

³⁵ Greg Tate gestures toward such a possibility in his own introduction to *Everything But the Burden*: “This book, then, is about Black resentment and discontent to no small extent, but be reminded that Black irony and contrariness are never far away.” He goes on to say that while the focus is on “scrutinizing the need by white Americans to acquire Blackness by any means necessary, it is also about the fascination that desire has provoked in a contemporary generation of African-American artists and intellectuals who hold complicated ideas about ‘Whose Black culture is it anyway?’” (5). I suggest that this same fascination, this impulse to imagine, create, and collaborate amid these often harmful exchanges, was present at midcentury as well.

to sideline recriminatory arguments over who owns this material or how it should be received. And rather than worry about how well they aligned with the avenues of resistance taking shape at this time, they experimented and played with aesthetic form and as a result proliferated new meanings and attachments to the music that had already become deeply racialized. What I hope to show is that together, and through a turn to literary forms, these artists expanded what this music could ultimately mean, who it could speak to and how, and what other possibilities for belonging might lie beyond liberal integration and explicitly racial consolidation.

To be sure, in mapping these binary logics as modes of thinking these artists worked to exceed, there is a risk of reinscribing them, or of reducing the complexity of the moment itself. Monson goes to great lengths to warn us that “[p]art of the challenge of thinking through this history is to resist the temptation to rigidly map aesthetic positions and politics” (160), and that “we must move beyond an either/or conception of the political struggles in the jazz world as integration versus separatism” (171). Paul Gilroy has similarly discussed black music as a model “whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers” (102).³⁶ In many ways, the chapters that follow are an extension of these interpretive concerns, working to magnify the remainders that are left over when rigid mappings and either/or conceptions are used. And they were used, by fans and major critics of the time, and they continue to be the lenses through which everyday discussions of black music often look

³⁶ Gilroy’s turn to music in *The Black Atlantic*, particularly hip hop, enables a racial community that pervades the distances and differences alive in the black diaspora. By attending to the transnational exchanges that came to define hip hop—the “cross-fertilisation of African-American vernacular cultures with their Caribbean equivalents” (103)—as well as the formal techniques of cutting, mixing, and sampling that are staples of the genre, Gilroy uses the music to show how a diasporic intimacy can exist while still containing proliferating difference.

back on this moment. The fact that so little has been written about Big Bill Broonzy, *The Real Ambassadors*, or Sun Ra's poetry speaks to this, the lack of critical attention perhaps illustrating their illegibility. Thus, while we know that this music is not "expressive of an essence" (Gilroy 110), it remains the case that certain activist discourses made strategic proprietary claims in response to the industry conditions and racial injustices they were weathering.³⁷ Artists of this period had a tight discursive space to navigate, and as I show, the turn to the literary became a significant means of expanding it.³⁸

Additionally, I want to recognize that critics like Anthony Reed and Carter Mathes have similarly offered new possibilities for exploring how conventional categories of resistance might be reexamined through music and literature. Reeds describes how genres like jazz are often compelled to be heard as a metonym or representation of black political *reaction*—to and thus within the bounds of liberal notions of freedom and sovereignty—and he instead attunes us to the "unorganizable particularity" of black sound during the long Black Arts era. These sonic "refus[als], interrupt[ions], and redirect[ions]" exceed legible discourses of social organization and relation, thereby rendering black sound practice as "extra-discursive plentitude, as medium for preserving and disclosing practices of resistance and structurally inarticulable postulates of freedom" (24). Additionally, Mathes has revealed how literary manipulations of sonic effects like vibration, resonance, and dissonance become the means for artists to "imagine alternative configurations of subjectivity and resistance outside the frameworks of social transformation that

³⁷ Gilroy admits as much when he discusses Houston Baker and the "trope of the family" often used as an organizing logic for black cultural production: "Baker's position is in many ways a sophisticated restatement of the absolutist approach to 'race' and ethnicity which animated black nationalism during the sixties" (98).

³⁸ Additionally, while Gilroy positions his turn to music as "a means to get beyond the related oppositions between essentialists and pseudo-pluralists," he also sees it as a way to "supplement and partially displace concern with textuality" (36). I am suggesting here that artists turned to the textual as a means of navigating similar antinomies at midcentury.

had generally been reflected in the linearity and hyper-visibility of the Civil Right and Black Power movements” (18-19). I draw inspiration from each of these conceptually innovative works, as I am similarly invested in ways of rethinking political engagement and resistance during the mid-twentieth century.³⁹ But I also extend these formal approaches to consider the blues as a coterminous site of musico-racial meaning, and while Reed and Mathes each reinvigorate understandings of the black avant-garde, my own interests also stray beyond this field, instead amplifying the more mundane instances of aesthetic exchange, particularly by those artists who have gone underexamined in political histories of the period.⁴⁰ Additionally, while Mathes wonderfully illustrates how sound is incorporated into literature to produce political effects, I am also interested in following the reverse flow of influence, asking how literature is seized upon, often by musicians themselves, as a means of commenting on the discursive networks that define the blues and jazz. Their richness and complexity, their discursive engagement and political investments; perhaps by setting the Cold War’s binary logics aside and attuning ourselves to the intermediality of their works, we can experience the third space these artists created, a space where they could forge new categories of identity and belonging that exceeded the parameters set forth by their music’s dueling reception.

³⁹ Kevin Quashie has also challenged how resistance becomes “the dominant idiom for reading and describing black culture” (331). He instead turns our attention to black interiority and the ways in which black expressive culture is not “necessarily public,” privileging a concept of quiet as “the expressiveness of the interior” that cannot be subsumed under the rubric of resistance (333-334). While my own work still engages with public expressive cultures rather than interiority, Quashie’s move to exceed resistance as such is deeply informative. See Quashie, “The Trouble with Publicness: Toward a Theory of Black Quiet” (2009).

⁴⁰ While Langston Hughes’s *Ask Your Mama* is perhaps the poet’s most experimental poem, Hughes is certainly not an experimental poet in the sense we mean when we talk about 1960s literary aesthetics. Similarly, while Sun Ra is often considered a member of the jazz avant-garde (not without dispute, however), his poems have received scant critical attention and are often set apart from canonical writers of the black literary avant-garde.

Summaries of Chapters

In chapter one I explore the burgeoning blues field of the 1950s and 1960s, a moment in which the history of the genre was both shaped and contested. I examine alternative constructions of this blues archive as devised by artist Big Bill Broonzy. A major figure in the 1930s urban blues scene who by the 1950s transformed into a folk icon playing for predominately white fans, Broonzy serves as a crucial though understudied figure in blues canonization. I argue that his archived recordings with folklorist Alan Lomax and his autobiography *Big Bill Blues* intervene on the “cult of authenticity” and “romantic racialism” dominating blues criticism at the time and redirect critical attention toward questions of canon construction, generic preference, artistic ownership, and historiography’s fidelity to truth. Analyzing both archival recordings and Broonzy’s own textual record, I identify a form of *counterarchiving* in Broonzy’s work that indulges in white romantic recastings of the blues while simultaneously shifting and occluding the audience’s gaze. Furthermore, I attempt to trace this counterarchiving practice through a turn to the literary aside. If Broonzy’s work is characterized by brief, tangential comments meant to circumnavigate his immediate interlocutors, perhaps the aside becomes his way of departing from white expectation or promotion; put another way, the aside functions as a departure from the historical record’s “A-side,” the side of the record explicitly designed for air play, promoted by the record company and meant to please audiences.⁴¹ Broonzy’s asides and his larger counterarchival practice help craft multiple artistic personas that allow different forms of black musicianship to coincide, none of which can be easily circumscribed.

⁴¹ Though Broonzy’s career predates some of the A-side and B-side conventions of the music industry, the terminology still serves as a useful analog to the larger discursive work Broonzy performs in the newly constructed blues record.

Chapters two and three respectively shift attention to jazz's appropriation in this moment, both by the state through its infamous international "jazz tours" and by the Beat poets of the period. In chapter two, I analyze Louis Armstrong's collaboration with Dave and Iola Brubeck on the satirical musical *The Real Ambassadors* to show how jazz artists touring for the US government distanced themselves from the state's imperial interests. I argue that the musical's written narration and music interact in ways that re-envision the discursive power of the songs themselves, thereby modeling a form of intervention that interrogates and reconfigures the state's mobilization of jazz, one that stripped the form of its political resonance and redefined its racial significance. I read the performance's entanglement of music and narrative as a purposeful deployment of intermedial form aimed at disrupting jazz's simple enlistment in America's depoliticizing and ostensibly colorblind diplomatic agenda. Chapter three continues to trace jazz's re-signification; however, it turns from the stage to poetic form. I examine Langston Hughes's epic internationalist poem *Ask Your Mama*—famous for its combination of poetic verse and musical instruction—and I argue that the work's formal procedures invoke a form of cosmopolitanism that negotiates alterity and re-examines inherited attachments, whether they be cultural, racial, or national in scope. By analyzing the unique combinations of poetic verse and musical instruction on display, I argue that these combinations produce networks of alternative meanings that facilitate reconsiderations of geographic distance and identity, the co-mingling of disparate cultures and national affiliations formalized in the interstices of music and poetic verse. This chapter reveals how novel aesthetic form can produce new forms of relation, with Hughes's poem reimagining jazz's attachment to US diplomacy, to the Beat movement's predominantly white rebellious poetics, and even to the vision of a unified global blackness expanding in this period.

Finally, chapter four makes an historical and methodological leap to examine the early 1970s sound poetry and film work of avant-garde musician Sun Ra. An enigmatic figure fitting tenuously within the jazz world, Black Arts, and American diplomacy, Sun Ra was considered by Amiri Baraka the “resident philosopher” of the Black Arts Movement, and yet at the same time his music was broadcast internationally on the state-sponsored Voice of America (VOA) radio program *Music USA*. As Civil Rights waned and Black Power rose, Sun Ra’s music could be heard simultaneously as an expression of racial essence and as a Cold War tool for American democracy. Ra himself refused any clear political stance, instead privileging an outer space agenda that conceived of humans as vibrations and transported people to other planets through music. To make sense of Sun Ra’s political ambitions, this chapter turns to the newly-invented analog synthesizer, one of the first truly electronic instruments and one that the bandleader and his Arkestra helped pioneer in popular music. As an instrument that combines electronic signals of different frequencies into a complete sound, the synthesizer becomes both method and metaphor in Sun Ra’s pursuit of alternative forms of belonging. Throughout his poetry and in *Space is the Place* (1974), Ra conceives of bodies through vibration, as instruments or sound generators susceptible to adjustment by exposure to “other” music. If vibration is the base property of being, then our capacity for belonging shifts in the era of synthesized sounds. At a time of heightening calls for black particularity and affiliation along identity-lines, Ra’s writing turns instead to questions of entanglement, orientation, and (re-)alignment. In this way, Ra embraces and reimagines the persuasive tactics that defined Voice of America’s duties as the sonic arm of the American state, while also redefining the essence that drove discussions of blackness and avant-garde jazz. Through the synthesizer, Sun Ra’s commitment to vibration,

coordination, and music's transformational power becomes increasingly legible, as does his place within the tangled web of Cold War politics and black liberation.

I began this introduction with Lorraine Hansberry because it would have been impossible not to. Though her work was not often intermedial in the way this project understands it, her insights on the relationship between race, music, and Cold War culture are so instructive that to embark on this project without her would be a misstep. I do however recognize the overwhelming masculinity of the case studies offered here. In some ways this reflects the masculinist discourses that have defined these musical genres historically, and I both recognize and deeply respect the work by critics like Daphne Brooks, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Emily Lordi, and Maureen Mahon to rectify these concerns.⁴² To be sure, there were a number of women who worked at the intersection of music and writing in this moment, including poets Jayne Cortez, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez, as well as jazz vocalist Abbey Lincoln, to name only a few. The remarkable activism of these artists—Cortez, Giovanni, and Sanchez all prominent members of the Black Arts Movement; Lincoln serving as one of the most outspoken artists on issues of racial justice in the 1960s—has allowed their political investments and resistance to be unmistakable. The fact still stands, however, that gender remains an underexamined area in the pages that follow. I do in key moments attempt to interrogate and exceed the masculinist underpinnings of some of these artists' work. For instance, I consider how Louis Armstrong's role in *The Real Ambassadors* unwittingly instantiates the myth that true change and revolution

⁴² See Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (2021); Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (2001); Lordi, *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American Literature* (2013); Mahon, *Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll* (2020).

requires “male charismatic leadership,”⁴³ and I also consider briefly how Sun Ra’s work with the synthesizer relates to that of transgender artist Wendy Carlos and the black feminist thinking it at times resembles. In future iterations of this research, I hope to expand the project to take gender as a more central concern, considering the improvisatory sound poetry of jazz singer and composer Jeanne Lee, and to extend the temporal frame so as to account for the blues poems of Sherley Anne Williams.

Before turning to the chapters themselves, I would like to return to Hansberry one final time, because a month before she chastised Mailer in the *Village Voice*, she published a fictional dialogue in *The Urbanite* that not only stages a similar dispute, but offers a brief preliminary glimpse at what the aesthetic exchanges this dissertation explores might result in. Only a few pages long, the dialogue stages a conversation between an “uncolored egghead” and a presumably fictionalized Hansberry, and the two take up some of the central concerns around race in Cold War America. And to be sure, they find zero common ground on any of them. Responding to the speaker’s code-switching early on, the egghead states “[i]f there is one thing I utterly *loathe*, it is to hear the way you colored intellectuals are always affecting the speech and inflections of the Negro masses!” (149). He later accuses black intellectuals of being unable to “[transcend] to more universal human agonies,” asking “when are you going to produce a Camus?” (151). She responds with Camus’s failures on Algeria, claiming that the West has no recourse but to see itself reflected in the world around it—or worse yet, to forcefully manifest that same image abroad. And on the topic of assimilation and suburbia, she claims, “we are too close to the horrors of the ghetto to wax romantic over its impending death” (153), a sentiment she would repeat in her article for the *Voice*.

⁴³ See Erica Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (2012).

Though the disagreements here stem from a number of factors, Hansberry foregrounds as the primary culprit the egghead's errors in listening. She wedges a number of revealing descriptions between lines of dialogue: "He didn't even hear it" (150); "Again, he wasn't listening" (150); "He ignored that and continued" (151). Among the litany of differences that contribute to the gap separating these two—what the speaker calls "the chasm between us" (152)—an exacerbating factor is white willful mishearing. But at the conclusion of the piece, it is Hansberry's speaker who stops listening. The egghead carries on, but she "couldn't hear him anymore" (153). She instead imagines a world where black identity does not require white negation or antagonism to be asserted, and near the end she starts singing a gospel tune. And as she taps her foot to the beat, she thinks, "I could see the bridge across the chasm," one "made up of a band of angels" comprised of singers Leontyne Price, Lena Horne, Nina Simone, writers Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, and James Baldwin, and jazz artists Duke Ellington, Cannonball Adderley, and Louis Armstrong. And though she also includes painter Charles ("Charlie") White and actors Julian Mayfield and P. J. Sidney, the bulk of these artists are musicians and writers. The passage ultimately becomes something like a poetic catalog, one all the more striking given that her enumeration of some of the central figures in twentieth century black art abruptly interrupts the dialogue structure, and is described as a "bridge across the chasm," presumably the divide growing between the two speakers throughout. And we are told that even as the egghead insults her once more ("You are disgustingly emotional"), with "water standing in his eyes . . . he put his foot in the same tempo as mine" (154).

Through Hansberry's catalog the aesthetic divides fall away, the artists' accumulating works depicted as "golden waves" (154), bodies building together and breaking as one. And what comes after is a momentary reprieve. Throughout the conversation the two can find no

shared footing. But in this final moment their feet tap out the same tempo. The gospel sounds draw him in and the two fall in sync. Of course, this is not a resolution. As Joel Dinerstein reminds us, the music Hansberry recalls here “was so important to twentieth-century existential affirmation it was white-faced for crossover consumption, from Paul Whiteman (‘the King of Jazz’) to Benny Goodman (‘the King of Swing’) to Elvis (‘the King of Rock and Roll’)” (432). And indeed, nothing indicates a change in her interlocutor’s thinking. The scene is ultimately mired in histories of white appropriation and indemnity. But Hansberry gifts us one moment in which his willful mishearing is sidelined, when those “golden waves” rise and bring “heavenly brightness,” stalling the discord and offering an instance of collaborative musicking. And though he is unaware of it, Hansberry’s listing provides the prelude to the egghead’s embodied attentiveness. In fact, for the reader the weight of this moment is aided by the catalog that precedes it; when combined with the gospel lyrics that conclude the piece, a shift occurs, not just in the egghead’s orientation, but perhaps in the reader’s as well. Catalog overwhelms dialogue; it combines with music and hints at a momentary cohesion.

Of course, the normative listening practices that had coalesced by 1961 and the legacies of appropriation that forged them haunt this scene. The hipster impulse; the blues revival; the state’s very enlistment of jazz into its Cold War ranks. What drives the egghead’s embrace of this music is not what inspires Hansberry’s. But to cast aside any hint of hopefulness would be a mistake as well. The dialogue centralizes listening as both the problem and possible solution, and it stages an affective shift that occurs somewhere, somehow, amid the messy overlaps of literary form and music. The synchronized toe-tapping is literally wedged between the catalog and concluding lyrics. The pages that follow attempt to dwell in this space, surveying the porous borderland where aesthetics intermingle, where conventional discourses stall, and where an

altered listening practice can lead, however fleetingly, to moments of transcendence, collaborative feeling, and new modes of belonging.

CHAPTER ONE

Amending the Blues: Big Bill Broonzy's Archive of Asides

In 1966, critic Charles Keil published *Urban Blues* after nearly a decade of blues revivalism that solidified blues writing within a cult of folk romanticism. He described this mode of writing about the blues as a “moldy fig mentality” in which a “romancing motive or element is omnipresent” and obscurity and agrarian milieus are privileged (34-35). In his challenge to this mentality, Keil writes:

As for the late Big Bill Broonzy, I wonder why all the blues writers . . . have failed to notice his terse and logical definition of the field. As reported in *Time*, Broonzy “had short patience with all the folk song curators who insist that a true folk song has to be of unknown authorship and come down through oral tradition. ‘I guess all songs is folk songs,’ he said, ‘I never heard no horse sing ’em.’” (36-37)

Keil turns to one of the most prolific blues artists of the early twentieth century to help underwrite his claim that an arbitrary distinction of value had been built around the Robert Johnsons, Skip Jameses, and Charley Pattons of the world—those noted country and Delta blues artists widely adored by white fans. This critical collective worshipped a rural folk past, ridiculed the contrasting urban commercial sound, and overlooked the career-conscious artists who made the strategic decision to provide them. Here, we have a critic turning to the artist, elevating the latter’s understanding of the field as something to be expounded upon in a critical monograph designed to give better shape to a still-forming blues history.⁴⁴

If Keil recognized something novel in Broonzy’s claim in 1966, it has since become widely accepted in the annals of contemporary blues historiography. The bulk of recent scholarship on the blues is committed to revising the problematic whiteness of blues writing and

⁴⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley also turns to Broonzy’s famous quotation in “Notes on Deconstructing ‘The Folk,’” calling it “Perhaps the most powerful challenge to the social construction of ‘the folk’” (1403).

unveiling a much more dynamic history which attends to black audiences and black taste, to the prevalence of popular music in the South, and to the diverse repertoires of blues musicians even as early as the turn of the century.⁴⁵ But in the efforts to overcome the limitations that a decade of blues writing and canonizing set forth more than a half-century ago, we might also risk overlooking some of the significant critical work done by the artists themselves, something that Keil hints at but that can be much more robustly featured. If the midcentury period of blues writing and revivalism is understood as an archive of folk romanticism crafted to revitalize its Cold War white audience, are there methods by which that same archive can be read otherwise? Or rather, is there a way in which our relationship to that archive can be amended through a recognition of the artists who contributed and refused to adhere to the trajectory it was determined to follow?

This chapter returns to the work of Big Bill Broonzy and situates it within the burgeoning blues field of the 1950s and 1960s, a moment in which the history of the genre was both shaped and contested. Though not nearly as well-known as those artists previously listed (or, for that matter, the amplified blues artists who would soon be celebrated, including Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf), Big Bill Broonzy was a major figure in the Chicago blues scene of the 1930s and 1940s, recording well over two hundred sides during his career. In recent years, Broonzy has begun to receive the critical attention his career warrants. Most significantly, critics have noted his uncanny ability to tailor his sound to the desires of his audience, reinventing his image and repertoire from a 1930s urban blues celebrity among black audiences in Chicago to a folk hero touring Europe and playing for predominately white fans in the 1950s.⁴⁶ It is in this latter

⁴⁵ See Garabedian, Hamilton, Miller, O'Connell, Titon, Wald.

⁴⁶ Historian Kevin D. Greene's *The Invention and Reinvention of Big Bill Broonzy* (2018) provides a wonderful survey of Broonzy's savvy showmanship and ability to transform according to the whims of his ever-changing audience.

moment that Broonzy's creative focus takes on a historical bent, doing recordings for famous folklorist and song collector Alan Lomax and drafting pages of scattered blues history that would be compiled into an autobiography initially titled *The Truth about the Blues*.⁴⁷ By focusing our attention on the later years of Broonzy's career and the writing and recorded work he produced, we can begin to trace the methods he used to intervene on a blues discourse quickly being shaped by white record collectors and critics at midcentury.

Familiar histories of race, music, and Cold War culture often only tangentially engage with the blues, with jazz receiving much more critical attention. But as a genre similarly appropriated and redefined by white audiences during this period, its revival is crucial to seeing how racialized understandings of music informed Cold War cultural conceptions of whiteness, and how black artists struggled to maneuver through them. As Ulrich Adelt writes in his study of blues music in the 1960s, "white male power was mostly expressed through the appropriation of black masculinity" (6). This tight representational space was defined by a commitment to rurality, obscurity, and authenticity expressed through the blues singer's straining voice and the 78's aging pops and hisses. As the decade carried on, mostly white, middle-class men embraced an older, rural image of blues music, constructing a proximity to an imagined blackness that could provide a rejuvenating jolt amid a stilted and stifling Cold War consumerism. But while these images of blues music were increasingly defined as romantically raw and uninhibited, they were also "unthreatening," with white audiences "beginning to demand an older and safer conceptualization of blackness at the exact moment when calls for black power were becoming imminent" (Adelt 9, 7). And just as the audience for the blues became increasingly white, so too

⁴⁷ Letters exchanged between Broonzy and de-facto editor/collaborator Yannick Bruynoghe reveal that Broonzy initially envisioned *Big Bill Blues* to be titled *The Truth about the Blues*, and that he enquired about having that title copyrighted prior to the work being published (Riesman 208).

were the cultural brokers who worked to establish the field of blues historiography, with black artists and critics routinely sidelined.⁴⁸ The 1950s and 1960s then saw the blues coopted and redefined, made to fit a model of blackness that could serve and secure a Cold War whiteness while also undermining the credibility of the artists themselves.

In this chapter I argue that Big Bill Broonzy's later recorded work and writing can be read as a counterarchival practice of historicization and self-making. Broonzy's work across these aesthetic modes develops forms of permutation and play that run within and against the strategies of institutionalization shaping the accepted blues discourse, as well as the racializing process redefining this music and the artists who played it. Broonzy's historical work, especially his autobiography *Big Bill Blues* (1955), is often read as a series of unserious fabrications or adhering to a folk paradigm perpetuated by white cultural brokers like Alan Lomax. Historian Kevin Greene describes certain chapters of the autobiography as "haphazard and nonchronological" (160), and states that "trying to label Broonzy as a Mississippi Delta bluesman is as specious as labeling Robert Johnson as a Chicago bluesman because he performed and recorded 'Sweet Home Chicago'" (162). While Broonzy's work certainly lacks systematization and willfully bends the truth, I also show how he redirects his audience's attention to questions of canon construction, generic preference, artistic ownership, and historiography's fidelity to facticity. Rather than read these exaggerations and inaccuracies as mere mistakes to be reined in or corrected,⁴⁹ I consider them an artistic intervention in the

⁴⁸ This trend had its roots in the writing and field work conducted decades before, with scholar Clyde Woods lamenting that "the community that created the blues was deemed incapable of analyzing them" (37).

⁴⁹ As Greene notes, in later editions of *Big Bill Blues* editor and collaborator Yannick Bruynoghe included a new fourteen-page foreword by jazz critic Charles Edward Smith and "corroborated new evidence and added footnotes in the American edition, especially concerning the dates of Broonzy's recordings, the age of his friends, and Broonzy's birthdate" (164).

process of historical curation, one that irreverently plays with and thus reveals the stereotypes being fashioned for blues artists. To shape this alternative approach to Broonzy's recordings and writing, I draw on Brent Hayes Edwards' *counterarchive*. Reading against the grain of traditional archives—which might adhere to preservationism and authenticity or simply resist more progressive modes of historicization—the counterarchive reveals moments when alternative interpretations remain submerged within the collections themselves. Such an approach demonstrates how “an archive devoted to the sedimentation of the ‘traditional’ can be used or abused to trace a history of transformation” (“Sound of Anticolonialism” 272). Broonzy's work in *Big Bill Blues* and his archived recordings with Alan Lomax showcase strategies that can be characterized as counterarchival in their desires to reside within contemporary blues narratives while also exceeding what those traditional narratives demand.

In charting this counterarchival practice, I recall some of the lesser-used meanings of the term “counter” to better apprehend Broonzy's position within this growing blues archive.⁵⁰ “Counter” is often understood as “acting in opposition to” or “tending in the opposite direction,” with its uses as an adjective and prefix operating almost indistinguishably. As a typographical term though, the “counter” is the space of a letter that is either partially or completely enclosed by the ink that instantiates its form (consider the letter “p” or “q”). In other words, the counter signifies the white space that is either wholly or partially framed by black ink, the former

⁵⁰ I use “archive” both literally to refer to the historical sound recordings cataloged and maintained within institutional bodies (in this case, Alan Lomax's digitized *Association for Cultural Equity*) and more broadly to connote the public materials collected and preserved for musical posterity. The period between the 1950s and 1960s erupted with blues content: collectors compiled discarded records and curated tracks worthy of re-release on reissue labels, while critics produced book-length histories of the genre. Consequently, we might consider the breadth of content being produced and recorded in this period as a publicly-curated archive insofar as it was seen as a growing collection of artifacts with a clear preservative mission.

necessarily reliant on or given shape by the latter.⁵¹ This typographical meaning—white space enclosed by black form or framing—metaphorically captures the phenomenon of blues appropriation, but it also explicitly turns us to the textual, allowing us to advance beyond the strictly musical record as the privileged means of understanding this moment. Additionally, “counter” historically had a musical function as a verb “to sing an accompaniment to a melody or plain-song.” This would develop centuries later into a noun designating “any part set in contrast to a principle melody” (OED). The evolution and etymological tension between the act of accompaniment and the instance of performative contrast captures how artists like Broonzy can provide content for a blues history tinged in folk romanticism, while at the same time actively redirect it to that which falls beyond such a frame. Broonzy’s counterarchive is thus an early instantiation of the third space between complicity and resistance artists began to cultivate at this time, here a playful proliferation of the signifying potential of the blues. And by turning to and reviving these oblique understandings of the counter—one an essential component of printmaking, the other signaling a musical history of accompaniment and/through contrast—the multimodality that defines blues scholarship in this period can be seen, as can Broonzy’s own practice of crossing and combining writing and recorded sound.

As this chapter will show, Broonzy accomplishes this counterarchival practice through an embrace of the *aside*, a discursive strategy that extends across his recordings and writing and that illustrates his capacity for play and permutation. As a term, the aside usefully recalls the act of “setting aside,” to declare something as having “no authority,” a dismal reality for blues performers at this time. Writer and folklorist Harold Courlander actually cites Broonzy’s description of the blues as a “lived” music in *Negro Folk Music U. S. A.* (1963), only to respond:

⁵¹ See Tova Rabinowitz Deer, *Exploring Typography* 48-49.

“blues singers are not likely to be able to tell us much more than this about the blues form or its development. Their role is to sing, not explain how it all came to be” (qtd. in Tilton 232). This etymological association keeps the question of “credibility deficits”—brought on by appropriative practices—at the forefront of our thinking about Broonzy’s collaborative work with white folklorists and editors like Alan Lomax and Yannick Bruynoghe. But as a stage direction and literary device, the aside also means to “speak aside” or apart from general company, to speak so that certain words are unheard by other characters in the performance. These instances of inaudibility not only capture the experience of blues artists as critical interlocutors within this blues moment; they also highlight Broonzy’s own recourse to excess, indirection, and play, at times embracing these folk romantic images and in others proliferating new stories that are present but “inaudible” within the accepted vision of the blues. I thus draw on the aside as a theoretical apparatus to reveal how Broonzy’s rhetorical acumen and practice of negotiation stretch across his writing and recorded work. During interviews with Lomax, Broonzy appears to almost relish redirecting the route of conversation and questioning. Sections of his autobiography also formally mimic the field recordings Lomax conducted—a performance of intermediality in his writing. But his proliferation of narratives to contextualize these songs frustrates any catalog of facticity that traditional historiography might demand, while also de-emphasizing the actual musical recording as the privileged object of analysis and conveyor of “truth.” Borrowing from Foucault, Broonzy’s entries in this midcentury blues history become a form of subjugated knowledge that is often disqualified by hierarchies of erudition, but that also works against the concatenation of such institutionalized discourses (7-10). We might say that Broonzy’s asides play with and depart from the “A-side” of the musico-historical record, the preferred side of the vinyl recording expected to do well or “fit” with the industry standard. If the

B-side is where “material with less commercial appeal but more artistic potential” resides (Fintoni 3), then perhaps we can “flip over” the historical record coalescing in this moment and embrace Broonzy’s asides, which playfully frustrate facticity, linear history, the fetishization of the recorded object, and the containability of the black blues artist in the Cold War period.

In what follows I briefly map the critical conversation surrounding blues music during the 1950s Cold War moment, illustrating some of the central features that define it and that Broonzy takes up in his work.⁵² I then examine Broonzy’s archived recordings with Alan Lomax, as well as his autobiography *Big Bill Blues*. I read his work across these modes as counterachival in their shared commitment to exceeding the traditional parameters of similar artifacts. Broonzy often deviates from Lomax’s line of questioning or is deliberately inscrutable in his responses, thereby frustrating Lomax’s projected vision of black rural coherence. Additionally, in their discussion of the music industry, Broonzy actively reroutes the conversation to the constraints placed on black musical authority and interrogates the sanctity of the recorded object, the engine of appropriation for white fans searching for that “authentic sound.” Turning to *Big Bill Blues*, Broonzy extends this interrogation in his chapter “My Songs.” He attends to the exploitative nature of the recording industry while also offering alternative forms of ownership that trouble the approach to music *as object* that white record collectors were trafficking in. By supplementing his musical catalog with narratives that both relate and transcend their histories of production, Broonzy privileges anecdotal evidence as a means of moving beyond understandings of music as contained and concretized products to be curated and mastered by white consumers. Similarly, in his chapter “My Friends” Broonzy continues his departure from the period’s “object

⁵² While the bulk of white romantic recastings of the blues can be located in the 1960s revival, their ideological traces are also found in the decade prior. In turning to the mid-1950s, I follow Adelt who writes “to understand these shifts, I deemed it important to incorporate events from before 1960” (4).

orientation.” The chapter’s short vignettes weave together seemingly negligible moments and memories that playfully redirect our attention while also offering a cast of characters whose commercial success departs from the rural obscurity coveted by fans of the time.

This chapter’s focus on Cold War blues historiography means its idiosyncrasies lie not only in its generic focus—it is the only chapter on the blues—but perhaps in its method as well. While succeeding chapters perform extended close readings of literary works, the readings performed here trace the strategies Broonzy used to enter into this critical field. Beyond literary flourish, we witness historical revision and archival excess. Broonzy’s narrative asides become a richly nuanced intervention, however unconventional, in this quickly-coalescing archive of white desire. As a counterarchival practice, Broonzy’s work across aesthetic modes privileges a form of play that participates in and undermines the logics of appropriation, authenticity, and complicity that were taking center stage in discussions of race and popular music at this time.

Forming a Canon: Blues Collectors and Critics at Midcentury

In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, a discursive body of blues material began to take shape across recorded sound and written text, and it quickly established rural obscurity as one of the touchstones of the accepted blues sound. Historically, several shifts occurred that determined the course of this work. Following World War II, the Second Great Migration led to African Americans pouring into northern cities at a rate that rivaled the First. As Marybeth Hamilton describes, the increase of black migration to northern cities brought with it “rising rates of male unemployment and families headed by women. That in turn encouraged the growth of a virulent critique of black social ‘pathology,’ as liberal social scientists argued that the city’s leisure

pastimes and ‘matriarchal’ families were creating a society of damaged black men” (192).⁵³

Dovetailing these critical accounts of black urbanity was the alteration of white listening practices following the 1940s reissue wave, where reissue labels began releasing back catalogs of major record companies, a process that led to a flood of newly pressed reissues of records by the likes of Louis Armstrong and King Oliver (218). Hamilton suggests that this new sales practice, which moved certain white audiences away from the traditional New Orleans sound, coincided with the larger reevaluation of black urbanity. Collectors and critics turned toward more rural and obscure recordings situated, either aesthetically or geographically, in the rural South.

As scholars have recently acknowledged, one of the engines powering this shift was the network of record collectors in the 1950s that helped steer the blues canon towards an archive of rural listings through their dedicated salvaging, cataloging, and re-releasing of obscure material.⁵⁴ The sounds they favored included not only the acoustic guitar and “rough-hewn voices” of black Southern musicians (Hamilton 230), but also the pops and hisses of needle on vinyl that suggested the record’s age and history. These men would become disseminators of a blues canon through their careful construction of a hierarchy of blues recordings that privileged obscure, vernacular music over popular commercial recordings. As scholar John Dougan writes, “[t]his ‘insider’ discourse (revealed to outsiders in the form of blues reissues) is how collecting becomes connoisseurship, through the mastery of a domain of knowledge—generally speaking, a corpus of factual information” (57). Musical history and social significance would be cast aside in the effort to cultivate a taxonomy (and hierarchy) of release dates and recording personnel, the ear all-the-while turned to the Delta region. This minor network of hardcore collectors was

⁵³ We can recall Gunnar Myrdal’s 1944 *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, with its call for swift assimilation in response to these supposed “pathologies.”

⁵⁴ Collector Pete Whelan recalls becoming interested in collecting as early as 1952, whereas Gayle Dean Wardlow is said to have started in 1954 (Dougan 48-49).

“united by their disaffection for the cult of New Orleans and their devotion to authentic blues, a music known only to the cognoscenti, secret, occult, and obscure” (Hamilton 221). Brought on by a particular (white) projection of black vernacular music, this accumulating catalog of rural sounds would soon become the standard for blues music.⁵⁵ The phonograph record was privileged as an artifact of historical significance, and the historical record itself became a curatorial project by white listeners who had an eye toward the rural South as the locus of their blues vision.

This obsession with raw, anti-commercial blues became one of the major debates leading up to the blues revival of the 1960s. Samuel Charters’ landmark critical text *The Country Blues* (1959) departed from several of the tenets these collectors saw as part and parcel of the genre. Born out of his own excursions through the South during the 1950s, Charters’ text was one of the first major surveys of the early blues, and is often marked as the unofficial “beginning of blues historiography proper” (Garabedian 491). Reviews for the text made explicit how the study “pioneer[ed] the field” of formal blues scholarship, and how before it, “the best documentation ha[d] been with the phonograph record itself.”⁵⁶ For the hardcore collectors, however, the text did not go far enough to mine historically obscure material. One collector took issue with Charters’ deference to black taste as a guiding frame for his work, responding in a column for *VJM Palaver*: “I know about twenty men who collect the Negro country blues. All of us have been interested in knowing who the *great* country blues singers are, not in who sold best” (qtd. in Hamilton 228). Another levied his critiques quite succinctly: “[*The Country Blues*] was real . . .

⁵⁵ Marybeth Hamilton cites one fan’s explanation for why the taped reproductions of old 78s released by independent labels like Origin Jazz Library were so authentic: “The voice is dark and heavy, often thick and congested, with a peculiar crying quality. . . . and suffused throughout with an emotional intensity that is all but overpowering (the words seem almost torn from the singer’s throat)” (230).

⁵⁶ See Cray, Hoffman.

but not real enough” (qtd. in Dougan 52). Another issue was Charters’ focus on social significance rather than aesthetic quality. Much of *The Country Blues* was driven by the artists’ biographies, with whole chapters devoted to the lives of popular figures such as Indianapolis blues pianist Leroy Carr, who had over one hundred sides released under his name prior to World War II.⁵⁷ In these descriptions, Charters attempted to capture the social context out of which these artists sprung, an approach that far surpassed the purely aesthetic interests that certain collectors had in mind.⁵⁸ Finally, perhaps Charters’ greatest transgression was his “disinterest in mastering a corpus of information that centered on dates, places, record labels, and matrix numbers” (Dougan 51). Charters’ attempt to bring alive these artists and their respective milieus departed from the exclusively rural focus and compendium of facticity that the record collectors sought to build.

While other texts like Paul Oliver’s *Blues Fell This Morning* (1960) and Frederick Ramsey’s *Been Here and Gone* (1960) would soon join the fray, the contestation between Charters and this motley crew of record collectors serves as a snapshot of the central features of this burgeoning blues discussion. Perhaps most glaring is the pervasive whiteness of the field, with black authorities “routinely under-represented in the mainstream canon” of midcentury blues criticism (Garabedian 478).⁵⁹ This becomes more problematic when we consider how collecting proclaimed a certain mastery over the record in its perceived wealth of primary material, and how classification often serves as “one of the technologies that maintain such

⁵⁷ See Wald 41.

⁵⁸ As Hamilton writes, “the whole point of [collector James] McKune’s *VJM Palaver* columns was to evaluate the singers purely as artists” (229).

⁵⁹ Perhaps the single major exception would be LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), whose *Blues People* was published in 1963.

hierarchies” (Helton 103). Black musicians in particular, though frequently called upon for historical evidence, were routinely sidelined.

We also see a set of concerns over *how* to approach the musical record. Should these scratched and spinning discs be understood as artifacts unto themselves or as launchpads into the artists’ histories and their respective milieus? In line with this question is the tension between the object, heralded as central arbiter and authority, and the burgeoning literary output of Charters, Oliver, and others in the 1960s who aimed to present a historiography of the field. As Titon recalls, “the blues revival was remarkably oriented to records and the record-listening experience” (225-226), something certainly brought on by the record collectors years before. But the increasing repository of literary material necessarily effected how the recorded object was approached. Also, which of these records was to be valued, according to what criteria, and to what degree should black taste determine canonicity? We see in this moment an evaluation of what the musical record could ultimately provide, and to what degree the artists themselves were a part of that evaluation, either as subjects or as mere producers of recorded material that was then cataloged for musical posterity.

Finally, this (re)turn to rural blues was part of a larger grappling with Cold War culture, urbanization, and race during this moment. White listeners and collectors privileged images of natural, “authentic” black musicianship over the urban professionalism that first made the genre famous.⁶⁰ This privileging was perhaps also an imaginative inhabiting, an embrace of life on the margins of a mass culture that only seemed to be growing as the fifties carried on. Rural black

⁶⁰ Even in Charters’ *The Country Blues*, a text that devotes significant space to urban musicians of the 1920s and 1930s, strains of folk romanticism are still quite prominent. Charters admits as much in his preface to the 1975 edition: “When I look back on what I wrote during this period it often seems a little insistent to me, the romanticism a little strident, but I was trying to get people to listen, and this seemed to be the most direct way to get through” (x-xi).

life could be accessed through its most “authentic” sounds, and through that access revitalize a white audience now so far removed from the folk heroism and rebelliousness thought to define rural American life.⁶¹ As Christian O’Connell writes, “During the blues revival, the folkloric paradigm found many adherents, and the Beat Movement, folk revival, and disillusion with the centers of power during the Cold War and Civil Rights eras . . . played a large part in paving the way for the identification of white nonconformists with the blues” (69). These approaches perform a variation on the “black mirror” Eric Lott has described as a precondition of American whiteness, the blues here “stag[ing] access to, even dependence on, a blackness imagined to be both other and intimate” (9).⁶² As the sixties continued and the revival gained steam, institutions like the Newport Folk Festival featured “rediscovered” blues artists like Son House and Skip James, who had not released music in thirty years and had since fallen into obscurity. That these aging artists were seized upon during a moment when the Civil Rights Movement was building is not a coincidence. As Adelt writes, “[the revival] revealed white fantasies of an unthreatening and pastoral southern past rather than an acknowledgement of current black politics articulated by leaders of the civil rights movement” (48-49). These older blues artists were prominently featured at Newport between 1963 and 1965, the same years Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” that the Birmingham church bombing occurred, and the Civil Rights and Voting Right Acts were passed (Adelt 41, 47). We might couple this with Paul Oliver’s *Conversation with the Blues* (1965), whose curated oral histories and images of black Southern life were “far removed from the era of black militancy and political activism that

⁶¹ Such a racial project has its roots in the earlier fieldwork of folklorists like John and Alan Lomax, who helped fashion a canon of rural folk music that was thought to “exemplif[y] the country’s creativity and vitality” during the disillusionment of the Depression era (Filene 604).

⁶² As Robin D. G. Kelley also writes, “twentieth-century white audiences took comfort and delight in the stereotyped images of African Americans . . . Without the stock black characters in subordinate positions, whiteness would have no meaning, no payoff, no clout” (1406).

characterized the mid-1960s” (O’Connell 76). The canon and conversation around the blues in this moment thus instantiates an appropriative process by which white listeners and collectors could imaginatively shirk the constraints of Cold War culture, while also reconstruct an anti-modern black sound whose nostalgic underpinnings side-stepped the urgency and active dissent of civil rights.⁶³

Turning to Broonzy’s work on record and in writing, certain counterarchival strategies become apparent when read in the context of this burgeoning blues field. From the early 1950s until his death in 1958, Broonzy was incredibly active in shaping his own history and the cultural legacy of the blues; however, it is in the specific ways that he imparts these accounts—deflecting and circumventing interview questions with noted folklorists and modulating and expanding the catalog of songs in his autobiography through narrative—that his method of historicization simultaneously sits within and exceeds the trajectory being charted. Of course, this larger pattern of blues reception would not come into full bloom until the years immediately following Broonzy’s passing. Still, some of its central features—an overwhelming whiteness, a romantic nostalgia for “real” rural obscurantism, a desire for facticity and recorded sound—were already more than present and communicated to Broonzy through his performances for predominately white audiences, as well as his relationships with early blues scholars.⁶⁴ Broonzy neither departs from the folk paradigm, nor uncritically embraces the racialized categories such a paradigm

⁶³ Speaking of famous blues singer Robert Johnson’s posthumous popularity during the revival, Dennis McNally writes that “Johnson perfectly suited the ’60s counterculture’s need for heroes who rebelled against conventions, [and] lived lives of unfettered freedom while expressing themselves artistically” (308).

⁶⁴ In addition to his work with Lomax, Broonzy would become close with soon-to-be established blues scholar Paul Oliver during his time in the UK during the 1950s, with Oliver providing illustrations for *Big Bill Blues* (see O’Connell 73).

demands. Rather, what we see in his work is a playful disruption and slipperiness that creates space for multiple possibilities for black musicianship to coincide.

Narrative and Excess: Broonzy's Asides in Lomax's Aural Archive

In May of 1952, three years before his autobiography would be published, Broonzy recorded two hours of material for legendary American folklorist Alan Lomax in Broonzy's hotel room in Paris. The content of this material ranged from traditional folk music and blues to discussions around black popular taste, racial pride, and anti-black racism. The recordings themselves are now digitized and housed as "sound recordings" in the online archive of Lomax's *Association for Cultural Equity*. By the time of the recording session, Lomax had already established himself as one of the central figures in folk music and field recording. Along with his father, John Lomax, Alan had compiled a uniquely American body of folk material, the father-son duo providing particularly "nationalistic assertion[s]" in their *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934) and *Our Singing Country* (1941) (Filene 606). Alan had also served as "Assistant in Charge" of the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folk Song from 1937 to 1942, contributing thousands of field recordings from across the United States and Caribbean. By 1952, it would be fair to characterize Lomax as a collector deeply interested in African American culture and opposed to the most heinous abuses black Americans endured, but also pursuing a musical rootedness and isolated folk purity that situates rural blackness as an "outsider" category at once coveted and estranged (a project not unlike what the record collectors were after as well).⁶⁵ Thus, as an essential, established voice in American musical history, Lomax was an

⁶⁵ Garabedian has linked the earlier period of Lomax's collecting with the ensuing blues revival through the recognition of a strain of liberal pluralism and romantic racialism that runs through these (white) approaches to blues music (491).

important figure for Broonzy to work with in shaping the contours of his own musical past and contributing to the narrative being told about the blues.

The format of these discussions has Lomax serving as interviewer, asking Broonzy questions that the musician then expounds upon or offers musical evidence for in the form of small riffs or full songs. Broonzy's voice comes through much more clearly than Lomax's on these recordings, presumably because the mic is placed directly in front of the interview subject. The conversation traverses a wide range of topics, with much of it centered around race relations in the US. In the dialogue, Broonzy is particularly interested in discussing the internalized inferiority of African Americans and the ways in which black relations have been determined by legacies of white racial violence. But what also characterizes these recordings is the lively back-and-forth between the interviewer and his subject, the disputes and challenges, even outright refusals to answer certain questions according to what Lomax expected. This conversation rested on almost a decade of dialogue and musical collaboration, so the discussion never bordered on animosity or resentment; in fact the extent to which Broonzy felt comfortable talking candidly with Lomax on such topics speaks to the trust and respect the two had for each other. But what is clear upon listening are the ways that Broonzy would subtly—and perhaps not so subtly—turn the conversation away from Lomax's desired route, and how Lomax would consistently challenge Broonzy for the “real truth.” After playing “Joe Turner Blues,” for instance, Lomax asks, “Bill, what are all the facts that you know about Joe Turner,” to which Broonzy responds, “there's no facts to know about that man because he never was seen, same as John Henry.”⁶⁶ In another moment, Broonzy speaks incredulously about the prevalence of black-on-black violence in the South and Lomax, clearly frustrated with the lack of specifics, pleads, “now tell me just

⁶⁶ Lomax, “Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on Joe Turner.”

one or two *real* cases, Bill, because you said this a lot of times, but . . . tell me something that's really true."⁶⁷ And near the end of the recording, during a particularly charged discussion about sexual relationships between black men and white women, Lomax asks, "when was the first time that you ever did know a white woman in that way?" Broonzy responds, "I been knowing white women all my life, I been around them all my life." Lomax clarifies, "no, but I mean really knowing them." The exchange carries on:

LOMAX: When did that happen to you the first time? It must have been something quite special.

BROONZY: What do you mean . . . first time?

LOMAX: How old were you?

BROONZY: That's a silly question, ask a man that. That's getting—that's getting too personal.

[both laughing]

BROONZY: For Christ's sake, that—that ain't nothing—that ain't nothing to even talk about, that ain't. About what time a man [laughs]. I been going to bed with women ever since I was eight years old.

LOMAX: Eight years old?

BROONZY: Yeah.

LOMAX: Oh, you're lying.

BROONZY: No, I'm not lying. No, I'm not lying, I'm telling you the truth.

LOMAX: Bullshit, nobody starts going to bed with women at eight years old.

BROONZY: Eight years old!

LOMAX: Eighteen.

BROONZY: No, eight.⁶⁸

The conversation continues, with Broonzy discussing both the arbitrary categories of skin color and the ways that sex could be used as a weapon against white men. Lomax would laugh again, claiming one final time, "Oh, Bill, God damn, you told so many lies tonight."

These brief exchanges show the extent to which the discussion being recorded is constantly diverted or cut short in the face of altering authority and misaligned standards of truth.

⁶⁷ Lomax, "Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on why he loves the blues, reading and writing, pride, and black unity."

⁶⁸ Lomax, "Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on black men and white women, sex, and relationships."

Lomax consistently demands honest accounts, whereas Broonzy fails or simply refuses to supply tangible truths. Broonzy instead turns to exaggeration, and with the final exchange, he abruptly departs from Lomax's line of questioning in offering a different—and indeed more incredulous—account of his first consensual sexual experience. These sudden deviations and minor breaks from topic frustrate the catalog of facticity that Lomax is after, a record of rural life that includes violence and sexual spectacle. Instead of facts, Lomax receives more stories; in search of specifics, his subject pivots to a different account. And in response to an invasive exploration of black male sexuality, Lomax is confronted with only further opacity, the answers he receives unacceptable according to his standards. This opacity then stems from both Broonzy's refusal to divulge and Lomax's unwillingness to "hear" what is ultimately offered. In tracing the cumulative counterarchival effect of these dialogic events, Edwards' "political implication of opacity" can be useful. Speaking specifically of musical events and musical performance, Edwards describes moments of "indirection, digression, abrupt shifts in register, and juxtapositions of disparate elements" as having political weight in their evasiveness or impulse to move beyond narratives of institutional or colonial coherence (276). The dialogue in these exchanges shows a recurring evasiveness on the part of Broonzy, and in certain moments even a commitment to hindering coherence through digression or the ever-proliferating narrative. The multiple meanings of the aside—as lack of authority, as "unheard" remark, and as discursive deviation—are present here. Broonzy can be heard as a contributor to this folk-romantic archive insofar as he provides content to be absorbed in Lomax's history of the blues and black rural life. But in these smaller moments of frustration the content splinters and the recording expands its interpretive possibility. Broonzy refuses to uniformly adhere to the doctrine of facticity that such an archive would seem to inspire. Thus, with Lomax serving as one of the key cultural brokers in

the historical record of American vernacular music, Broonzy's role as interview subject both contributes to and undermines the stated goals of such a project.

Of course, these recordings were meant to serve as a resource on vernacular music, and Broonzy's method of deflection extends to discussions of the musical record as well. One of the more sustained discursive struggles between Lomax and Broonzy involves the musician's frustration with the recording industry and its strategies of containment as it pertains to the possibilities of recorded sound. The exchange begins with Lomax asking about the difficulties Broonzy encounters in the studio: "when you go to try to organize a record now, what kind of problems do you run into . . . you got these guys and they know a little bit, they give you a lot of trouble, what do they say, how does it go?"⁶⁹ Broonzy responds, "I'll tell you the whole thing." He briefly traces the process from start to finish, from being recruited by talent scouts sent South by the recording companies to arriving in New York or Chicago to play for producers in studio. Broonzy explains that after playing for these men he'd be told, "that's good . . . but you've got to take *this* out, and put *this* in." He elaborates, describing how these producers would say "this is not right" or "you're not making chords," ultimately concluding with, "I've got to forget what I know and try to do what he tell me." Lomax interjects: "But Bill . . . when you go to make a record now, you got to work with a band." This attempt to pivot suggests that Lomax is more interested in the difficulties among the musicians themselves, and that perhaps this was the initial route of his questioning. Even as he answers this next offering, Broonzy remains committed to a discussion of producer oversight and the limitations placed upon blues artists. Lomax tries again: "When you go out on the road with a band, how does it work?" Broonzy responds, "well, that's it, that's what I got to do before they send me on the road with the band." Lomax finally

⁶⁹ Lomax, "Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on the record industry and playing in bands."

concedes, reiterating what Broonzy's been saying ("they say change this and—"), acquiescing and prompting Broonzy to continue. Broonzy arrives at his central point: "The people of America . . . everywhere I been, they crave to hear the real thing, but if you come or go anywhere with the real blues of Mississippi, unless you hit the right, one certain spot . . . and if you sing just the way you feel, you'll be back in Mississippi so darn fast . . . People ask for a lot of things they don't want. And they will not pay for it." Finally, in the face of this central claim, Lomax responds: "Uh, but Bill, you have trouble with these musicians when you have your own band, don't you?" In this single exchange we see the extent of this discursive tug-of-war between these two figures.

There are several key issues to recognize in Broonzy's commitment to deviating from Lomax's interview questions in favor of examining industry constraints. First, the discussion itself is only born out of Broonzy's willingness to depart from the course that Lomax imagines, thus extending Broonzy's grasp on the recordings' content and displaying a continuation of the strategies previously traced. Lomax appears interested in exploring the disputes and contestations between the artists themselves, both in studio and on the road, as a way of better understanding the hierarchies that take shape in performance and the difficulties that arise when levels of professionalism differ. Broonzy instead takes the opportunity to focus on the larger concerns involved in record production. He emphasizes the means by which musicians are stripped of their own artistic integrity in favor of whatever model the industry has in mind ("this is not right;" "put *this* in"). In terms of recorded content, then, Broonzy is able to exercise his own agency as interview subject insofar as he guides the conversation to the central concern he has in mind. It is not that Lomax gives Broonzy free reign to discuss whatever he pleases; instead, the parameters of the question are forcibly extended so that emphasis can be placed on the

constraints imposed on black artists rather than the feuds and competition between them. We shift from deflection in response to Lomax's earlier invasiveness to committed deviation. Broonzy offers remarks not immediately related to Lomax's main topic but that ultimately demand a larger consideration of the creative constraints placed on black artists.

What we also see is Broonzy proclaiming an adherence to the folk paradigm that folklorists and record collectors like Lomax promoted throughout the period. Broonzy chastises American listeners who "crave to hear the real thing," only to either have that authentic sound go unpurchased or filtered out through the recording process. We can hear Broonzy posturing for Lomax in these accounts, proclaiming his status as an authentic blues singer carrying "the real blues of Mississippi" and whose untrained sound has been made to fit the commercial mold of New York and Chicago. Broonzy's deviations captured here on record then still appear to fit the "sedimentizing" project that an "archive of the traditional" would pursue, operating in line with a folk purity assumed to rest at the heart of black vernacular music. In that sense, his stance is not so far removed from those of the collectors themselves, who covet obscure records gathering dust on store shelves that might give a peek into the authentic lifestyle of the rural south. Broonzy here is speaking himself into a catalog of artists that would be celebrated for their perceived "down-homey-ness," the likes of which commercial blues has apparently succeeded in tamping out.

At the same time that Broonzy displays a commitment to "authentic" sound, it cannot be discounted how carefully he spells out for us the ways that the record as an artifact is always already mediated, always already detached from the lived reality of musical performance and its southern milieu. Broonzy's main point in this discussion is how little the recording process can be relied on to convey how music might sound in the areas from which it has been mined. As he

recalls hearing from talent scouts and labels: “Take *this* out, and put *this* in” or “you’re not making chords.” Broonzy makes clear just how uninterested the industry is in what the artist provides and rather how closely they can be made to align with the profitable standard. And though Broonzy is still very much championing rural blues here, he also calls attention to the ways in which the recorded object must vacate its position as the authoritative source for authentic sound. Individual repertoires are shunted in favor of an industry standard thought to be more commercially viable.⁷⁰ Thus, what we have with Broonzy’s discussion of musical recording is an artist who, though claiming an adherence to a folk paradigm now recognized as patently misguided, also articulates a critique of industry standards that undermines any claim to integrity by the recorded object, diverting attention to the manipulations in sound and the artistic constraints that ultimately produce the packaged disc. Broonzy’s deviations captured on record undermine or at least critically examine the faulty foundations of commercial blues recording, thus expanding Lomax’s history of the blues to include those processes by which black artistic agency is systematically overlooked.

What these archived recordings demonstrate are the multiple strategies Broonzy uses to maneuver through the topics Lomax outlines in his attempt to give shape to the history of black vernacular music. Broonzy expresses a disinterest in hard facts and directs attention away from some of the more exoticizing concerns of his interviewer—concerns that no doubt govern the rural tastes of record collectors as well. At the same time, he demands space be given to the constraints placed on black artistic agency. In doing so, Broonzy claims some of that agency for

⁷⁰ Broonzy was not alone in claiming this in the moment of the blues and folk revivals. Radio DJ and producer Bill Randle also said as much in his review of Paul Oliver’s *Blues Fell This Morning*: “the materials recorded are determined ultimately by the actual specialized market (primarily in the United States and England), by what the producer imagines that the market wants, or, finally, by what the performer thinks the producer and the market want” (102).

himself, wrestling curatorial authority away from Lomax in key moments, determining the content that can be included in this history and the criteria according to which that history will be measured. In the same moment that the absence of artistic agency on record is being documented, we can hear its presence expressed through the deflections and minor contestations that sustain in Lomax's recordings. In his asides we hear Broonzy playfully deflect and actively reroute, indulging in a romanticized blues persona while also calling attention to the inherent mediation and corruption of any "authentic" blues recording. The black blues musician then becomes more than a source or subject in the background of this collected sonic history. He is now a co-curator of this material, operating within and progressing beyond the approved parameters in ways that reorient the listener to the unique authority of the artist himself.

Broonzy's commitments to excess and narrative asides would be expanded on three years later in *Big Bill Blues*. During their conversation in Paris, Lomax tells him, "you got ten books in you Bill, you got a million books in you, from what you've seen."⁷¹ Published in London in 1955 and later a posthumous entry into the American blues revival scene in 1964, *Big Bill Blues* is perhaps Broonzy's response to Lomax's conviction. Placing Lomax's archived recordings alongside Broonzy's autobiography, we can see Broonzy's counterarchival project extending across modes. Broonzy moves from historical recording to literary text, taking an initial consideration of industry mediation and creative control and extending it to questions of copyright, artistic ownership, and the interpretive possibilities that arise from his ever-proliferating narratives.

⁷¹ Lomax, "Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on why he loves the blues, reading and writing, pride, and black unity."

“My Songs” Remade: Digression and Performance in Broonzy’s Autobiographical Asides

Big Bill Blues is made up of three sections, “My Life,” “My Songs,” and “My Friends.” It moves from a limited discussion of Broonzy’s life and upbringing, mostly in the South, to an abbreviated catalog and description of his musical output and a series of vignettes about his professional relationships in Chicago after his arrival in the 1920s. When it is read at all, *Big Bill Blues* is viewed as an intriguing if inconsiderable blip in Broonzy’s artistic career.⁷² To date, one of the few sustained engagements with *Big Bill Blues* comes from historian Kevin Greene, who reads it as a misleading characterization that reshapes the artist’s public memory as a country blues artist within the Mississippi Delta tradition. Calling it the “first in-depth biographical study of any bluesman” (159), Greene criticizes the text as a misguided attempt by collaborators Yannick and Margo Bruynoghe to position Broonzy as a rural musician well within the confines of the Delta blues, thereby becoming another extension of the “sedimentizing” project of this folk-romantic field of study.⁷³

While Greene is correct that the work resides within a larger cult of authenticity, the text might also be read against the parameters in which it is set, as well as the larger blues context in which it resides. In his “Ontologies of Music,” Philip Bohlman claims that one of the most familiar approaches to music in the West is to conceive of music *as object* (18). William G. Roy

⁷² Ethnomusicologist Darius L Thieme does include it in his 1960 research catalog for the *African Music Society Journal*, citing it alongside Ramsey’s *Been Here and Gone*, Marjorie Tallman’s *Dictionary of American Folklore* (1960), and Richard Dorson’s *American Folklore* (1959) (68).

⁷³ Green’s criticisms are four-fold: 1) the text devotes too little attention to Broonzy’s time developing the Chicago blues scene in the 1930s, instead promoting a rural image that aligns with a white folkloric “cult of authenticity;” 2) the selection of songs in the book’s second section largely stem from Broonzy’s more recent and more political oeuvre, thereby revealing the political sentiments of Broonzy’s collaborator Yannick Bruynoghe; 3) the descriptions of black life and even Broonzy himself traffic in a rhetoric of otherness characteristic of the ballad hunters and record collectors who helped establish this cult of authenticity as the primary lexicon for blues study; and 4) the 1964 American edition, in its attempt to validate itself as an entry into the burgeoning formal genre of blues criticism, characterizes Broonzy as an unreliable source in need of critical re-framing, the likes of which come in the form of Bruynoghe’s introduction and a new foreword by jazz critic Charles Edward Smith.

describes this approach as an understanding of music as a *thing* that can be defined by “a moment of creation, stability of characteristics over its lifetime, stability of characteristics between contexts, and consistency of cause-and-effect relations” (10). Roy describes how institutional practices “such as copyright and technologies such as notation and recording constrain musicians to concretize performances into singular, repeatable, named pieces of music called songs” (10). Copyright, in other words, not only becomes the means by which black artists have been historically dispossessed of their artistic material, but also one of the governing technologies by which such material becomes objectifiable.⁷⁴ Given the 1950s record collectors’ strict adherence to the 10-inch, 78-rpm record as “cherished artifact” capable of “transcribing cultural history” (Springer 41), we can recognize a significant strain of thought within this blues moment that understands music as object, whose contents are capable of being owned, mastered, curated, and canonized by white listeners.

Looking at Broonzy’s chapter “My Songs,” we see a catalog of curated material that intervenes on both white record collection and the blues revival’s impending turn to the literary as an organizing mode of historicization.⁷⁵ The text recalls the exploitative nature of the recording industry and offers alternative forms of ownership that play with categories of music as “object” and as “process.” In this way, Broonzy attempts to supersede the musical record, oscillating between critical curator of recorded material and writer expanding on music as a process the discographical record fails to capture. Additionally, Broonzy proliferates backstories

⁷⁴ This might be an extension of the objectifying process that James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow describe as accompanying all musical reproduction: “as the loop or groove repeats a sonic event, the sound *becomes* an object for the listener” (8).

⁷⁵ While not a work of rigorous music historiography, I follow Daniel Stein and Martin Butler in their claim that musical autobiographies like *Big Bill Blues* can “launch into ongoing discourses about the musician and his/her music” (117). I extend their approach to consider not just how *Big Bill Blues* revises the conversation around Broonzy’s music, but around blues music itself.

and origins for his songs, as well as performs blues stereotypes circulating in this moment. These practices reveal a willingness to reproduce limiting representations of black life, while also acknowledging both their falseness and financial utility in the current blues landscape. The result is a piece of writing that, in its attempt to serve as a contribution to the developing blues archive, also destabilizes the very basis on which that archive is founded: the material record itself.

As we saw in his discussion with Alan Lomax in Paris, one of the preoccupations of Broonzy's text is the contested claims to ownership by black musicians over their artistic material. Throughout his autobiography he relates stories in which he was either duped out of the rights to his music or made to sell them away for paltry performance fees. In his first chapter he asserts, "[w]hat is a blues singer, a good one or a bad one? I say he's just a meal ticket for the man or woman who wears dollar-signs for eyes" (46). Farther down the same page he describes his first encounter with J. Mayo Williams, manager of Paramount's race record catalog from 1924-1927, for whom he claims to have made four songs in the early 1920s, two of which were "never released on record by me but was made by other artists" (46). He would return to this experience in a discussion of his early recording days in "My Songs," referencing an additional song and writing, "[t]hey was never released by me, but by other artists later on, and I didn't get no money out of them" (69). Moreover, in describing the two songs he did record for Williams, he tells us that he simply received fifty dollars and that the producers "kept on telling us to relax and giving us moonshine whiskey to drink." After passing out and waking up after the recording was done, his recording partner told him, "You've let them get you drunk . . . and you've signed your rights away" (47).

These exploitative practices were anything but uncommon. From its height as a commercial genre in the 1920s to the years immediately preceding the blues revival, copyrights

could be granted for a period of twenty-eight years “renewable once by the author, his heir or the proprietor of the rights” (Springer 34). And while copyright deposits were sparse in the 1920s, in those moments when they did occur, the “proprietors” often wielded the most power. The largest number of registered copyright material was submitted “by the music publishing companies working in conjunction with the recording companies, or by the recording companies alone” (Meade 208). Much of the available information shows that it was a rare occasion when a record company conceded royalties to a black artist, with the majority of these musicians settling for flat performance fees, on average between \$20 and \$50 per side (Springer 37-39). Similar exploitative trends would continue into the 1960s revival, the time in which Broonzy’s text would be re-released in the US. A new market for rare, reissued 78s had arrived and this enthusiasm was coupled with the desire for new recordings by “rediscovered” blues artists and the proliferation of covers by emerging white rock ‘n’ roll bands. This newfound popularity only emboldened impropriety, with aging artists agreeing to contracts in which the rights to their songs would be relinquished, white artists appropriating authorship for and profiting off of records previously released by black artists (Springer 40-41). The copyright concerns that plagued black blues musicians for most of the twentieth century are clearly embedded within the larger discussion of appropriation in this moment. Broonzy’s decision to devote well over a third of his autobiography to his songs—and not simply his songs but the narratives that demonstrate his proprietary claims to them—is all the more significant given the tenuous relationship these artists had to their own product.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Broonzy managed to work with two of the more recognizable record producers early in his career, Williams and Lester Melrose. Williams was prolific in his accumulation of musical copyrights, depositing nearly one hundred compositions per year between 1924 and 1928 (Meade 210). However, “[t]he phrase ‘*proprietor of copyright for a work made for hire*’ appeared on all material,” which, suggests that Paramount was either incredibly successful at persuading its artists to sign away their rights or severely dishonest in their handling of this material (Springer 37). In the 1930s, Broonzy worked

Though “My Songs” is not organized chronologically or according to any discernible logic,⁷⁷ almost all of the fourteen entries begin with lyrics from the song that are then followed by short anecdotes detailing the song’s history and the events that inspired it. Entries often include guided readings of certain lines, as though Broonzy is providing a method for listening to his material and uncovering the meaning of a given reference or metaphor. As Greene writes, “*Big Bill Blues* employs similar analytical devices as those used by folklorists such as Lomax” (157), most of which try to demonstrate Broonzy’s fit within the tradition of the Mississippi blues. However, the structure of “My Songs” also mimics the format of some field recordings, with a song performed and then a discussion of that song immediately accompanying it. The chapter then becomes something like an intermedial translation of some of the recordings Broonzy did for Lomax a few years before, capturing songs “on record” and offering testimonials on their origins and significance. In constructing these claims to ownership Broonzy turns to anecdotal evidence as the means by which he establishes authority over his own catalog, thereby overriding the nuances and caveats of a given copyright claim. In “Kind-Hearted Woman” he provides the lyrics for the song and then reproduces specific verses throughout the narrative that follows, not only determining the meanings of each line but narrating the events that inspired them. In “Looking Up At Down,” Broonzy recalls the drought in 1916 that pushed

closely with Melrose for Bluebird, the race-record subsidiary of RCA Victor. Melrose often paid flat fees for original compositions and would then copyright the music under his own name (Greene 78). Broonzy signed contracts with Melrose in 1930 and 1934, but rather than split publishing royalties, Broonzy was made to give up fifty percent of his initial half, thereby sacrificing seventy-five percent of royalties to Melrose (Riesman 81). As biographer Bob Riesman states, “[h]e would almost certainly have seen it as a reduction in income that was legitimately his because the songs were his creations” (81).

⁷⁷ The chapter begins with “Joe Turner Blues,” a folk song Broonzy claims originated in the slave era. But his 1920s rent party tune “House Rent Stomp” immediately follows “Partnership Woman,” a 1945 recording about men who share the same lover. Likewise, the antepenultimate “WPA Rag,” written in the wake of the New Deal’s public works project, is immediately preceded by “When I’ve Been Drinking,” which itself is preceded by the quite political “Black, Brown, and White.”

him to work the coal mines in Arkansas and Tennessee. In his description of “the pit” residing “twenty feet deeper than the real mine, so all the other miners was looking down on me” (81), Broonzy both relates the experience that inspired one of the song’s verses and literalizes the metaphor organizing the song as a whole. Given the experience of deferred or partial royalty payments alongside the rampant history of unacknowledged compositions throughout the first four decades of commercial blues recording, Broonzy ensures his proprietary claims are captured on record. He also relies on personal testimony that, while certainly (and perhaps strategically) impossible to verify, also precludes the possibility of being discounted.

Additionally, several of the entries in “My Songs” offer additional accounts of the song’s inspiration or origin, some of which extend or depart from the song’s lyrical content. “Black, Brown, and White,” for instance, offers several short anecdotes explaining the origins of certain verses, however their explanatory power quickly gives way to an infusion of narrative excess. In one of the verses Broonzy sings, “*I went to the employment office / Got a number and I got in line / They called everybody’s number / But they never did call mine*” (82). In the text that follows Broonzy describes going to an employment office and seeing a woman turned away due to her race. Broonzy recalls telling her, “You’s still a Negro, and I am too, so we have to get back, can’t you see what I mean?” (85). Meant to provide a backstory for one of the verses in the song, the narrative quotes the primary refrain (“*They say if you’s white, you’s all right / If you’s brown, stick around / But if you’re black / Mmm, Mmm, Brother, git back, git back, git back*”) while also expanding its content and establishing a similarity in experience with another woman. Similarly, in another verse Broonzy sings, “*I was in a place one night / They was all having fun / They was all buying beer and wine / But they would not sell me none.*” The backstory he then offers presents an even more significant departure from the lyrics. Broonzy tells a story about a

bartender following his boss's orders to shatter any glass used by a black patron. Broonzy and his friends continue to buy drinks and even graduate to champagne to force more expensive glasses to be destroyed: "we left and the glasses cost more than the drinks we had in there" (88). The anecdotes following each song then bolster Broonzy's ownership claims—a crucial concern in the age of Cold War musical appropriation—while also offering subtle additions or departures from the songs' lyrical content.

The significance of these playful departures resides in their accumulation across the chapter and in their effects on the songs reproduced on the page. Ultimately, these anecdotes supplant the content of the recorded disc. By embracing proliferating narrative over lyrical content and performance, the text offsets the commitment to recorded sound that characterizes the record collectors of the time and the revivalism soon to take off. These textual additions thus become the "unheard asides" staged within this accumulating catalog of blues material. More significantly, the text's recourse to narrative departs from an object orientation and embraces an approach to music that is more akin to "process," one that becomes intermedial in its narrative extension of the recording on the page. As Bohlman describes, music is "always in flux, it never achieves a fully objective status; it is always becoming something else . . . unbounded and open" (18). Music becomes an activity of ongoingness rather than a thing with consistent and discrete contours. And while Bohlman and Roy are referring to the always-already shifting properties and relations *within* musical performance, Broonzy extends this by re-performing these origins in the literary text. The narratives that follow each song are not mere elaborations of the material at hand but an intermedial reimagining of what that material can contain and convey; they become a repetition with a difference, this time extending across aesthetic modes. Now, a verse detailing the singer's experience in an employment office features an alternative narrative with a female

interlocutor; another verse relaying a refusal of service in a bar becomes a story about black patrons pulling one over on the bartender. These re-performances of the song's thematic material—the added details and alternative narrative paths—pluralize its lyrical content. It is not simply that these entries give fuller accounts of the originating events than what the songs can provide; instead, the text becomes a performance that begins with the verse material and then surpasses what the verses contain. With this, the “stability” of the song's characteristics—its history of production and recorded lyrics—fails to obtain across contexts and is thereby exchanged for an openness that provides “the moment of creation” in the very instant that it catalyzes its unbounded continuity. Even as they bolster this impulse to create a catalog of recorded blues material, Broonzy's playful asides also depart from music as object, the likes of which can be easily claimed, curated, and mastered by others.

The text's propensity for process and proliferation receives its fullest expression in the final entry of “My Songs”: “Kind-Hearted Woman.” The song begins by praising the generosity of the singer's female partner: “*Lord knows she's kind to me everyday / Lord, she always gives me spending money / Lord knows she always lets me have my way*” (99). As the song progresses however, the feeling shifts and the woman's lavishness translates into a threatening demand that the singer better stay in line: “*My baby told me she would give me / All the money she wins / She said 'Bill, I will buy you a coffin / Boy, and a grave just to put it in.'*” The first narrative Broonzy provides unfortunately performs some of the familiar misogynist tropes found in certain blues songs. He describes an overbearing, heavysset, hypersexualized woman who provides for him financially but who also threatens him if he should “get down wrong”: “your mother will get a chance to wear that black dress if you intercourse with my money, so just don't do that if you don't want your mother and father to cry because if I find out you's getting down wrong you's a

dead duck” (101). But the text very quickly introduces another story about a woman named Black Saddy, who “was real dangerous with a razor” and who after being physically assaulted by her man ends up slicing his throat while he sits at a card table. The narrative then suddenly shifts into a mythic register: The man, named “One-Eyed Abe,” has no response to being cut. After being told of the attack by the other card players, he responds: “Oh, man, deal the cards and stop kidding with me. I don’t like to be kidded when I’m gambling,” to which another tells him: “Abe, you’s dead, your head is cut off . . .” (102). “Is you crazy?” he responds. “I’ll shake my head.” We are then told that Abe shakes his head “and his head fell off on the table . . . And that was the last of old One-Eyed Abe.” Immediately following this story, Broonzy appears to try and validate it by telling *another* personal anecdote, this time about when he himself was cut across the back by a woman while playing guitar. In just four pages, the text shuttles through three narratives, two of which Broonzy himself allegedly experienced, the Black Saddy story something he simply “remember[ed] once” (102). Taken together, these multiplying stories willfully provide the humor, violent spectacle, and folkloric fantasy that readers might be yearning for in an “authentic study” of the blues.

Crucially though, the final pages of “Kind-Hearted Woman” shift again, this time away from the mythic violence of earlier narratives to a more honest grappling with the stakes of Broonzy’s escalating asides. Broonzy begins this final section with a story about arriving home to his daughter who is waiting to hear a bedtime story. Broonzy writes, “I had been telling her about Little Red Riding Hood and about the Three Bears for five years now . . . I said to myself ‘I’m going to tell her one she’s never heard before’” (103). He then proceeds to tell her the story of Abe and Black Saddy. When his daughter does not laugh at the end, he asks if she liked the story. She responds: “Daddy, that’s not a story, that’s a lie” (104). And finally, just before the

chapter concludes, Broonzy gives us one last story about visiting a barbershop, and again he tells the Black Saddy story. Once he finishes and is ready to pay for his haircut, Broonzy asks how much he owes. The barber's answer concludes the chapter: "For what you just told me you don't owe me nothing. That one haircut is on the house. So goodbye, Big Bill, and don't forget to come back when you've got a bigger lie to tell." Importantly, throughout "My Songs" Broonzy punctuates many of his stories with a statement about their truthfulness: "Joe Turner Blues" ends with "and that's the truth about the blues" (59); "Partnership Woman" similarly concludes with "that's, I'm telling you, the real truth about the blues" (67); even "Kind-Hearted Woman" includes the line "and that's the truth about the blues, too" after Broonzy describes being cut across his back (103). This sudden admission of fabrication and the shift away from violence at the end of "Kind-Hearted Woman" is both surprising and revealing. The break effectively becomes a wink at the reader, a playful acknowledgement that these presentations of personal history and folklore—the likes of which he performed for Lomax and others during the 1950s—are indeed performances. Additionally, "Kind-Hearted Woman" ends not with gambling, domestic abuse, or violence at a music hall, but in a little girl's bedroom and a local barbershop. Violent spectacle is both re-performed on the page and supplanted, with images of the domestic and mundane taking precedent. And in the end these lies, these performances, become Broonzy's currency in the final scene, forms of economic exchange that perhaps echo the true reality for blues artists in the fifties and sixties: that in the search for success in this moment of arcane collecting and revivalism, the truth would only get you so far.

"My Songs" both textually performs the folklorist recording session and willfully contributes to a catalog of blues material for posterity. And yet, when read through the lens of the aside, its ever-expanding archive of origin stories and anecdotes also shifts the focus away

from the recorded disc, embracing the continuity and fluidity of narrative text and thereby undermining the collectors' very object of allure. And as these anecdotes deviate from their expected roles as explanatory, verifying accounts, they multiply the interpretive possibilities of this music. Broonzy both indulges in the bluesman stereotype so coveted by white fans in this moment, while also giving the lie to these performances as "authentic." They are the currency of the blues performer, a playful inhabiting that is also financially strategic. This reality would remain largely unheard for at least another decade in blues history. As with Lomax's archived recordings, "My Songs" showcases Broonzy's impulse to excess, these digressions and multiplying anecdotes playing with and calling into question the vaunted status of the isolated musical recording and the racialized expectations that accompany it.

An Archive of Excess: Asides as Alternative History in "My Friends"

As the previous sections have shown, Broonzy's contributions to the Lomax archive and his autobiography challenge the musical record on the grounds of what it cannot contain, in effect, shedding light on its troubling history as a fetishized object produced and packaged at the expense of the black blues artist. In his final chapter "My Friends," Broonzy attempts to do a bit of archiving of its own, a project he would take up again during a final recording session with radio DJ and record producer Bill Randle in 1957, the year before Broonzy's death. What we see in the third chapter of *Big Bill Blues* is another departure from traditional autobiography.

Broonzy devotes over a third of his text to a different type of catalog, one that now lists and surveys the artists he performed with and encountered in Chicago. This same devotion can be heard on the recordings from the Randle session, which was edited and packaged into a five-LP set titled *The Big Bill Broonzy Story* (1960), and which devotes significant space to the black

recording artists of Broonzy's time. In this section I offer one final examination of Broonzy's asides by turning to the last chapter of *Big Bill Blues*. In "My Friends" Broonzy appears to offer an alternative mode by which to trace blues history, one in which artistic subjectivity continues to be privileged over an object orientation, while chronology and categorization are deemphasized in favor of black popularity and networks of musical intimacy. In tracing this alternative approach, I draw on the Randle recordings to underscore the impetus driving these corresponding works—namely, to curate and preserve. But I also attend to the affective importance that Broonzy's performance on record reveals, a man desperate to lay down a bit of history in the very moment that it is beginning to be told and that his own ability to tell it is ending.⁷⁸

"My Friends" offers a series of fourteen vignettes that detail Broonzy's experiences with artists such as Tampa Red, Lonnie Johnson, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Memphis Minnie, none of which are longer than a few pages. Each vignette includes a selection of the artist's records, a description of their particular playing style, and the capacity in which Broonzy worked with them (often either in studio or informally through Chicago's rent-party circuit). Perhaps the first thing to note is that the cast of characters in "My Friends" departs from the increasingly rural, obscure focus of white listeners and critics in this period. The effect is an alternative mapping that extends beyond conventional musical categories. Of the fourteen artists that Broonzy includes in "My Friends," four had released over one hundred sides between 1920 and 1942 (Tampa Red, Lonnie Johnson, Memphis Minnie, and Washboard Sam), with another four considered "runners-up": Georgia White (91), Sonny Boy Williamson (89), Joe McCoy (77), and

⁷⁸ In placing the text and recording together, I follow Riesman's claim that the "two works can be seen as complementary pieces, in which Bill used the respective advantages of each medium to convey his points" (235).

Curtis Jones (74) (Wald 41-42). Eight of Broonzy's fourteen artists can be seen as popular professionals whose music circulated not just in the cities in which they were recorded but in the rural areas where the supposedly "real" bluesmen were said to remain. Importantly, then, while "revivalists privileged an obsolete form of rural black culture in an era when most African Americans lived in cities" (Hamilton 239), these artists privileged black listening practices and black purchasing power, offering a catalog of popular blues artists that for Broonzy were at risk of obsolescence in the wake of a discursive context that valued that very thing.

Broonzy's dissatisfaction with this quickly coalescing rural paradigm was also addressed on record with Bill Randle in 1957. In a dialogue track from the Randle sessions, Broonzy parrots the claim that "the best blues singers come from Mississippi and Arkansas," and then responds, "well, that's true, I believe some of that, and some of that I don't believe" (*The Big Bill Broonzy Story*). He goes on to describe how musical cultures like the Delta blues or New Orleans jazz are products of availability and market desire, and that many rural artists "wanted to get out from behind that plow, so he had to be good at what he was doing to get a job to play in town someplace." He goes on to describe how artists like him "found out that they would pay you to go in these towns and places and sing it, so then we got interested in it and we studied it, same as people do today." The emphasis is not on an authenticity or a natural capacity inherent in rural black artists, but on the professional devotion to the musical form, to the sustained cultivation of musical proficiency as the means to depart from the very context taken to be the cultural center of "real" blues.⁷⁹ Here, the romantic façade of real rural blues, an authentic immediacy devoid of commercial contamination (which Broonzy appeared to champion with Lomax five years before)

⁷⁹ Such comments align with Karl Hagstom Miller's reassessment of the common romantic conflations of rural music and labor: "Music was not a way to pace work, to make labor their own, or even to comment on it and the meaning it had for them. Music was a way to stop working—or at least to work at a task over which they had much more control" (58).

is cast aside. As with “My Friends,” Broonzy turns to popular artists like Bessie Smith, Tampa Red, and Leroy Carr to document the professional successes of black musicians. These figures, now largely overlooked in common blues parlance (the incomparable Bessie Smith notwithstanding), illustrate Broonzy’s turn to a commercial history that was defined and supported by an urban black community. The stereotypical rural bluesman that a Cold War audience expected and that Broonzy often performed is now enmeshed within a larger network of urban professionalism and black celebrity.

Beyond the characters included in “My Friends,” the descriptions for each artist and the chapter’s composition amount to a striking departure from the traditional historicizing project of midcentury blues criticism. Nearly all of Broonzy’s descriptions include a series of anecdotal fragments meant to capture the closeness he shared with each artist. Broonzy’s rapid, oscillating prose style, while characteristic of the text as a whole, intensifies in this final section to produce a network of musical intimacy where blues history—the record catalogs, studio outfits, and performance styles—bleeds into immediate personal experience and moments of subjectivity. Admittedly, there is a difficulty, perhaps even impossibility, in identifying aesthetic and editorial choice in such a document. As Bob Riesman makes us aware, “Because [Broonzy] had handed or sent the writings to the Bruynoghes as he went along, they were the ones who assembled the full set of materials and made the editorial choices” (208). This discursive mediation precludes us from attributing the text’s form to the conscious stylings of Broonzy exclusively. But rather than cast the section aside as an editorial contrivance, the chapter becomes yet another opportunity to read counterarchivally. We can trace the effects and revelations that these kernels provide, all the while aware that these authorial assertions of self, as with the industry as a whole, are necessarily mediated by the white collaborators that oversee them.

What is striking about the structure of each vignette in “My Friends” is how rapidly the text synthesizes the personal details and professional history of each artist in the span of a single page, often in a single paragraph. After describing blues celebrity Lonnie Johnson’s prolific musical talents on violin, bass, and banjo, as well as his preference for using a pick during performances, Broonzy writes:

I have never played with Lonnie, but we was together on some shows and on some parties. He’s about five feet and ten inches tall. Me and him went fishing together and it would do me more good to see him catch a fish than it would if I had caught one, because he could holler so loud. He would always say: ‘I got him, Bill, he ain’t so big, but he’s big enough to bite my hook, he’s big enough to make the skillet stink.’
And sometimes he caught about twenty-five fishes in one day. He liked to fish very much. We was living in Chicago at that time (119).

There is a whimsical rapidity in the way the content roves between musical acumen and shared leisure time, with the attention to each subject brief and without elaboration. In an interview about the composition of the work, Margo Bruynoghe recalls that Yannick instructed Broonzy to “write it down as it came to him,” a process that almost certainly speaks to the fragmented prose style represented here (qtd. in Riesman 208). But the immediate juxtaposition of musical style to bodily measurements and personal anecdotes becomes an oddly affectionate biographic illustration that pays no attention to the conventional spheres or cadence of historiography, even as it attempts to enter them. Of course, Greene’s earlier criticism still applies: with Bruynoghe’s support, Broonzy’s depictions are “fused with a highly exotic, folksy, and generally romanticized depiction of the world of Chicago blues” (161). Still, Broonzy’s adherence to the problematic lexicon of this folk-romantic frame—one no doubt bolstered by Broonzy’s white collaborators—also attempts to defy (successfully or not) the narrow focus this discourse desires, here placing the artists’ personal histories at the genre’s historical center. The same can be seen in Broonzy’s vignette for Tampa Red, which opens with a description of his playing style (“Tampa Red has

got a style of his own, playing guitar with a bottle neck on his little finger”), and then moves through a list of his popular records to when he and Broonzy met in studio in 1928. The page then details Tampa Red’s studio work with various ensembles who together recorded some of his most famous releases, only to be followed by an odd description about their birthday celebrations: “Every year all the musicians go to his house to eat and drink, talk about different blues and songs, and give him a good beating with a strap. Sometimes it takes from twelve to fifteen men to hold him down and sometimes there is about thirty of us musicians at this birthday party. Some hold him down while the others march around and hit him, not light but hard and he hollered sometimes. That’s the way blues singers celebrate” (117). Again, the text’s sudden shift from the artist’s catalog and recording outfits to a lengthy description of their bizarre birthday antics alters the scale of relation, the studio and recording histories passing freely into the shared (and surely exaggerated) memories of these collaborating artists.

The effect of this fragmented, almost stream-of-consciousness prose style is a reevaluation of historical detail, small snapshots being lifted out of time to be showcased so that negligible moments are heightened, overlooked encounters privileged. This is not to say that these events are randomly selected or insignificant. In his section on popular blues pianist Memphis Slim, Broonzy writes of a discussion the two had about Slim sounding too similar to the older pianist Roosevelt Sykes. In this moment, a seasoned artist encourages another to cultivate his own sound (good advice considering the criticisms Chicago blues would receive given some of its factory-line production methods).⁸⁰ When discussing guitarist Memphis

⁸⁰ Charters would severely censure the prototypical blues mold taking shape at Bluebird Records, dubbing it the “Bluebird Beat,” noting that they “used a group of house musicians who accompanied everybody,” and that “[a]fter two or three years of this, it was almost impossible to tell one singer from another” (183).

Minnie, Broonzy narrates a contest between the two artists in which Minnie outperforms Broonzy to the surprise of everyone in the audience; again a single event, the actual validity of which has been disputed,⁸¹ that captures Broonzy's high esteem for a female contemporary. The result is an assortment of seemingly minor events—fishing trips, birthday parties, passing conversations, guitar contests—whose triviality can be located in their position outside the jurisdiction of conventional historical narrative and the near impossibility of documentation. Moreover, these vignettes are not ordered chronologically (Memphis Slim's, for example, precedes Memphis Minnie's, even though the dates Broonzy provides are 1939 and 1933, respectively), and so they become a shifting narrative index of minor memories that together create a collage of intimate encounters and exchanges across the Chicago blues scene. What "My Friends" ultimately offers is a document in which narrative logic and chronology are sacrificed for a lateral network of historical asides. The artist is privileged over or at least alongside the artifact, and the inconsequentialities are pluralized and prioritized over a grand narrative of generic evolution or industry proceedings. In these moments the turn to excess that characterized Broonzy's role in the archive and his approach to the musical record are given *carte blanche*, determining the full scope of his blues vision. And while these vignettes certainly border on stereotype as Greene warns, one wonders if we can acknowledge these failings alongside their intended effects: to infuse discography with subjectivity, to offer some alternative that imbues the circulating record with digressions and departures. Such contradictions rest at the heart of a counterarchival practice.

What we see and hear in "My Friends" and *The Big Bill Broonzy Story* is an aging artist trying to desperately piece together an index of musicians to facilitate future fans' conjuring of

⁸¹ Riesman has identified a real contest that occurred between the two artists advertised in the *Chicago Defender* in 1949, but the dates and judges listed are inconsistent with Broonzy's account (212).

blues history. Rather than a compendium of dates and catalog numbers, Broonzy supplies a rhizomatic survey of intimate musical encounters; instead of an archive accommodating the increasingly arcane interests of white listeners, Broonzy attunes us to those commercial artists who made their careers in the limelight of urban Chicago. About halfway through the Randle LPs' listings, Broonzy performs something similar to the network he traces in "My Friends," playing songs made famous by artists like Jim Jackson, Leroy Carr, and Richard Jones. As he introduces each song he consistently remarks on the passing of many of these artists and his commitment to keeping their music alive. Describing Leroy Carr as "one of the greatest blues writers that I've ever known," Broonzy begins to play his "In the Evening (When the Sun Goes Down)," and he says, "I don't think he'll ever die, because a song like this don't die." Three tracks later he turns to Big Maceo Merriweather, and before playing another of his favorites he tells us, "he's dead, but I don't think this song will ever die neither," concluding with, "I like it myself, and that's why I play it, and I don't want it to die." These remarks on memory, death, and musical longevity no doubt relate to Broonzy's own confrontations with mortality as the decade carried on.⁸² Broonzy sounds weary and introspective on the recording, projecting a solemn sincerity that perhaps extends back to his writing on some of these same figures two years earlier. In both of these works Broonzy creates a web of intimacies that surpass the documentable record and yet still remain productive as a different form of memory, one in which artists are supported and support each other, and their deaths are accompanied by a much longer legacy in writing and recorded sound.

Across all the works surveyed in this chapter—the Lomax and Randle recordings, *Big Bill Blues*—the throughline has been Broonzy's use of the aside as a counterarchival practice, a

⁸² Before the session began, Broonzy had made plans to have throat surgery. The procedure left him almost voiceless and found traces of cancer which he would succumb to a year later.

method of digression nestled within and yet also rerouting some of the core tenets of blues collection and criticism at midcentury. Still, their very nature *as* asides meant that they were not wholly heard, a reality that became abundantly clear three years after Broonzy's death, when journalist and producer Pete Welding wrote the following for *Down Beat*: "it's almost as if the death of the superb blues artist Big Bill Broonzy in the early summer of 1958 had spurred every collector, musicologist, folklorist, and owner of a tape recorder to invade the rural South in an effort to preserve as much of the rough; natural; vigorous, and, it was feared, perishable music of the Southern Negro" (qtd. in Adelt 42). Though his archived recordings and writing had undermined the veneration of the recorded object and revealed the cultivation and performance of the stereotypical Delta bluesman, these critical departures were left largely unheard by the blues culture gaining steam in the wake of his passing.

As Laura Helton rightly claims, archives "recur as sites of racial power that guard the boundaries of knowledge" (101). Recognizing Broonzy's work as a part of this larger body of blues history—and elevating it beyond a footnote or epigraphic flourish—this chapter has highlighted the possibilities that sustain within a musical archive committed to rurality and obscurity. It has emphasized instead those moments in which black critical authority is affirmed and the racial projections of blues collectors and critics are strategically claimed and shrewdly evaded. The methods that might disqualify such work from consideration—excess, exaggeration, a reliance on narrative—become the very means by which Broonzy reckons with this broader discourse, an attempt to occupy a musical archive of white projection that also stymies some of the assumptions and expectations that propel it forward.⁸³ And while his performances on the

⁸³ We should recall that the standards by which we measure this historical work were certainly underachieved by collectors and critics. Revisionist scholars are now revealing "the irreconcilable variance between the blues as it really was and that which white middle-class enthusiasts and record collectors of the Sixties 'invented' and wanted to see" (O'Connell 62). Perhaps we can accept that the

record and on the page are a far cry from Langston Hughes's cosmopolitanism or Sun Ra's "vibrational" ontology (the subjects of later chapters), they serve as useful early instances in which an artist's work risks being buried under the debates around appropriation and complicity within black cultural production. Broonzy neither offers condemnatory claims of appropriation nor capitulates to the racializing scripts being crafted for blues artists. Rather, he strives for something else: a savvy self-conscious performance and play that exceeds prescriptive models of musical blackness within the blues field and the institutionalizing discourses of a Cold War imaginary. By infusing the fetishized recorded object with personal history, with popular urbanity, and with narrative asides that embrace inconsistency, digression, and contradiction, Broonzy sketches a musical history unacknowledged in this Cold War moment, one that, as he claims, is the "real truth" about the blues.

histories being told, the canons constructed and the archives ossifying in the 1950s and 1960s were a fabrication brought on by an inventive white curatorship, and in so doing also acknowledge those artists who were active agents in this conversation, who were aware of how this history was being constituted and located moments in which to intervene.

CHAPTER TWO

The Real Ambassadors, Reappropriating Jazz, and the (Mis)recognitions of Empire

Only a few months before Big Bill Broonzy's passing in August of 1958—which left behind a musical archive that frustrates any attempt to appropriate blues music and cast it as an “authentically” rural art form—the United States' Cultural Presentations Program embarked on its second goodwill tour of the Middle East. These “jazz tours” sent pianist and composer Dave Brubeck and his quartet to places like Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran, in an effort to broadcast a uniquely American music to countries deemed vulnerable to Soviet persuasion. The tours were motivated by a belief that jazz's formal makeup and interracialism could provide a portable cultural model of the United States' colorblind democracy for newly liberated or post-colonial states. In a *New York Times* article from June of that year, Brubeck aligns himself explicitly with this vision, writing that jazz is “our single native art form . . . the most authentic example of American culture,” and in its structure the “most democratic form of expression I know” (“The Beat Heard”). In the same moment that the blues' sound was being contested and recast by white audiences to capture an image of black rural life that was safe and cooptable, jazz was being lifted up as a beacon of American democracy.

But if Brubeck's outward display of patriotic allegiance seems clear-cut in 1958, his 1962 collaboration with his wife, Iola, and jazz legend Louis Armstrong on their musical *The Real Ambassadors* complicates this reading, particularly when it comes to the role of race in musical diplomacy.⁸⁴ A satirical reimagining of the State Department's jazz tours, *The Real Ambassadors*

⁸⁴ Although the 1962 performance was an abbreviated concert reading of the show, I use the term “musical” to describe *The Real Ambassadors* since a full Broadway show was always the Brubecks' ambition.

tells the story of a famous black jazz musician—modeled after Armstrong—who after his diplomatic tour travels to a newly liberated African country where he is mistaken for the actual US ambassador. Performed in a “slimmed-down one-hour ‘concert version’” at the 1962 Monterey Jazz Festival (Hatschek xi), the show is an interracial collaboration that intersects Cold War diplomacy, civil rights, and decolonization.⁸⁵ But crucially, in a moment when the Civil Rights Movement was gaining steam and demands for political and social recognition were taking off, *The Real Ambassadors* is a performance defined by misapprehension and duplicity, with identities and politics routinely and comically mistaken. If Brubeck attested to the unmistakable union between jazz and democracy in 1958, what does *The Real Ambassadors*’ emphasis on misrecognition and comic detachment from the US government offer as a response to the state’s appropriation of jazz and the role of race in this process?

This chapter shifts from the national domain of the blues to the international arena, where the US’s project of cultural integration and American exceptionalism was carried on in full-force. I argue that the musical—both its performance at the Monterey Jazz Festival, as well as its accompanying LP recorded in 1961—centralizes “(mis)recognition” as a governing relational structure of Cold War musical diplomacy.⁸⁶ As Kenneth Warren describes, appeals for (mis)recognition define the diasporic experience: “to be cognizant of oneself as a diasporan subject is always to be aware of oneself, no matter where one is, as from elsewhere, in the process of making a not quite legitimate appeal to be considered as if one were from here” (400-

⁸⁵ Keith Hatschek’s recent *The Real Ambassadors: Dave and Iola Brubeck and Louis Armstrong Challenge Segregation* (2022) is the first major study of the musical’s development and social significance. His work has provided invaluable insight into the production of the musical at Monterey.

⁸⁶ The readings performed in this chapter are of digital documents housed by the University of the Pacific’s Scholarly Commons, entitled “The Real Ambassadors script and sheet music used at Monterey Jazz Festival.” The documents were included in the online collection *The Real Ambassadors – Scripts and Ephemera*.

401). Additionally, the jazz ambassadors traveling for the State Department navigated a similarly troublesome bind: inspired to cultivate transnational relationships with the local musicians and audiences they encountered abroad, these artists were also hampered by the state's imperial procedures that might inevitably override such connections. In other words, the jazz artists' appeals for transnational affiliation were also "not quite legitimate" given their attachment to the US state, a diplomatic collaboration that itself only nominally addressed black artists' appeals to be "considered as if one were from here." As I elaborate in the next section, (mis)recognition doubly defines the experience of the black jazz ambassador. Drawing on Warren's terminology, I trace how *The Real Ambassadors'* dynamic formal maneuvers reflect the gaps and misapprehensions that underlie both diplomatic and diasporic relations at midcentury. If jazz was appropriated by the state as a structural parallel to a thriving American democracy, then (mis)recognition—a condition defined by gaps and misapprehensions—makes clear a creative wedge between the two.⁸⁷

Like the previous chapter, Dave and Iola Brubeck and Louis Armstrong can be heard reshaping their own experiences in an effort to disentangle their music from a dominant national listening practice. In addition to Dave Brubeck's tour of the Middle East in 1958, Armstrong's own state-sponsored tour of the African continent came near the end of 1960 and carried on into early 1961. While Broonzy's counterarchival work oscillated between biographical recording and autobiographical writing, the artists here keep their efforts on stage and in studio, though their approach is hardly contained by the music itself. I argue that the musical's intermingling of sound and narrative text facilitates the staging of musico-diplomatic (mis)recognition, extending

⁸⁷ At various moments in her study of the jazz tours, historian Lisa E. Davenport uses the language of appropriation in describing the US's adoption and promotion of black cultural objects. See *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (7, 84).

the term beyond its understanding as a concept of diaspora, while also intervening on the touring artists' enrollment in the imperial desires of the Cold War US. Though the Brubecks' public comments seemingly mark them as devoted patriots consumed by their faith in jazz's democratic potential, the musical captures a much more complicated web of attachments and discrepancies with respect to artists and the state. Reflecting on his state-sponsored tour at the 2008 Brubeck Festival, Dave Brubeck stated, "I was aware in 1958 that we were being used in the Cold War propaganda battle, and acutely aware that Eugene [Wright] did not enjoy all the privileges that the rest of our group did in the U.S., particularly in the still segregated South. Yet, Eugene and I agreed that our mission was as President Eisenhower had declared it: 'People-to-People.' And it was on that level that we tried to communicate" (qtd. in Hatschek 195). Brubeck articulates a clear awareness of how his music was used at this time, but also how his own agency and that of his bandmates might be expressed in key moments, and indeed, more richly expressed four years later at Monterey. If, as Danielle Fosler-Lussier suggests, musical diplomacy is akin to Henry Kissinger's "elaborate stage play," in which rival superpowers no longer negotiate with one another but rather perform for the "world at large" (206), then perhaps the stage is the very arena in which to look for critical reflections of this imperial exercise.

Though (mis)recognition as a key term is now nearly three decades old, I return to it for two reasons: 1) its signification aligns with the musical's string of willed misperceptions and identificatory gaffs; and 2) as a frame of perception the concept has a particular utility in defining sensory experience beyond the visible. Jazz artists' respective political affiliations and desires were thought to be recognizable first and foremost in their music. Thus, the term's capacity to measure diasporic consciousness can be made to intersect with the audibility of the artist's perceived values in decolonizing states. And while its purchase as a diasporic concept,

especially today, may have shifted, as a structure of relation it still retains much of its explanatory power in the context of the Cold War period.

If the “jazz as democracy” gambit and the tours’ state-sponsorship made (mis)recognition the diplomatic condition musicians experienced during the Cold War, then intermediality becomes one of the means by which certain artists critically engaged with this phenomenon. In this chapter I both draw on and generalize Daniel Albright’s definition of intermediality—“the imaginary artwork generated by the spectator through the interplay of two or more media” (209)—to describe how *The Real Ambassadors*’ intermingling of music and text reimagines the role of jazz in cultural diplomacy and transnational solidarity. In the previous chapter, perhaps the most obvious example of intermediality was the translation of folklorist recording strategies into autobiographical writing in *Big Bill Blues*. But Broonzy’s textual asides also effectively expanded the narrative power of his music so that his songs became an intermedial “process” rather than simple recorded objects or appropriated products. This chapter expands on the latter category of cases. In *The Real Ambassadors*, written narration and music interact in ways that re-envision the discursive power of the songs themselves, thereby modeling a form of intervention that interrogates and reconfigures jazz’s appropriation by the state. *The Real Ambassadors* also arranges jazz as a structuring agent and narrative figure throughout the musical, a formal mechanism that takes on metaphorical significance in crucial moments in the performance. While a handful of critics have analyzed the work and noted its capacity for social critique, most have either left the form of the performance unacknowledged or have taken for granted the combination of music and script. This is not to mention how critical attention to the 1994 CD re-release understandably overlooks the accompanying narrative, given its omission on the cast

album.⁸⁸ And since the 1962 performance was not “a full-blown musical theater staging,” but rather a concert version with “each performer’s parts right in front of them on music stands for the performance” (Hatschek 132, 136), the richness of the work resides in these aesthetic overlaps made overtly visible to the audience. Precisely because intermediality both highlights and attempts to erase the distance between aesthetic modes, it becomes the proper expressive strategy for reflecting and critically examining its cultural counterparts: diplomatic and diasporic (mis)recognition. I read the musical’s entanglement of music and narrative as a purposeful deployment of intermedial form aimed at disrupting jazz’s simple enlistment in the US’s depoliticizing and ostensibly colorblind diplomatic agenda.

In what follows I briefly review Kenneth Warren’s concept of (mis)recognition and elaborate its meaning as a condition of Cold War musical diplomacy. I then analyze key musical-narrative clusters in *The Real Ambassadors* to illustrate how the performance’s satirical, intermedial staging of (mis)recognition (at once diasporic and national-diplomatic) critiques the parasitic role of the State Department’s Cultural Presentations Program. Here, I begin by demonstrating how the performance displays an awareness of its own intermediality, or comingling of aesthetic forms. By calling attention to its mixing of sound and text, its formal constraints, and the audience’s participatory role in the performance, the musical ends up reinterpreting and defamiliarizing the jazz-as-democracy trope circulating at this time. I then move through several instances in which the narrative interludes intervene on the music being performed in the musical, reshaping the individual songs and frustrating any facile linkage between the jazz being heard and the diplomatic mission touted by the State Department through this music. Finally, I provide an extended reading of “swing” in the song “King for a Day,” a

⁸⁸ See otherwise positive reviews by Gary Giddins and Scott Yanow.

jazz term and early subgenre that by the 1960s connoted both white appropriation and musical-racial essence. As an alternative to the more avant-garde approaches coming out of hard bop and free jazz, I suggest that swing is reappropriated here to imagine forms of black leadership that also avoid essentialism, with the jazz ambassador's role reevaluated to make explicit the gaps these artists desired.⁸⁹ And yet, even as it succeeds in making audible the distances between the artist and the state, the musical's relentless pursuit of diasporic intimacy ultimately adopts structures of relation that are regrettably familiar. In the final section I consider how though the gaps articulated by these intermedial exchanges open up space for the artists to imagine alternative forms of engagement, the musical's resolution replicates the same geopolitical unevenness that defined the US's Cold War aspirations. *The Real Ambassadors* makes clear that while there are forms of (mis)recognition that establish a productive separation between ambassadorship and empire, also present are forms that collapse diasporic relations into a vision of universal belonging that risks continuing to operate imperially. Despite the shortcomings of its conclusion, *The Real Ambassadors*' satirical performance of (mis)recognition demonstrates the artists' playful response to and re-appropriation of jazz in the Cold War moment.

(Mis)recognition, Diaspora, and Diplomacy

In our turn to (mis)recognition as a structuring concept for musical diplomacy, it is helpful first to trace "recognition" as a political demand and ideal, as well as how it pertains to twentieth-century black travel, including diasporic movement across borders, and cultural

⁸⁹ Ingrid Monson provides a succinct account of black musical responses to swing's success: "in response to the commercial and popular success of white musicians, which was viewed by many as depriving African American musicians of a fair economic return on their creativity, many African American jazz musicians of the 1950s and 1960s seemed determined to emphasize and develop black difference rather than witness a repeat of the 1930s, when Benny Goodman was crowned the King of Swing" (106).

ambassadorship. In his now famous essay “The Politics of Recognition,” philosopher Charles Taylor describes how marginalized groups’ make demands for recognition because the alternative, “Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (25). For Taylor, there are two types of recognition that have taken precedent in the modern moment: the “politics of equal dignity,” which calls for a universal recognition of each human’s worthiness of respect (41), and the “politics of difference,” which calls for the recognition and fostering of particularity (43). As TreaAndrea M. Russworm writes, “although the universalist emphasis on human equality often contradicts with the demand for individual and collective distinctiveness, both have come to inform ideals governing liberal democracy” (22). And while definitions of political recognition vary, philosopher Nancy Fraser writes that “The usual approach to the politics of recognition . . . starts from the Hegelian idea that identity is constructed dialogically, through a process of mutual recognition.” To be misrecognized according to these dialogic models then “is to suffer both a distortion of one’s relation to one’s self and an injury to one’s identity.” These psychological harms, coupled with the disenfranchisement and interminable violence inflicted on African Americans, heightened demands for political and social recognition during the mid-twentieth century. As Russworm writes, during the civil rights era “the struggle for recognition was expressed, challenged, and affirmed in landmark legal cases like *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, in Malcolm X’s call for ‘black recognition on a global scale,’ in the speeches and activism of Martin Luther King Jr., and in the efforts of ‘countless ordinary men, women, and children’ who protested oppression and inequality throughout the era” (25-26).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Russworm also links the politics of recognition to Fanon, describing how the “‘the fact of blackness’—the interpretation of the racial other’s outward appearance as a pejorative prism of difference—has historically been used as the very catalyst for precluding recognition” (23).

The Civil Rights Movement thus understood recognition as a grounding for liberal democratic inclusion and as a political strategy that would lead to black Americans being “seen” as subjects worthy of equal rights and privileges as citizens of the US.

Discussions of recognition within the context of diasporic relations both reiterate and expand on some of these more familiar understandings of the politics of recognition. In *Global Circuits of Blackness* (2010), Percy C. Hintzen and Jean Muteba Rahier provide a string of compounding definitions for diaspora, all of which center around its function as a space of mutual recognition. They alternatively describe diaspora as “the black struggle for recognition” (xi), an “implicit structure of shared meaning” (xii), a “mutual recognition across difference” (xiv), and “an ideology of black mutual recognition” (xvii). Beyond a description of global migration or mass movement of groups across borders (often forced or coerced by violence, colonialism, or displacement), Hintzen and Rahier theorize diaspora as a set of exchanges that contest the “miscognition” and “misrecognition” that results from ideological distortion. As they write, “[s]uch distortion, as it pertains to blackness, derives from the ruling ideology of white supremacy that we consider to be the central force in the process of black abjection, exclusion, and erasure” (x). Ultimately, misrecognition operates here within the realm of white supremacy, and diaspora, as an analytic and mode of political contestation, responds to such distortion by creating space for self- and mutual recognition across geographies.

And yet, within diaspora specifically, misrecognition’s constitutive role cannot be overlooked. In his now landmark essay for Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease’s *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993), Kenneth Warren provides an incisive theory of diasporic relations that involves what he calls “appeals for (mis)recognition.” After detailing the ways in which African and African American relations are always temporally mediated or predetermined by

prior encounters, Warren draws his key example from Langston Hughes's autobiography *The Big Sea* (1940), specifically a scene in which Hughes's conversation with a Kru man from Liberia becomes a "comedy of misrecognition": "Hughes who appeals for misrecognition as an African is misrecognized as white and George [the pantryman] who appeals for misrecognition as a Kentuckian is misrecognized as African" (400). The resulting condition Warren identifies, and which I quoted earlier, is that "to be cognizant of oneself as a diasporan subject is always to be aware of oneself, no matter where one is, as from elsewhere, in the process of making a not quite legitimate appeal to be considered as if one were from here" (400-401). Recognition is always contingent upon one's apparent or assumed affinities, and thus one "can always be misrecognized as other than what one claims to be." For Warren diasporic relations are defined not by a shared consciousness or black intersubjectivity, but by ambiguity, separation, and the desires to erase them despite the knowledge of their abiding power and one's propensity to perform in ways that reinscribe them.⁹¹ Thus, demands for political recognition in the US coexist with the experience of diasporic (mis)recognition, where appeals for black transnational cultural connection are always mediated by gaps and separations across difference.

If we isolate the years of the Cold War, we see (mis)recognition in the African diaspora take on a new dimension, particularly as it relates to music and the US state. In turning to the experience of the black musical ambassador, we see a somewhat similar set of ambiguities define his or her experience in relation to a national Cold War project. From 1956 until 1969 the State department sponsored twenty-eight tours of jazz artists and R&B groups (Monson 123), and by all accounts these tours amounted to some of the most significant cultural programming

⁹¹ Warren's attention to disjuncture between diasporic communities characterizes a larger shift in the field in the last few decades, with scholars like Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer, Hazel Carby, Paul Gilroy, and Brent Hayes Edwards leading the way (Burden-Stelly).

coordinated by the US government during this period, alongside the four-year tour of *Porgy and Bess* and other works of theater, classical music, and ballet (Von Eschen 4-6). While jazz was adopted as a state-sponsored expression of a thriving democracy, it was “never solely an expression of nation,” nor were the musicians “simply tools or followers of this policy” (Von Eschen 250, 252). Many were outspoken about their experiences as racialized subjects within a Jim Crow nation and often struggled to articulate gaps between the statist agendas they recognized and their own motivations as African American performers abroad. As Dizzy Gillespie recalled after his inaugural state tour, “I sort of liked the idea of representing America, but I wasn’t going to apologize for the racist policies of America . . . I know what they’ve done to us and I’m not going to make any excuses” (qtd. in Von Eschen 34). Gillespie was also known to refuse to play for the exclusively elite audiences that the State Department targeted in their coordination of the shows. Louis Armstrong initially rejected a Soviet tour in 1957 as well, his decision arriving on the heels of Eisenhower’s delayed response to Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus’s armed re-segregation of Central High School in Little Rock. As Armstrong stated: “[i]t’s getting almost so bad a colored man hasn’t got any country” (“Louis Armstrong”). Many of these artists felt compelled to offer candid accounts of what life was like in the US for black Americans.

And yet, such open separations and outspoken criticisms of nation—which Von Eschen and others have considered part of the transnational exchanges and pan-Africanist sentiments bolstered by the tours themselves⁹²—could very quickly be subsumed under the totalizing engine of American democracy. Decolonization became the cover “with which U.S. empire cloaked itself” (Collins, McGranahan 8). The anti-colonial shift away from formal empire and toward

⁹² Biographer Aaron Lefkowitz aligns himself with Von Eschen when he writes, “jazz musicians transformed US efforts to win the cultural Cold War into something much more subversive” (27).

economic attraction and international sway became a configuration of the “informal” empire that was bolstered by postwar American interests (Louis and Robinson). As Fosler-Lussier notes, “[g]iven the rhetoric of freedom that was emphasized in U.S. propaganda and tied closely to the idea of jazz itself, it was very difficult to subvert the State Department’s wishes with defiant words or actions of any kind” (94). Brian Russell Roberts reaches a similar conclusion: “US efforts in international coercion actually sought to promote the precise mode of color-based connections that present-day cultural criticism would normally celebrate as subversive to the nation-state” (159). In other words, these musicians’ outward departures from statist visions and their public shots aimed at the government, while attempting to disentangle the artist from an imperial agenda, were “not quite legitimate” appeals as well. What mattered was the ability to create distance, though not quite detachment or absolute separation; rather, what was necessary was a productive space in which musicians could critique, declare alternative support, and perhaps gain “leverage in political events” (Bennett 59).

To sum up, if as Warren has suggested diasporic relations involve an awareness of being in some way *a part from*, while making (not quite legitimate) appeals to be seen as *a part of*, then in the case of the jazz ambassador, musico-diplomatic relations similarly involve an awareness of being *a part of*, all the while making (not quite legitimate) appeals to be considered *apart from*. These dual (mis)recognitions were often intertwined for black artists traveling for the State Department. Expressed desires for diasporic linkage while touring in Africa or the Middle East could be seen as a dual expression of a desire for national separation, not a decisive break, but a gap or productive distancing that could underscore the ideological differences between musical ambassador and US government. Appeals for (mis)recognition doubly define the jazz ambassador. Thus, in a moment when demands for political recognition were reaching their

pinnacle height with the Civil Rights Movement, an additional experience of (mis)recognition—both as a diasporic reality and oblique diplomatic strategy—could be identified in the jazz tours as well.

There is a critical tension detectable in the reception of these jazz ambassadors above, between the strength of imperial logics and the space for productive dissent. What interests me in placing this discussion within a model of (mis)recognition is not whether we can more accurately map where the tours reside on this spectrum—whether Von Eschen’s camp is more persuasive than Roberts’ or Fosler-Lussiers’—but rather *how* the artists demonstrated an awareness of this conflict, and how that awareness was registered formally in the work they would produce in the tours’ wakes. For many of these artists, working in conjunction with the State Department became a question of distance and intimacy, and whether or to what degree they could articulate constitutive gaps in their thinking about Cold War diplomacy. As music scholar Frederick Schenker writes, “listening to jazz history for—and with—empire can allow us to hear new narrative forms and different ways that jazz has been made meaningful throughout the world” (237). If jazz form could be appropriated into an American imperial project, what happens when the artists themselves initiated its contact with others? How might interrogating the medium—measuring its contours and manipulating its performance practice—become the means by which these artists established space between aesthetics and empire? As the next section will show, the intermedial logics of *The Real Ambassadors* function as a disruption of the state’s swift appropriation of jazz as an uncomplicated emblem of American democracy, its recourse to narrative becoming a method by which the accompanying songs’ expressive capacities are reinterpreted and reimagined.

Articulating Space: *The Real Ambassadors* and National Disentanglement

The Real Ambassadors was performed at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1962 as a shortened concert-version of what the Brubecks' ultimately envisioned to be a full-scale Broadway show. That dream was never realized however, and what they offered instead to festival-goers on that evening in 1962 was essentially a concert reading, with Iola providing the narration on the stage apart from the main characters. The accompanying LP was recorded the year prior and made available just weeks before the festival performance (Hatschek 117). The 1962 performance was not recorded, however in recent years it has been rediscovered and re-performed at Monterey in 2002 and at Lincoln Center in 2014; it also received a 1994 CD release with additional songs not included on the original LP.⁹³ The narrative follows "our hero" as he accepts an invitation from the State Department to tour "in the name of democracy, freedom and the red, white and blue" (3). After accepting and completing the tour, which is said to be "a triumph" (6a), our hero decides to take a detour to the "newest of the new African nations," Talgalla (6B). Throughout the initial tour of Africa, he continued to hear about the "Festival of Talgalla," a traditional week-long celebration in which "the tribal social order was turned upside down" and which culminated in one select citizen crowned king, "[t]he rulers and the ruled trad[ing] places for one day." Eager to take part in the tradition, our hero touches down in Talgalla, but the timing of his arrival is serendipitous: with Talgalla no longer "unknown and unrecognized," the US has appointed an American ambassador to the country, and with our hero's arrival, the Talgallans take none other than "Ambassador Satch" to be their newly appointed ambassador. Once all the confusion is sorted out, to comic effect, the Talgallans

⁹³ Because the added songs are not included in either the original LP or the 1962 script and sheet music, I do not include them in my analysis.

decide to remain with “Pops” as their chosen dignitary, and on the final day of the celebration, the “real ambassador” is named king for a day.

Even with the summary above, the work as a whole defies containment. The various follow-up performances at times deviate from its initial 1962 iteration, either scrapping songs or narrative sections. From an interpretive standpoint, the lack of an original live recording also makes a performance studies approach quite difficult, and the absence of narration on the soundtrack album requires the critic to maneuver between the script and studio recording, which itself necessitates a medley of close-reading and close-listening practices.⁹⁴ Additionally, weaved throughout is a love plot between the protagonist and a new female vocalist, which ends up competing for the narrative’s focus as the story goes on. But perhaps more striking than the competing narrative tracks are the generic constraints that the musical itself foregrounds. While both a political satire and a conventional love plot, *The Real Ambassadors* also resists formal and generic categorization. The narrator opens the performance with the following:

The Real Ambassadors is not a musical drama in the usual sense. The drama lies in the sudden ‘coming to life’ of words and notes written on pieces of paper, propped on music stands before our players. Sets and costumes are far more fantastic than any of us could ever see on stage, because they exist only in our imaginations. We must paint a view of the world from an airplane window, build an African village with a church and a palace and people in its streets.

I have said our presentation is not a drama, nor is it a play, except in the sense that to play is to pretend. Nor is our offering really a concert, only in the very special sense of concert—many voices raised as one. (1)

The description of the performance’s form becomes significant precisely because of its willingness to be everything and nothing at all. It is not a musical drama, or at least not one “in

⁹⁴ The closest we get is a 2012 recreation of the original *Real Ambassadors* performance by students at the University of the Pacific Conservatory, with Iola Brubeck narrating alongside them.

the usual sense,” suggesting that it can in fact be considered one, albeit under the proper circumstances. It is also not a play, unless we accept the term as an ongoing act of fantasy or exercise in “pretend.” And it is not a concert, except in the rather ambiguous understanding of it as an instance of “many voices raised as one.” We should note alongside musicologist Julianne Lindberg that jazz and musical theater have been historically and critically separated as genres, and even in the moments when they intersect, the seriousness of the work would determine its categorization, the artful “musical play” of the 1940s set in contrast to the seemingly “frivolous, commercial, and ephemeral” musical comedy of the 1930s (28). Iola Brubeck acknowledges this herself in the 1962 liner notes, writing “[w]hat, I reasoned, could be more logical than to bring together on more intimate terms these two uniquely American musical forms?”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, here the narrator has distanced the work from the staged musical, the drama, and concert form, though it refrains from cutting ties from any of these categories. In this sense, the musical as performed at Monterey becomes a form of aesthetic (mis)recognition, “apart from” and “a part of” these varied artistic genres. And while it is certainly a comedic performance, its aspirations as a satire and the comparatively serious description above impede any confident categorization of the work.

The closest we get to a clear statement from the narrator is perhaps in the second sentence, with the work said to be a “‘coming to life’ of words and notes written on pieces of paper.” While on the one hand a strategic statement attending to the modest production value of the performance at Monterey, the claim here is also a direct invocation of the work’s intermediality, words and notes, text and sound mutually activating the impending drama, the

⁹⁵ Iola also writes in the liner notes that “Dave says *The Real Ambassadors* is a Broadway version of a jazz show,” and on the record sleeve an entire series of Broadway cast albums are cataloged, claiming that “The Best of Broadway Is On Columbia Records.” Advertisements for soundtracks to *My Fair Lady*, *The Sound of Music*, *West Side Story* are included, among many others.

likes of which render any consideration of the music without the attending script incomplete. The statement also actively positions *The Real Ambassadors* in the odd space between musical production and imaginative reception. As Daniel Albright describes, an intermedial work is “the imaginary artwork generated by the spectator through the interplay of two or more media—the transient, complex thing that is assembled in each spectator’s mind through attention to the elements in different media” (209). For Albright, the coming together of different media is alchemical—it almost magically produces a third term or cultural form that is a hybrid object—but part of that magic is the particular assembling that occurs in each spectator’s mind. Here, intermediality extends beyond the interchange of aesthetic form to the imaginative work produced in its wake.⁹⁶ And given the narrator’s direct statement that the sets and costumes “exist only in our imaginations,” a certain tension now arises between the concert’s “many voices raised as one,” and the intermedial work’s single performance splitting off into many. Just as the narrator conceives of the work as a unification of different genres while never adhering to any single mold, the musical involves a collective call to imagine its formal features, while the very same gesture requires a certain splintering in terms of aesthetic conception.

It should be noted how these formal refusals relate to the reception of jazz itself as a Cold War trope for representative liberal democracy. By 1962, the jazz tours that the Brubecks and Armstrong satirize had long been advertised as a performative instantiation of democracy in action. Motivated to counter Soviet critiques of American racism, the tours were designed as a cultural appeal to vulnerable and newly liberated countries, and jazz was thought to serve as both an expression of a colorblind democracy and a uniquely American high modernism. Historian

⁹⁶ Albright uses the opera as an example of intermediality. He writes, “each member of the audience at a performance of *Tosca* experiences a different opera because the opera exists only as an airy shimmer generated from components each one of which bulges and recedes in a space uniquely defined by, and for, a particular spectator” (210).

Lisa Davenport describes how American policy makers endorsed “the notion of ‘jazzocracy’—a democratic country unified racially and politically through the arts and jazz—to implement the policy of cultural containment” (84). Marshall Stearns, who served on the cultural-representations music selection committee for the State Department, celebrated its mode of performance in particular, stating that the music “offers a common ground upon which the conflicting claims of the group and the individual can be resolved” (qtd. in Crist 160). Willis Conover, host of Voice of America’s radio program *Music USA*, agreed: in a democracy “we agree in advance on the laws and customs we abide by, and having reached agreement, we are free to do whatever we wish within these constraints.” With jazz performance, he continues, “the musicians agree on the key, the harmonic changes, the tempo, and the duration of the piece...[and] within these guidelines, they are free to play what they want” (162). And in the article earlier cited, Dave Brubeck writes that jazz was the “most democratic form of expression,” and that it is “freely created... by a group of instrumentalists, each of whom is afforded a maximum of individual expression in a democratically agreed-on framework of rhythms, harmonies, and melodies.” By 1962, critics and artists alike accepted jazz’s reassessment as a reflection of “the unforced initiative of democratic citizens” (Maxwell 45).⁹⁷

If the opening narration of *The Real Ambassadors* takes pains to set the parameters for the audience’s engagement, to establish “constraints,” “guidelines,” or an “agreed-upon framework” that the audience is free to imaginatively co-create in, then at the outset the intermediality of the work becomes something of a derivation of the jazz-as-democracy trope,

⁹⁷ Critic Scott Saul notes how this description of democracy in jazz creates a vision of musicians as “a passive community—a society that recognizes laws, then discovers how to be playful and law-abiding—when in fact ‘laws’ were frequently under dispute during the music’s performance. . . . By understanding jazz’s ‘universal’ triumph as a result of its performers’ Americanness and individualism, [such accounts] failed to appreciate the collaborative and volatile aspects of jazz performance” (19).

only this time placing at the forefront what is *not* seen, or better yet, what is not immediately recognized. The “common ground” is really an unsettled terrain defined more by what it is not, and every recognizable genre is in some way negated, even as each contributes to the larger interpretive scaffolding. All in all, in the first moments of *The Real Ambassadors* the narrator can be seen reinterpreting one of the most commonly circulated understandings of jazz form—individual liberty within agreed-upon constraints—only now those parameters are willfully under-defined, the work announcing that its own formal recognition will continue to remain at a slant.

If the form of *The Real Ambassadors* places emphasis on its performativity and estranges us from that which would be immediately recognizable, it also brings to the fore the inherent “stagedness” of diplomatic relations, and ultimately reveals (mis)recognition to be a condition of musical diplomacy. As a trope in the performance itself, misrecognition is everywhere. A proliferation of identity-obfuscations and misapprehensions (willed or otherwise) runs through the entire performance: the central character’s strategic public discretion (“such a tour could jeopardize his spotless, non-committal [sic] career” [3]); the State Department’s pre-tour briefing to “watch what you think or do or say” (4); Talgalla’s week-long carnivalesque tradition to “turn upside down” the country’s tribal order (6B); and the revue’s central animating confusion over just who the real ambassador is.

We can turn to the musical’s first narrative interlude to see how the narrative’s staging of misapprehension becomes a question of national alignment. In this moment, “our hero” debates whether to accept the State Department’s request to tour formally for the US government; the struggle over this decision is rendered audible through the show’s formal arrangement, the narrative interlude and subsequent song combining to reveal much more than the song itself

might be able to. The narrator describes how he “had experienced such great success as an unofficial ambassador,” and that taking the plunge into true diplomatic work, no matter how informal, “could jeopardize his spotless, non-committal [sic] career.” He attributes his success as a musician to his “[d]iscretion,” his ability to “keep opinions to himself,” and his “dazzle-toothed, shimmering public image.” Strikingly though, the narrator includes a line of dialogue that the musician had “been known to say in a moment of pique”: “LADY, IF YOU COULD READ MY MIND, YOUR HEAD WOULD BUST WIDE OPEN” (3). The description is a clear parodic image of Armstrong himself. In an article for *Ebony Magazine* in 1961, Armstrong wrote, “I’m not a political person, although I’m an honorary life member of NAACP. I don’t want to get too involved. There’s a whole lot of smelly things that I can’t do anything about. So I don’t get involved, otherwise, I’d always be in trouble” (88). The narration in this moment attributes success to willful obfuscation, and in fact suggests that it is the very thing that makes Armstrong’s character so attractive to the State Department in the first place. At this point in his career, Armstrong’s music was thought to be apolitical at best, with some condemning his continued performance of “neominstrel” songs like “When It’s Sleepy Time Down South” well into the postwar period (Stein 207). Additionally, his state-sponsored tour of the Congo in late 1960 directly overlapped with Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba’s arrest and subsequent assassination.⁹⁸ The narration brings to the fore the public image and discretion that defines our hero’s success thus far, thereby demonstrating the character’s own conscious performance of that persona.

⁹⁸ As Von Eschen writes, “at the time of [Armstrong’s] visit to Leopoldville at the end of October and to Katanga in November, Lumumba had been arrested and was being held and tortured by Tshombe’s army, with American assistance. Lumumba would be assassinated in January 1961 with the CIA’s help, while Armstrong and his band were still playing on the continent” (68).

But if the music becomes one site in which Armstrong has remained palatable to a white American audience, the musical's juxtaposition of aesthetic modes reveals alternative undercurrents within the music itself. The song that accompanies the above narration is "Good Reviews," sung by Carmen McRae with Louis Armstrong playing trumpet and adlibbing alongside her near the end. Just prior to the song the narration reads, "Discretion had served him well. After all, through the years he had gained the admiration of not only the public but the critics" (3). "Good Reviews" centralizes McRae's vocals for most of the song, with rhythmic percussion and a subdued piano accompanying the lyrics, but Armstrong comes in after the first verse, performing over and alongside the other brass and woodwinds to create a distinctly traditional jazz sound. The song humorously recalls the musicians' responses to critical attention, with lines like "There's nothing like a good review," "we must take the bit-ter with the sweet," and "If good we just a-dore them, if bad we just ig-nore them." But just as Armstrong's trumpet melodically mirrors McCrae's vocals in the first verse, we receive a few significant pairings that speak to the narration's own adjacency to the song. In one of the repeating refrains "views" and "reviews" are rhymed with "news" ("ev-ry time they praise us our e-go quick-ly rais-es with the views in the news"); and near the middle of the song, a seemingly innocuous tip to forget critical appraisal becomes a more significant call to "de-fy pre-dic-tions, [and] Come through with our con-vic-tions." The song is very clearly presented as nothing more than an upbeat tune about musicians and their critics. But keeping in mind the narration that introduced it—chock full of statements about discretion and "dazzle-toothed" performance—the musical almost dares us to listen for alternative inflections. Shuttling between reviews, views, and news, the lyrics draw out a correspondence that nonetheless sustains each term's signification. A song about reviews in the music section very quickly becomes a song about bad press in the news itself, something

Armstrong knew quite a bit about following his 1957 spat with the US government over Little Rock. Frustrated with President Eisenhower's failure to intervene on Faubus's use of the National Guard to bar desegregation, Armstrong said that "the Government can go to hell," and that the president had "no guts," was "two-faced" and "had allowed Governor Faubus to run the Federal Government" ("Louis Armstrong"). In an earlier version of the play, Iola Brubeck explicitly links the good press from the state-sponsored tour to the bad press Armstrong received here, writing a line for "Pops" in which he "LOOKS OVER THE REVIEWS" and says, "It's goin' to take a lot of blowin' to blow the stink out of Little Rock, but it's been a ball tryin'" (24). Armstrong ruffled more than a few feathers with these statements—he himself made news—and we might characterize it as a moment in which he willfully "jeopardize[d]" his own "spotless, non-committal career."⁹⁹ In a sense, then, we have a series of pairings in "Good Reviews": musical reviews and news, public expectation and the artist's convictions, and song and narration more broadly. The former all align with the box in which the artist has been cast: an apolitical image, with music remaining the singular domain. The latter either press against these perceptions or function to reveal such performance as charade. Just as the convictions lie dormant beneath the music and may be revealed in the news itself, the narration shadows and reframes the song, making what might have been a sweet, swinging segue into the story a coded instance of this dazzle-toothed, shimmering image in action. The narration helps to reveal strategic discretion as a masking presence in this music designed for mass appeal.

⁹⁹ Biographer Daniel Stein calls these statements "as bold as anything Americans would have heard from an African American entertainer in the 1950s, including the politically much more active and much more outspoken Paul Robeson" (237).

Something similar unfolds in the following scene. After agreeing to take on the tour, the band finds itself receiving a “last minute ‘briefing’” at the airport prior to departure. The script reads:

DAVEY: Passports.
 YOLANDE: Shots.
 JON: Identification.
 DAVEY: Visas.
 YOLANDE: Pamphlets.
 JON: Verification.
 TOGETHER: When you travel in a far off land
 Remember you’re more than just a band
 You represent the U.S.A.
 So watch what you think and do and say. (4)

The band then begins playing “Remember Who You Are,” which is a satirical recasting of the briefing itself. Along with the refrain “re-mem-ber who you are and what you re-pre-sent,” the lyrics restate several of the constraining guidelines issued: “Ne-ver face a prob-lem al-ways cir-cum-vent;” “when con-tro-ver-sy en-ters you re-treat.” The real bite of the song lies not only in the musicians’ parroting of the briefing, but also in the accompanying narration and its placement after the earlier focus on musical discretion. With the cast alternately listing the requisite documentation for the tour, we receive a series of surveillance modes—passports, identification, visas—all meant to facilitate recognition and continued observation. Paul Robeson and W. E. B. DuBois both had their passports revoked in the decade prior, and as Shana Redmond writes of Robeson’s experience, “By revoking his passport the State Department attempted to blur ‘the vocabularies of nation and race’ and reconstitute Robeson’s identity by making him first a national subject”(128). Here, the same sentiments might be present: these artists are national subjects meant to carry out the US’s stated diplomatic mission and nothing else. We are told in the cues before the dialogue that these lines are set to a rhythm with brushes, so the list has a percussive movement that almost routinizes the exchange. Each single utterance

of a particular form of documentation performs a reduction of the cast member, the department officials' briefing then paired with a compacted form of interpersonal exchange, identity here translated into the bureaucratic trappings of state power.

This process of verification also complements the accompanying song. The very demand to “remember who you are” suggests a mutual recognition, that both State Department officials and band members agree on the latter's political affiliation (i.e., “remember who *I know* and *expect* you to be”). But the routinized and deeply depersonalized briefing betrays such a determination. The refrain then, like any good satire, is doubly-signaling: remember who we think you are and who we expect you to be, but also, in the mouths of the artists, the advice is regurgitated as a demand to “forget who you are,” should that person not be the type to “be discreet” or “cir-cum-vent.” The tongue-in-cheek recitation is performed so as to demonstrate a distancing from the agents they mimic, and the instrumentation's comically dark tromping reveals an impertinence that underlies the briefing's continued restatement.

But what makes the moment so remarkable is its proximity to the scene and musical number before it, which did in fact show the main character to possess the qualities the State Department here is demanding. So while on the one hand the song is an “evaluat[ion of] the briefing they received before embarking on their tours” (Von Eschen 83)—an evaluation deeply critical of the process itself—it also recalls the very attitudes that our hero was afraid of losing only a moment ago. Thus, as the song fades out with the multi-voiced repetition of “rep-re-sent,” here echoing the automated, unfeeling, tone-deaf demands of the State Department, we might also hear “re-present,” our hero revisiting the very qualities he clung to in the earlier narrative interlude. What I am suggesting here is that the narration does not simply complement or frame the music—something we could easily expect in a combination like this. Rather, it complicates

the straightforward listening of the song and the swift interpretations of the musicians' political affiliations: they clearly are not visible to the officials, but through the oscillating narration and repackaging of statement and song, these convictions might also not be wholly visible to an audience who, if we recall, are piecing the work together intermedially as well. The effect is another comedy of (mis)recognition in which the musicians have distanced themselves from the State Department, but also perhaps the audience, narrative prose instrumentalized in the musical to consciously amend the music's sound.

What we see in both of these moments leading up to the actual tour is a deliberate foregrounding of misperception, willed or otherwise. The artist proclaims his adherence to choreographed discretion, and in doing so reveals his mask, an act which revises our listening to the song that accompanies it. But with the last minute briefing and "Remember Who You Are," the musical draws our attention to a different form of national (mis)recognition, the State Department projecting its identificatory processes and assumed affiliations onto the artists, who re-perform this encounter for effect. In both scenes national recognition (commercially or governmentally defined) is found wanting, the artists instituting interpretive gaps that create space between American assumption, audience reception, and artistic action. And while the music remains necessarily central to these illustrations, these appeals to be seen as "apart from" are only really accomplished through the narrative manipulations brought on by this aesthetic entanglement. Thus, while Von Eschen describes the work as a tribute to Armstrong that "recovered his submerged militancy and paid homage to him as a political actor" (82), that militancy is most aptly seen on the aesthetic edges, where (mis)recognition can be properly mobilized.

As the musical carries on, we can feel a shift in the role (mis)recognition is meant to play, with state-sponsored ambassadorship giving way to a desire for more immediate diasporic connection. If the earlier scenes serve as an appeal to be seen as apart from the expectations and technologies of national recognition, then as the performance carries on we are given insight into their affordances with respect to black international exchange. Interestingly, while the state-sponsored tour is the plot's initial activating force, the tour itself gets absolutely no attention. We are simply told that it "was a triumph," and that while "[h]ere is where our story should end... our hero refused to let it end there" (6a). Not only is this an expression of our hero's agency as a central character, but also as a figure capable of redirecting the audience's attention to new stories and new possibilities within the Cold War backdrop of the performance. It is also significant that in this same narrative interlude we finally get a name for our hero: the narrator calls him "Pops (for that's what his friends call him)." This moment becomes a turning point in the performance, with Pops having experienced something of an awakening during his African tour. The narrator proclaims that he "was beginning to feel the power that was in his horn. It was somehow linked with the power that was within the people. Vague dreams began to stir in our hero's mind as day after day he stared out the window at the landscape of the moving world and wondered what it was he could do."

The description of Pops' response to the tour falls well in line with the more favorable characterizations of the tours historically, that the artists aligned themselves with a progressive politics of decolonization and international liberation. In her own estimation, Von Eschen claims that "the jazz ambassadors sided with the forces of change and innovation and created new ways of supporting movements for equality and liberation wherever they went" (255). That the power of Pops' horn is linked to "the people" and spawns his desire to do something speaks to this. But

it is hard to miss the phallic hetero-masculinity present in the narrator's alignment of heroism, "horns," and power. Especially given the two romantic songs that precede the scene, it becomes something akin to what Erica Edwards might file under the black charismatic tradition—the association of social and political leadership with a charismatic black male icon—a model I will return to later in the chapter. But it is also important that we only receive an actual name *after* the events of the tour have taken place (and off-stage for that matter). Because our hero has "refused to let it end here," his role as an agent of American diplomatic interests has gone from performatively interrogated to narratologically undermined. Pops as a character, both in name and burgeoning values, becomes clearer as his state-sponsored duties fall away.

The song that immediately follows Pops' awakening is "King for a Day," which functions as a musical response to the call these ruminations prompt, while also exercising perhaps the most overt jazz-as-politics metaphor in the whole musical. The song stages a conversation between Armstrong and trombonist Trummy Young about what Armstrong's character would do if he were "king for a day," if as Pops puts it, "they'd just let me run things my way." Young asks Pops what he would do, to which he replies, "the first thing I'd do is call a basement session." Young responds: "you mean a summit conference." Pops doubles down: "Man, I don't mean a U.N. kind of session. I mean a jam session." The song then moves forward with a steady rhythmic backing and piano accompaniment, which can also be heard offering a series of vamps over which Armstrong and Young trade lines. When it is his turn, Pops rifles through a series of propositions: he would form a "swing-in' band with all the lead-ers from ev-'ry land;" that they would "fall right in a swing-in' groove," that "all the is-ms gon-na move;"

and in response to any fears of potential splintering or disagreement, Pops states that since “they are play-in’ jazz...There’ll be no such razz-a-ma-tazz.”¹⁰⁰

If the lyrics sound like a straightforward expression of the same jazz-as-democracy routine, there are more than a few wrinkles that complicate this reading. The first is that the space between national duty and artistic conviction continues to distend. Brian Russell Roberts describes work similar to what Pops imagines as a form of “hip-to-macy,” which “integrates hip knowingness of black vernacular culture into official diplomacy’s traditionally staid approach to internationalism” (118). Drawing from Langston Hughes’ “Simple” character in his *Chicago Defender* column, Roberts grants the hip-to-mat the “ability to speak in ways unfettered by government purse strings and state-generated performance imperatives.” The hip-to-mat is self-appointed, which can often lead to “honest directness,” and unlike the “traditionally disingenuous diplomat,” the hip-to-mat “seems appealingly authentic.” And while the language of the lyrics appears to fall in line with this idea, nowhere is the hip-to-mat more explicitly on display than in the play with self-naming that occurs near the end of the song. The exchange between Armstrong and Young is as follows:

[Young]: Pops, you got eyes to wear a crown?
 [Armstrong]: I might enjoy being king.
 After all, Buddy Bolden was king.
 [Young]: And there’s King Oliver
 [Armstrong]: There’s Count Basie.
 [Young]: And Duke Ellington.
 [Armstrong]: And Earl ‘Fatha’ Hines.
 [Young]: Man, quit jivin’ me! You know that cat ain’t no Earl. That’s his first name.

¹⁰⁰ These same sentiments would be offered by Dizzy Gillespie one year later at Monterey during his tongue-in-cheek 1964 presidential campaign, where he sold bumper stickers and buttons proclaiming “Diz for Prez.” As Hatschek notes, “Gillespie told his fans and the media that if elected, he’d form a swinging cabinet made up of a who’s who of jazz stars: Duke Ellington as secretary of state, Malcolm X as attorney general, Charles Mingus as secretary of peace, Mary Lou Williams as ambassador to the Vatican, and Louis Armstrong as secretary of agriculture (an inside joke referencing Satchmo’s love of marijuana)” (176).

[Armstrong]: No? Man, he had me fooled all these years!

Von Eschen describes this as a “playful discussion of the oppositional black politics of self-naming,” and that in writing the piece Iola Brubeck certainly had Armstrong’s own “Ambassador” sobriquet in mind (87). She also notes that according to Armstrong these names were simply what they “used to call one another...when we was broke and hungry” (qtd. in 87). Interestingly, Earl Hines’ moniker is debunked, but only on the grounds that “Earl” really is his name, while the other royal designations are accepted precisely because they are projections cast onto a public persona. The hip-to-mat’s self-appointment is then expressed here as the jazz ambassador’s self-naming, first in the narration’s acknowledgement of “Pops,” and second through the song’s royal proclamation, a vernacular practice born of minoritized dispossession now imaginatively elevating the musician’s status to royalty. And given this turn to monarchic discourse, in which the newly-kinged Louie will “swing this deal” and prevent Khrushchev from “hav[ing] the fi-nal say,” self-appointment also acts as an explicit distancing from the State Department’s nationalist vision. And while Roberts has specifically described the jazz tours as a co-opting of true hip-to-matic work, the narration’s emphasis on Pops’ agency *post*-tour and his imagined assumption of power in “King for a Day” falls very much in the vicinity of hip-to-matic territory. By all estimations Pops is not watching what he thinks and does and says.

Finally, if reference to musical self-naming becomes a form of self-appointment that also acts as a distancing from national duty, then the song’s figurative turn to jazz structure forces us to reconsider the traditional jazz-as-democracy gambit as well. “King for a Day” repeatedly uses the word “swing” as a descriptive for what Pops plans to accomplish: “this world would be a swingin’ place;” “I’d go and form a swing-in’ band;” “they will fall right in a swing-in’ groove;” “Don’t you mind, I’ll swing this deal.” As one might guess, swing’s meaning as a jazz term can

be hard to pin down, so hard in fact that clarinetist Benny Goodman, famously dubbed the “King of Swing,” once compared the task of explaining it to “trying to describe the colour red to a child who had never seen it” (qtd. in Butterfield 304). Popular jazz historian Ted Gioia has described it as “rhythmic cohesion,” the “individual members lock[ing] together rhythmically in a pleasing way that involves an uncanny degree of give-and-take,” with the musicians “adapting to each other but also insisting on their own prerogatives” (5). And while the term connotes temporal movement, swing for Gioia speaks more to the group’s shared rhythmic command of tempo, rather than to the tempo of the musical number itself. Such an understanding would seem to fit the “liberty-in-agreed-upon-constraints” discussed earlier. Music scholar Matthew Butterfield has also described swing as the forward propulsion that stems from anacrustic patterning in jazz rhythm, the sequence of an “unaccented event that precedes and leads us to anticipate a subsequent accented event” (an example in language might be the iambic sequence of “a-GAIN” rather than “GAIN-ful” (320-321). We can hear this pattern in the familiar cymbal sounds “ding CHICK-a-ding CHICK-a-ding” that has become a standard percussive figure since the bebop era (322). And we can hear a variation of this rhythm playing in the background of “King for a Day,” swing here becoming a “figure of consonance” in that both the song’s rhythmic structure and narrative motif are mutually reinforcing (Albright 210).

But the term swing is also tied to racist histories of a black rhythmic essence supposedly lying at the heart of jazz music (Butterfield 308). In the late 1960s, critic Gunther Schuller suggested in *Early Jazz* that the rhythmic innovation of musicians like Charlie Parker was “the musical reincarnation of impulses subconsciously remembered from generations earlier” (qtd. in Butterfield 308). As Butterfield rightly notes, Schuller’s descriptions “invoke essentialist thought, where an underlying ‘blackness’ both determines identity and serves as the

biological basis for behavior—in this case musical behavior” (308). We find something similar in Amiri Baraka’s *Blues People*, published just one year after *The Real Ambassadors* performance at Monterey.¹⁰¹ Baraka laments swing’s shift from verb to noun: “*Swing*, the verb, meant a simple reaction to the music (and as it developed in verb usage, a way of reacting to anything in life). As it was formalized, and the term and the music taken further out of context, *swing* became a noun that means a commercial popular music in cheap imitation of a kind of Afro-American music” (212-213). For Baraka, swing connoted a particular “attitude” of black America translated into music that could be learned and ultimately appropriated by white artists.¹⁰² Such a process, we might say, renders swing misrecognized as a musical concept as well, and whether or not Armstrong agreed with this interpretation, he would at least become aware of it, posing for a photograph in a 1964 *Ebony* profile with a copy of Baraka’s book in hand (Stein 244). What we see in both Schuller’s and Baraka’s accounts of rhythm and swing is that even into the mid-to-late 1960s, the term was quite vexed, a signal of white appropriation, while also in response conceived of with a situated notion of blackness at its core, perhaps signifying a rhythmic propulsion, but one born of African retentions.

Of course, in the wake of scholarship by Ronald Radano, Karl Hagstrom Miller, Jennifer Stoeber and others, we have more than moved beyond the notion of “black music” capturing a racial essence. And yet, swing remains a particularly challenging case, critics still grappling with how exactly to map its relationship to black identity and history, all the while maintaining an

¹⁰¹ At the time of publication, Baraka was still known as LeRoi Jones.

¹⁰² Brent Hayes Edwards has claimed that James Weldon Johnson “anticipates” Baraka’s point about appropriation in his *Books of American Negro Spirituals*. In his approach to the term, Johnson “indicates that ‘swing’ is a neologism...[that] is somehow tainted or inaccurate: it noun-ifies ‘swinging,’ stilling the ‘elusive’ and performative connotations of what is in its verb form a paradigmatic black cultural *action* or *process*” (*Epistrophies* 70).

anti-essentialist stance.¹⁰³ In “King for a Day” we hear the artists’ reappropriation of swing, repossessing it and infusing it with new meaning that reframes rather than rejects its musical and racial signification.¹⁰⁴ Through Armstrong’s performance the song invokes this signification but also departs from essence in the term’s mobilization at the level of metaphor. Given that swing “operates as a sign correlating a presumed racially particular sensibility” (Butterfield 332), the reference to it alongside the practice of self-naming signals racial meaning even as the song never openly mentions it. It is also interesting to note that while the term is used four times in the song, it never assumes a noun form. Thus, if Baraka laments swing’s nounification, in “King for a Day” we turn back from this moment, the term modifying nouns but never actually becoming one, the song’s continued rhythmic propulsion sustaining its verbal and adjectival function. Armstrong’s lyrics also elevate swing to the level of international politics, with the jam session now metaphorically signaling the political gamesmanship and diplomatic deal-making that defines the Cold War. Armstrong’s character is the body in charge; world leaders are said to maintain a “swing-in groove,” but only insofar as the Pops persona can “swing this deal.” Here we might say that Armstrong himself has become the “King of Swing,” dethroning white bandleader Benny Goodman while perhaps also returning the title to its pre-nounified glory. The “agreed-upon-constraints” thought to define jazz performance are here *imposed* by the “king,” this form of black leadership both imagined lyrically and embodied in the performance, with Armstrong’s trumpet holding court for the first twelve bars. The song then, without departing from the standard jazz form, redirects the audience’s attention from one metaphor to another. If

¹⁰³ See Brent Hayes Edwards, “Toward a Poetics of Transcription: James Weldon Johnson’s Prefaces,” in *Epistrophies* (2017); Matthew Butterfield, “Race and Rhythm: The Social Component of the Swing Groove” (2010).

¹⁰⁴ I draw from the work of Carol Bailey in my use of reappropriation here. See “Reappropriation as Contestation: Reconstructing Images of Black Women in Kate Rushin’s *The Black Back-Ups*” (2017).

jazz has been reinterpreted and absorbed into a national Cold War project as a structural parallel to a colorblind democracy (Von Eschen 256),¹⁰⁵ then swing, at least in its presentation here, becomes the engine through which political exchange is reconfigured. Black leadership and hip-to-matic self-appointment are now undoubtedly centralized. The turn to swing recalls and imaginatively exceeds black rhythmic performance to encompass “all the lead-ers from ev-’ry land,” but through its rhyming counterpart we have a vision of black monarchy governing this international groove. In Armstrong’s hands swing is both reclaimed and reimagined, not as rhythmic black essence but as interracial and international cooperation that still places blackness at its center. As an expression of self-appointment and unqualified black leadership, swing’s figuration as extra-musical performance continues to articulate the expanding distance that galvanizes (mis)recognition as a governing ambition for these artists. And while we cannot overlook the whiteness of the musical’s two other prominent writers and composers, Armstrong’s role as collaborator, inspiration, and narrative centerpiece almost acts as a meta-instantiation of this turn.¹⁰⁶

If the events leading up to and immediately following the tour work to create space between proscribed diplomatic responsibility and unfettered artistic ambition, when Pops’ plane touches down in Talgalla we approach the clearest instantiation of (mis)recognition as a diplomatic desire and diasporic reality. Upon arriving in Talgalla, the narrator tells us that the country is a small “tribal monarchy,” “the newest of the new African nations,” and that until just recently it “had been unknown and unrecognized” until the “two great powers” discovered it

¹⁰⁵ Patrick Burke notes this phenomenon as well, acknowledging that the “widely promoted view of jazz as a ‘color-blind’ music that transcends race often reflects well-meaning liberal opposition to racism” (186).

¹⁰⁶ The Brubecks have both testified at various times to Armstrong’s willingness to depart tonally from the humorous delivery they intended for certain songs, particularly “They Say I Looked Like a God.” See album liner notes, Von Eschen 89, Hatschek 109-112.

(6B). In earlier drafts, Iola had set the musical in the fictional European country of San Cristobal, but she later changed it to the fictional Talgalla “to better mirror actual world events” (Hatschek 12). Between January and November of 1960 alone, seventeen African nations achieved independence, with eight more following suit during John F. Kennedy’s presidential tenure (Dudziak 153). The descriptions of Russian and US interests situate the imagined country right in the crosshairs of Cold War gamesmanship, but we are also told that “it was not for these political reasons that our trumpet playing hero had taken it upon himself to bring his band to Talgalla.” Instead, it was the rumors he had heard all over Africa about Talgalla’s traditional yearly festival, where the “tribal order was turned upside down,” the week-long celebration capped off with one citizen crowned king for a day. When the plane touches down in Talgalla a crowd surrounds Pops, and after playing a few bars on the trumpet, he is approached by a man who says, “We did not expect you so soon. You are the American Ambassador, aren’t you?” The stage cues call for a “PIN SPOT” on Armstrong, ostensibly for comic effect, at which time he utters, “That’s what they call me... Ambassador Satch” (7). Upon hearing the news, the crowd abruptly raises Pops on their shoulders and carries him to the city.

Again, Iola Brubeck can be seen drawing inspiration from Armstrong’s real life experience for this scene. By the mid-1950s, Armstrong had already assumed the informal moniker “Ambassador Satch” and as biographer Daniel Stein notes, three weeks before Dizzy Gillespie’s inaugural tour for the State Department, Armstrong was celebrated in a front-page article for the *New York Times*: “America’s secret weapon is a blue note in a minor key. Right now its most effective ambassador is Louis (Satchmo) Armstrong” (qtd. in Stein 231). A year later, Armstrong would release his 1956 LP *Ambassador Satch*, and he would make his first trip to Africa, not as a state-sponsored cultural ambassador, but as a musician on his own terms.

Reflecting on this visit to the British Gold Coast (a colony well on its way to becoming an independent Ghana), Armstrong stated: “I came from here, way back. At least my people did. Now I know this is my country too. After all, my ancestors came from here and I still have African blood in me” (qtd. in Stein 233). Armstrong would double-down on these sentiments during his 1960 return to the continent: “I feel at home in Africa—more so now since I’ve been all through the place. I’m African-descended down to the bone, and I dig the friendly ways these people go about things. I lived the same way in New Orleans and they get my message here. I got quite a bit of African blood in me from my grandmammy on my mammy’s side and from my grandpappy on my pappy’s side” (qtd. in Stein 233). These statements present both a claim to historical roots and an embodied intimacy of feeling. Armstrong’s being African-descended is given a material immediacy, the language of blood repeated as a tangible illustration of identity relation. Armstrong gives this a spatial parallel as well, with his “feel[ing] at home in Africa” brought on by its perceived similarity to his birthplace of New Orleans. A place like Ghana becomes Armstrong’s “country too,” an affinity that toes the line between traditional ambassadorship and transnational diasporic affiliation. Such statements of course fall very much in line with the “[e]ssentialized’ notions of Africanness that were integral to earlier conceptions of Diaspora” (Burden-Stelly 214), but what we have here is a real desire to take part in tradition and to stitch oneself seamlessly into it.

Returning to the scene itself, we have a decolonized territory contending with the courtship of two rival superpowers. In actively setting the rest of the musical in Talgalla, the performance moves well beyond any notion of the us vs. them “containment culture” of the 1950s, instead inhabiting a “three worlds concept”—similar to what Leerom Medovoi has described—in which the previously colonized are “envisioned...as having finally begun the

passage out of nonage” (11). The previously unrecognized Talgalla has now risen to the level of international acknowledgement and desire. But if the larger narrative backdrop details a newly-recognized African country well on its way to being the subject of Cold War influence, the micro-narrative depicts an African-American musician stumbling right in (mis)recognition’s sweet-spot. His desire to take part in “a traditional expression of the hopes of Africa” (6B)—a desire reflected in Armstrong’s own language describing his previous African tours—is also an enactment of his rejection of the “political reasons” underlying America’s interest in the continent; and yet, his relationship with the Talgallan crowd depends on their recognition of him as their newly-appointed American ambassador. As Warren notes, “recognition can never preclude misrecognition because one can always be misrecognized as other than what one claims to be” (400). Here, the two categories are so intertwined as to be inseparable: Pops has cast aside the state-sanctioned, politically motivated duties of a cultural ambassador, but has also been embraced as such, the mishap arising not simply out of a case of mistaken identity, but oddly also because “what one claims to be,” indeed what Pops and Armstrong have become known for, is precisely the thing for which he is taken.¹⁰⁷ That which would seemingly preclude genuine diasporic engagement is also the very thing that facilitates it, and given the previous song, we can already anticipate Ambassador Satch’s as-yet-unstated desire to be the Talgallan citizen crowned king for a day. After all the effort to articulate space between the artist and the imperial engine powering his movements, the musical has finally staged an encounter with Pops and an African interlocutor, an engagement necessarily determined by expectation and prior perception, with misapprehension a foregone conclusion. The comic PIN SPOT thus sheds light on the paradigmatic condition of the black musical ambassador: (mis)recognition doubly defined by

¹⁰⁷ In an earlier version, with the mishap much more pronounced, Pops’ manager says, “Pops, the whole world knows you as Ambassador Satch. That’s not mis-representation” (96).

those affinities desired and desired to be discontinued. And with jazz form rearticulated and the discourse around it reconfigured, *The Real Ambassadors* drives an interpretive wedge between the art form's varied affordances and its institutionalization as a Cold War prop for a trouble-free democracy.

Separation and Linkage(s): The Trojan Horse of Diasporic Duty

The state of suspension that the black musical ambassador is thus resigned to and that defines Cold War musical diplomacy—attached to the state despite desires to depart, detached from diasporic homeland despite desires to return—becomes a liminal space for Pops, one he ultimately transcends, but not in the way the musical would have us believe. As quickly as Pops is able to disentangle himself from the expectations and obligations of the American state, the show's enthusiastic linkage of Pops to the Talgallan people risks re-performing the same geopolitical unevenness most feared in the decolonizing era. The song "Blow Satchmo" immediately follows Pops' welcome and is unique in both its brevity and in the new perspective it offers the performance. Sung from the perspective of the Talgallan crowd, we hear the lines: "Blow Satch-mo, Walls will tumble down. Blow Satch mo, You can wear that crown. Blow Satch- mo Take us by the hand, Lead us to that prom-ised, To that Pro-mised, to that prom-ised land." It is significant to note that the musical provides the perspective of the Talgallans responding to Pops' arrival, and allows its singers to embody that role. Here, the Talgallans are imagined as giving evidence to Pops' diasporic duty, one brought on by an ambassadorial mix-up but hardly imagined to be directly tied to it. The earlier phallic image of Pops' horn signifying a democratic power is confirmed in the Talgallan voices calling for Pops to "blow." Here we have the Brubecks and Armstrong staging what Erica Edwards has described as "one of the

central fictions of black American politics: that freedom is best achieved under the direction of a single charismatic leader” (xv). But that fiction, when overlaid with the “three-worlds imaginary” of the American Cold War state, becomes quickly transported across national lines. The “paternalistic responsibility” of US empire (Collins, McGranahan 1) has transformed into a similarly paternalistic diasporic calling, the harmonized shout “what are you wait-in’ for?” that opens the song serving as projected desire for an almost messianic responsibility. If, as Warren describes, “optimism about the possibility of worldwide black leadership tended to assume that this process would proceed, at least for a time, along imperialist lines of power established between the West and Africa” (399), then the imagined staging of African voices calling to be “taken by the hand,” led by the trumpet-wielding jazzman reenacts some of the same tendencies its previously-departed duty had already envisioned.

This late reentry into the imperial orbit provides an interpretive lens for Pops’ love plot with the band’s new female vocalist, played by Carmen McRae. Throughout the musical’s diplomatic dramedy we receive odd interludes in which attention is paid to a burgeoning romance between these two. Upon meeting her, she is described as “the new vocalist” whose “predatory eyes had not wavered from their principle target—our hero,” and whose entrance on the scene could derail a “heretofore smoothly functioning organization” (5). In the song “My One Bad Habit”—which takes place between “Remember Who You Are” and “King for a Day”—the vocalist describes her “one weakness” as “fal-lin’ in love and fal-ling right out a gain;” she resolves to “for-get the past,” to “make it last,” and admits she is “out to conquer,” that her “revolution is on.” When Pops assumes his ambassadorial role (after “Blow Satchmo”), the narrator tells us that he “momentarily forgot obligations of a different nature,” and as the musical charges toward the end, Pops is said to be so moved by the loyalty shown to him by the

Talgallans that he “suddenly found himself thinking in terms of the future—not his future particularly—but everybody’s future. Suddenly, everything Pops thought or did began to matter. The girl—she had been just another girl in a long series of girls—suddenly she mattered very much” (10).

The presence of this love plot fits unevenly within the context of the larger narrative, though we might choose to read it within the charismatic fiction that Edwards outlines. The vitality of Pops’ horn becomes apparent to him just before “King for a Day” and his touching down in Talgalla, but the narrator informs us of this immediately after “My One Bad Habit” and “Summer Song,” both ostensible romantic numbers. This structurally suggests that Pops’ newfound vitality has also been bolstered by the sexual relationship he kindles with McRae’s character. In fact, through the narrative oscillations, the plot becomes a nesting doll of courtships. The State Department, like McRae’s character, succeeds in seducing Pops, both of whom we can read as intrusions on the “smoothly functioning” jazz band. McRae’s self-diagnosis in “My One Bad Habit” also seems apt once it is translated and elevated to the international sphere, the US’s Cold War caprices allowing countries to become diplomatic darlings in one moment and then targets for choreographed coups in another. And as Pops throws himself into his diasporic duties in Talgalla, the US, like McRae, is an obligation cast aside in the desire to diminish his estrangement from his newfound African locale. Of course, the love plot’s lack of definition gives it a pliability that lends itself to (mis)recognition as well. As easy as it might be to map Pops’ attachment to McRae onto his attachment to the US nation, it would be impossible not to also read Talgalla as playing a role in this geopolitical romance. The narrator juxtaposes the deep “kinship” Pops feels with Talgalla to McRae’s sudden “mattering” to him, and in the final duet between the two, “I Didn’t Know ’Till You Told Me,” the two share final

lines in which the language of Cold War influence becomes the ultimate expression of romantic love: “On all the points you have sold me. It’s good-bye to my life so free.” Pops’ relationship with McRae’s character then simultaneously mirrors the trumpeter’s relationship to the US (ill-advised, neglected, yet ever-present), his additional desire to kindle a diasporic (re)attachment with Talgalla, and the US’s desires for an expanded sphere of influence (“out to conquer,” “good-bye to my life so free”). That her role can be read as a composite of male, national, and diasporic desires demonstrates how, as Destiny Birdsong and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo claim, the black diasporic space is problematically gendered, “especially for women, who are often operating as outsiders within, subject to the many disarticulations and silences that either confine them to or exclude them from theoretical conversations” (145). In that sense, whether the love plot parallels an attachment to the nation-state or a desire for a relationship with Africa (and as I have shown, (mis)recognition allows both options to sustain), two things become apparent: 1) the musical’s adherence to what Edwards calls “the most persistent problem posed by African American idealizations of charismatic authority: the conflating of political authority with idealized masculinity” (83); and 2) that in our inability to disentangle Pops’ diasporic ambitions from those of the state, the freedom forged in the musician’s distance from a Cold War project simply gave him the liberty to unknowingly re-enact relationships of a similar kind.

This resonance between Pops’ post-tour desires and the American interests he supposedly leaves behind receives its fullest expression in the universalism embraced near the end of the show. In the final narrative interlude, we get the ultimate coalescing of black male charisma, imagined diasporic linkage, and imperial desire. The freedom dreams of the Talgallans are described as “simple, if untenable,” and yet “[w]ith the arrival of the trumpet playing, swinging Ambassador from the United States, the people of Talgalla felt that [this freedom] was about to

dawn” (13). Finally, in the narrator’s last line we are told that a child “placed a crown upon our hero” and that “[t]he real ambassador was the symbol of the universal dream” (13). The diplomatic dilemma has thus been resolved, diasporic distance done away with, Armstrong’s very own post-tour statements reenacted on stage: “this is my country too.” Pops is simultaneously the Talgallan “citizen” crowned king for a day and the symbol for the “universal dream.” The final song also hammers home Pops’ international black messianic vision. Though named “Swing Bells/Blow Satchmo/Finale” on the LP, the track sounds as though it has almost eight distinct movements, with sections of specific songs changing speed and register, ultimately becoming an amalgamation of sounds that signal a grand finale. The jubilant “Swing Bells,” with its trio of voices moving in and out of tolling bells, cymbals, and piano, temporarily gives way to an understated, modern combination of Armstrong’s vocals and a rhythmic drum pattern. “Blow Satchmo” then follows, extended from its previous iteration to include more overt biblical references (“Jo-shua had just a horn. Jer-i-cho held him in scorn”); and after another lyrical diversion, the song finally features Armstrong on trumpet, as though he has answered the song’s earlier call, his instrument now moving exuberantly through the lyrics and blaring each time the singers shout “What are you wait-in’ for?” With “Finale” though, nearly all instrumentation falls away, the boisterous ensemble stepping back to give Armstrong the final word: his voice is front and center, and accompanied by a softly-playing piano he sings, “Now I leave you, Now I go. Now I think you know as much as old Satch-mo.”

Compiling so many movements, exchanges, and emotions in the final number, “Swing Bells/Blow Satchmo/Finale” seems to gesture musically toward Pops’ universalist aspirations, and in fact, in this final shift from narration to song we get one last intermedial encounter that encapsulates where *The Real Ambassadors* ultimately leaves us. Just before giving way to

“Swing Bells,” the original script and sheet music reveal two miniature drawings of a bell etched between the narrator’s lines, one after the sentence “With the arrival of the trumpet playing, swinging Ambassador from the United States, the people of Talgalla felt that day was about to dawn,” and another after the string of ellipses that follow “Talgalla would become a monument to freedom” (13). As punctuating symbols and ostensible cues for the band, the illustrations draw together textually the “swinging Ambassador,” Talgalla’s dawning “freedom,” and the ringing bells that overlay the opening lyrics of the song. There can be no mistaking who has sparked the bells’ ringing, especially given his already acknowledged capacity to swing. But this does not appear to be a representation of black international “reciprocity” or “mutual answerability,” the likes of which could mitigate (though never erase) the constitutive gaps that define diasporic (mis)recognition (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora* 110). The musical instead imagines transcendence, a universal black freedom figured through the sounds of the American ambassador. Here we have the unwitting instantiation of an oft-forgotten truth: that “the push toward ‘inclusiveness’ has often required universalizing assumptions about particular values” (Schenker 234). And given the bell’s significance as an object whose sound serves an ecclesial call for assembly, the universalism that has thus far been rooted in both jazz and America is bolstered by a turn to the divine. Pops sings of the guidance he has received: “Blow your horn. Set man free. One blast that the whole world can hear. Cir-cle the earth and wipe out all fear.” In his turn away from nation earlier in the performance, in his deliberate distancing from a statist project of musical diplomacy, Pops has graduated to another scale, one that is global, diasporic, and that reimagines a particular kind of Cold War “blast” as the hopeful international soundings of a blaring jazz horn. But in its tendency toward imperial structuration, albeit devoid of intent, the ambassador’s horn sounds more like a musical Manifest Destiny made over for the Cold War

era. Music scholar Jairo Moreno has categorized jazz listening practices as an “imperial aurality,” where the supposed “worldliness” of the genre is really an expression of US particularity, exceptionalism, and sonic extractivism, all other musical histories absorbed within the US’s “native” art form. And while the musical refrains from representing the local musical stylings of Talgalla, we do have the Talgallans more or less spoken for, or rather resigned to speak into existence the musician’s messianic mission. Pops’ ability to become the crowned Talgallan citizen gives expression to jazz’s perceived worldliness, while at the same time figuring it as the exclusive harbinger for decolonized freedom. To borrow from Yogita Goyal, *The Real Ambassadors*’ African state is perhaps unwittingly “an imperial construction of the ‘other’ that reaffirms the identity of the self” (8). Pops departed from US sponsorship, however what we see in the end is a re-centering of the US through Pops himself.

With all this said, there is reason to temper our critiques of the American universalism on display in the musical, particularly a universalism that places blackness—US or otherwise—at its center. As David Hollinger describes, universalist sentiments now routinely criticized were not just popular but prominent during the mid-century moment:

In the name of the rights and needs of the entire species, the United States tried to advance through war and diplomacy what we are now told were the historically particular interests of the North Atlantic bourgeoisie. In the name of the epistemological unity of all humankind, philosophers vindicated a scientific practice generated and sustained by what may have been the peculiar preoccupations of European and American white males. In the name of a mystical ‘humanity,’ the prophetic Hoosier Wendell Wilkie proclaimed *One World* in which farmers near Kiev deserved our sympathy and respect because they were just like farmers near Kokomo, Indiana. In the name of *The Family of Man*, Edward Steichen and the Museum of Modern Art exhibited a series of photographs displaying what we now recognize as a sensibility common to male American liberal intellectuals of the period. In the name of an essential ‘human nature,’ Freudians and behaviorists offered prescriptions designed for the entire population of the globe. (317-318)

Additionally, the Civil Rights Movement was deeply invested in a universalist vision of racial belonging. Denis Ekpo cites Martin Luther King Jr.’s “repeated emphasis (especially captured in

the ‘I have a dream’ speech) on the return to the nonracial universalist premise of the American constitution,” and writes that “King’s civil rights revolution was . . . mostly an internal wake-up alarm sounded to remind America first of its gross betrayal of the post-ethnic and nonracial universalism that birthed it, and secondly of the absolute necessity to correct the regressive errors of post-slavery segregation against Blacks” (48). Thus, that *The Real Ambassadors* roots its “universal dream” in the work of a black cultural ambassador in a newly-liberated African country is indeed remarkable. That this vision was an interracial collaboration between Armstrong and the Brubecks is similarly so, an aspirational idea of unity across racial difference. Indeed, at the time of the show Dave Brubeck’s own jazz quartet was integrated, which meant that many of his college tours were vulnerable to cancellation. Hatschek notes that as many as twenty-two of Brubeck’s scheduled concert dates for the winter of 1960 were cancelled (128). As *Down Beat* reported that year, Brubeck “refus[ed] to alter his group to conform to the racial prejudices of the South” (qtd. in Hatschek 129). Thus, to criticize *The Real Ambassadors* too harshly for the American universalism that it inevitably instantiates would be unfair, particularly given its stellar performance of (mis)recognition as a condition and strategy of musical diplomacy.

To conclude, *The Real Ambassadors* unveiling at Monterey in 1962 and its accompanying LP offer a remarkable performance of jazz’s reappropriation, where an artform made to signal unmediated and trouble-free democracy is refashioned by the artists themselves in the wake of the state’s instrumentalization of their work. The intermedial imaginings alive in its construction complicate the jazz-as-democracy trope and make apparent the experience of (mis)recognition not just as a diasporic phenomenon but as a diplomatic reality and strategy for black jazz artists touring for the US. Such a strategy wavers between the complicity these

ambassadors might be charged with and a strict resistance that such collaboration could never allow for. In the shared hands of Dave and Iola Brubeck and Louis Armstrong, the imagined political landscape of a “three worlds imaginary” embraces blackness and through reappropriating its sound allows it to stand at the helm. And yet, it still remains exceptionally American and proximally imperial, the Pops persona granted new heights at the expense of representative international exchange. If, as Nikhil Singh writes, “America’s global reach was represented as an outgrowth of the universalizing force of U.S. national ideals” (137), then despite its best efforts *The Real Ambassadors*’ black messianic vision appears an accidental affirmation of the Cold War’s American brand of universalism. But in the same year that the cast album for *The Real Ambassadors* was recorded, Langston Hughes would publish his epic neo-modernist poem *Ask Your Mama*. And like the political satire, Hughes had jazz internationalism on the brain. While Armstrong’s character ultimately arrives at a universalist vision that nonetheless centers American blackness—even if it is a form that does much to revise the typecast role to which the jazz ambassador was originally assigned—Hughes appeared interested in different forms of relation in the fall of 1961, the kind that explore the possibility for altering affinities. If *The Real Ambassadors* is the unwitting cover version of a state-sanctioned jazz sound, then Langston Hughes’s poetic intervention, to which we now turn, might be the unruly remix.

CHAPTER THREE

‘Boundaries Bind Unbinding’: Jazz and Cold War Cosmopolitanism in the Margins of Langston Hughes’s *Ask Your Mama*

On March 16, 2009 the world premiere of Laura Karpman’s *Ask Your Mama* was performed to a sold-out crowd at Carnegie Hall. As part of Carnegie’s *Honor!* Festival celebrating the cultural legacy of African Americans, Karpman’s composition was meant to finally capture on a grand stage the performative possibilities offered in Langston Hughes’s original 1961 poem of the same name; in virtuoso style, the show incorporated classical orchestral performance with digital samplings, autotune, and even audio recordings of Hughes reading the work decades before. Six years later, Avie Records released a recording of Karpman’s composition with the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, a record that received three Grammy nominations and won 2015’s “Best Engineered Album, Classical” category. Listed in Avie Records’ online catalogue, the description of the album concludes: “[t]he release appropriately comes in the wake of Independence Day: as Hughes says in his poem, ‘your country is your mama’” (“Summary”).

The original poem, nearly one hundred pages in length, is organized in twelve moods (a structural reference to “the dozens”) and serves as an experimental engagement with vernacular music and black life across the Atlantic and decolonizing world, with the verse accompanied by musical cues in the margins of the poem. In the album description’s brief recollection of Hughes’ line, much of the original’s caustic wit and irony is absent. The line actually reads “ONE’S COUNTRY IS YOUR MAMA.” It immediately follows the directive “ONE SHOULD LOVE ONE’S COUNTRY,” and it is the final statement in a series of micro-aggressions from white

neighbors who ask if the speaker knows Charles Mingus or why Richard Wright didn't come back from Europe to die "DECENT" in Harlem or Chicago (*Collected Poems* 500). The distinction between Avie Records' citation and the original text is crucial. The "YOUR" that precedes "MAMA" in the poem represents a rupture in the US-nationalist sentiment forced on the speaker through a repeated "oneness," while simultaneously bending the attack back on his interlocutors as a form of comic ridicule ("one's country is *your* mama"). With the speaker's alteration, what might have been a statement of national pride made clear through the language of familial relation has been transformed into an acerbic response flying in the face of suburban whiteness. The Avie Records quotation not only loses this complexity but also inverts the real thrust of Hughes's intention. The album description's citation becomes a national conscription, an original critique of white American liberalism and imposed repatriation, now a celebration of American freedom ventriloquized in black vernacular. In many ways Avie Records' rearticulation of Hughes's line performs a more glaring example of what *The Real Ambassadors* risked in its final embrace of a US-centered universalism: a focused critique made to collapse back into an American exceptionalism sounded out on stage.

I begin with Karpman's composition to underline the poem's relationship to music and to Hughes's politics of global relation. If such a performance can envision a geopolitical frame that cuts off the particular linkages Hughes brought to life in his writing, then we must consider again what that global frame actually is, and how music functions to establish it. Critics in recent years have variously aligned Hughes's writing within transnational, diasporic, international, and pan-African frameworks, and *Ask Your Mama* is no exception.¹⁰⁸ I suggest, however, that Hughes's poem pursues a form of sociality that privileges race but is not exclusively determined by it,

¹⁰⁸ For scholarship that engages Hughes's work through these frameworks, see Dworkin, Kim, Kun, Kutzinski, Westover, Lowney.

instead examining possibilities for cosmopolitan exchange. As the negotiation of alterity and the re-examination of inherited attachments—cultural, racial, or national—cosmopolitanism is an important though understudied radical strain of thought in this moment, and one we can hear sounded in the musical inflections and formal convergences staged in Hughes’s neo-modernist jazz poem.

As the previous chapter showed, by 1961 critics increasingly characterized jazz as America’s native art form and as a democratic mode of expression, what Marshall Stearns called a “common ground upon which the conflicting claims of the group and the individual can be resolved” (qtd. in Crist 160). The state also saw its international circulation as an opportunity to “‘contain’ criticism about America’s cultural and racial identity,” which in effect “curtailed and censured the activities of some black intellectuals in the domestic and international arena” (Davenport 7, 15). In response, some players “began to insist that jazz was a distinctly black form of musical expression rooted in African traditions” (Brick 84). Additionally, Hughes’s own incorporation of musical figures into *poetic* form—thereby moving beyond the staged musical of chapter two—contends with another brand of appropriative artistry: the stylized subversiveness of the Beat poets who enlisted jazz performance as a means of fashioning a new social insurgency. Acknowledging jazz’s attachment to each of these particular racial projections allows us to situate Hughes’s deployment of music as a re-imagination of what it could ultimately do in this moment, as well as what its national and racial attachments might be. Drawing on the surge in vernacular music’s postwar commercial and state-sanctioned circulation, Hughes combines generic forms and overlays scales of circulation and exchange that exceed any workable geographic or cultural category. Intervening on the verse through the cues in the margins of the poem and as a narrative device facilitating movement across the poem’s

varied international sites, music becomes a set of flexible figures that prompt the transgression of formal and cultural divides. Attending to the textual convergence of music and verse—what I will continue to describe as a form of intermediality—allows us to trace how Hughes captures formally the cosmopolitan process of altering encounter. *Ask Your Mama* thus demonstrates how, amidst the overlapping seizures and re-significations of black cultural production in the late 1950s and early 1960s, jazz music could be reclaimed and repurposed to not only transform poetry's structure but also rearticulate the boundaries of ethno-racial solidarity.

Though recent scholarship has worked to rectify Hughes's image as a diminished political actor by the 1960s, there still lingers an understanding of the writer as far removed from the radicalism of his 1930s work. Describing Hughes's testimony in front of the McCarthy committee in 1953, biographer Arnold Rampersad writes that Hughes's decision to cooperate and placate the committee "seemed to contrast weakly with the spirited resistance of other prominent blacks such as Paul Robeson" (219). Rampersad even goes so far as to say that Hughes "allowed the expression of his radical political zeal to wither, to atrophy, to evaporate" (220). Nikhil Pal Singh characterizes Hughes as "struggl[ing] vainly to cleave the middle ground of patriotic opposition," and that in his testimony he "concluded by testifying to the Myrdallian faith that progress in race relations was helping to make 'our country the most wonderful country in the world'" (169). Characterizations like these make clear that under the rubric of more conventional approaches to resistance during the Cold War, Hughes's later work remains less-than-legible. This chapter expands from James Smethurst's claim that "[t]he notion that Hughes's work during the 1950s was marked by political quietude has been overstated" (1226), and it suggests that perhaps approaching his writing from a cosmopolitan perspective allows us to better contend with the social and political visions he was crafting as the 1960s began.

In this chapter I first show how Langston Hughes's column for the *Chicago Defender* displays traces of a cosmopolitan ethos leading up to the composition of *Ask Your Mama*. These cosmopolitan logics sat alongside transnational and internationalist values in the black press and in the increasingly international circulation of jazz music. This heightened circulation, coupled with the press coverage and recording histories of prominent musicians, reveals a priority of cultural affiliation in the wake of decolonization, a priority shared with Hughes's column. Recognizing this shared concern allows us to read Hughes's *Ask Your Mama* as a unification of his own impulse to expand affiliations across national and ethno-racial lines and the discourses around jazz and other vernacular music that make this expansion possible. I then analyze *Ask Your Mama's* unique combinations of poetry and music, a different form of intermediality than in the previous chapter, but one that similarly seeks out space to re-envision music's role in this period. These combinations produce networks of alternative meanings that reconfigure relations between geographic distance, community, and identity, the comingling of disparate cultures and national affiliations formalized in the interstices of music and poetic verse. In addition to formal experimentation, Hughes turns to music technology, particularly the jukebox, as a referential figure that frames the poem's aesthetic exchanges, modeling new forms of relation through conceptions of audio technology and the traces of sound that travel via musical machinery. As a structural frame and activating figure, musical performance and reception are brought to bear in such a way that moments of negotiation and alteration are generated, either through the formal exchanges produced or through the ways its circulation and technologies are wielded. These moments enable shifts in perception and produce willed affinities that interrogate the predetermined scope of racial and US imperial attachments. If jazz has been absorbed into the state's colorblind diplomatic agenda, and if the formal convergences of *The Real Ambassadors*

struggled to create distance between the artists' ambitions and US-sanctioned structures of relation, then Hughes finds a way of both resignifying music's national contours and redefining its racial attachments. What we see in Hughes's poem is the deployment of music, specifically jazz, as an aesthetic strategy by which to combat both delimiting categories of identity and pernicious forms of US-American universalism, ultimately reimagining the ethical-political attachments made possible during the Cold War period.

I continue to use intermediality to describe how artists like Hughes engage a particular aesthetic mode through the use of others, however I move beyond Daniel Albright's understanding from the previous chapter. We recall that Albright distinguishes intermediality from multimediality, the latter simply involving works "compris[ing] elements of two or more media," while the former is the artwork "*generated by the spectator* through the interplay of two or more media" (209, emphasis added). Intermediality then is a product of the spectator's gaze rather than a formal property of the text itself. Hughes's poem, however, having been performed to musical accompaniment but also written to be read in isolation, consists of intermedial exchanges and translations that are more than by-products or interpretive results; rather, they constitute the very essence of the work. In fact, the cosmopolitan ethos I chart is alive in those spaces where aesthetic modes converge on the page. To this end, this chapter continues to focus our use of intermediality on those precise moments of aesthetic intersection, where performative practices are translated across medial divides. Such a streamlined understanding allows us to focus our attention on the exchanges and medial translations that the text itself foregrounds. Several critics have already attuned themselves to such exchanges in Hughes's work. A.J. Carruthers describes how musical notation serves as a structuring device in *Ask Your Mama*; Patrick Milian considers the poem a textual representation of stereophonic sound; while Meta

DuEwa Jones provides a method for reading across poetic verse and musical instruction, her “oppositional reading practice” sparking a reconsideration of the aesthetic divide between poetry and music.¹⁰⁹ Drawing inspiration from each of these critics, I show how *Ask Your Mama* serves as a sustained performance of pseudomorphic translation,¹¹⁰ those figures of consonance that stretch across poetic verse and the marginal cues producing potent effects that at times reinforce each other, but in other moments trigger alternative meanings. These latter moments formally inscribe the cosmopolitan ethos that Hughes is after, the poem’s intermediality linking novel aesthetic form to alternative forms of relation. I thus borrow from and expand on Jones’s oppositional reading practice, while also turning more deliberately than either Jones, Milian, or Carruthers to the Cold War context out of which this poem arises.¹¹¹

In terms of cosmopolitanism, I draw from critics such as David Hollinger and Thomas Bender to define it as a series of experiences and practices that cumulatively facilitate mutually altering affiliations and “internally complex, multiple solidarities” (Hollinger xvii). This understanding goes beyond the tradition of rootlessness often tied to the term and demands much more than a diversity of interactions. Drawing from Bender, I see cosmopolitanism as a process of encounter, negotiation, exchange, and altering attachment, wherein individuals encounter a form of otherness, experience a combination of unfamiliarity and recognition in the face of that otherness, and respond by both willfully extending their spheres of affinity and re-examining the parameters that have sustained in their wake. In other words, “the point is not just engagement

¹⁰⁹ See Carruthers, Milian, Jones.

¹¹⁰ Recall that pseudomorphosis is “when, in a work in a single artistic medium, the medium is asked to ape, or do the work of, some alien medium” (Albright 212), and that figures of consonance are those qualities, instances, or traits that are made to operate similarly across aesthetic borders.

¹¹¹ Carruthers briefly considers the concept of “mixedness” in *Ask Your Mama*, suggesting that mixed-race is signaled through mixed genre, an attempt to establish the poem as a hemispheric and trans-Atlantic text. This revision of scale, however, receives little attention, leaving more to be said about the means by which musical instruction enables diasporic and cosmopolitan exchange.

with the other, but self-reflexivity . . . a partial understanding of the other and an enriching partial reunderstanding of one's self" (Bender 121). Sarah Collins and Dana Gooley echo this process, describing cosmopolitanism as a "cognitive alterity," in which the act of cultural encounter facilitates a "cognitive opening or extension" that then forces an interrogation of assumedly natural attachments (153-154). Detecting these cosmopolitan currents in the visions artists had for jazz allows us to reframe this music, to divorce it from its growing association with nationalist and imperial procedures, not to mention the strategic roles that race is meant to play within them.

To be sure, cosmopolitanism is a deeply compromised term in discourses around race. It has a historical connection to the limited racial and gendered terrain of Enlightenment humanism, and even recent uses display a universalizing tendency that either dispels with difference outright or flattens it in pursuit of "world belonging." Cheryl Sterling captures these concerns quite succinctly, criticizing cosmopolitanism for idealizing a "post-ethnic, deracinated future," and she leverages Pan-Africanism as a corrective for the term's history of "conceptually elid[ing] . . . existences" (120, 124). Simon Gikandi similarly suggests that "Euro-centric narrative[s] of cosmopolitanism" might leave Pan-African identities "repressed or marginalized" (600). These anxieties are certainly warranted; indeed, I share many of them. But cosmopolitanism remains compelling so long as we understand it, following Ramzi Fawaz, as a *mutually transformative* practice—one that is in no way easy or assured—and that can account for multiple identity categories precisely because it is not one (120). It requires new acknowledgements of difference while also reassessing the parameters of inherited categories of relation. Put simply, cosmopolitanism "does not negate modes of belonging," but rather practices

forms of extension and self-reflexiveness that sustain openness and curb investments in unilateral attachments (Collins and Gooley 156-157).¹¹²

Turning to Hughes specifically, Shane Graham aims to reconcile these disputes by drawing on cosmopolitan frameworks to trace Hughes's "pan-African entanglements" with Caribbean and African writers. Crucially, he claims that Hughes enacts a "concentrically organized ethos of entanglement" that invests heavily in pan-African networks but "never regard[s] one cluster of kinships and exchanges as precluding other connections, for instance to Latin America, Southern Europe, and Central Asia" (32, 14). Graham's formulation is wonderfully useful, and I agree that pan-Africanism is often the privileged scale in Hughes's work. Nevertheless, I want to sit with cosmopolitanism a bit longer, not to deemphasize Hughes's commitment to pan-African networks, but to track the specific methods and experiences he draws out to articulate them, the likes of which as a practice become translatable across scales of relation. Such sustained attention not only foregrounds the reflexive work required in these exchanges, but also spotlights the multiple spheres of concern that Hughes conceptualized while writing *Ask Your Mama* and that his *Defender* column displays.

As a final framework to consider before turning to Hughes's column, diaspora remains a crucial site from which cosmopolitan experiences unfold. From Kenneth Warren's "(mis)recognition" (discussed in the previous chapter) to Brent Hayes Edwards "*décalage*," the concepts that define diaspora have moved well beyond notions of black universality or shared cultural identity, emphasizing instead the gaps and mistranslations that define global dispersal.

¹¹² This is also in part what separates cosmopolitanism from transnationalism. Collins and Gooley write, transnationalism "usually describes the continuing affiliations with known others—such as the affiliations of migrants or refugees with relatives or associates in their homeland" (154). As a strategy for both altering and developing new affiliations, cosmopolitanism diverges from concepts focused primarily on extending those attachments already acquired.

Naturally, Edwards looks to Hughes as well to elaborate the “futures of diaspora,” and in this gesture we see the concept’s relation to cosmopolitanism. Turning to Hughes’s “Letter from Spain,” Edwards reads in the poem an “incommensurability” and “radical difference” between an African American and North African whose encounter the ballad stages, one that “fails to result in any sort of internationalist collaboration . . . but . . . does use the trace of the encounter in Spain to announce a potential internationalist solidarity shared *among African Americans*” (703-704). This sustained difference and possibility resonates with notions of partiality and alteration that define a cosmopolitan experience. However, moving away from radical alterity and *failed* collaboration allows us to witness performative instantiations of what that collaboration might be in an increasingly globalized moment, one that refrains from dismissing difference outright but that also strives to overcome a resignation to future potential. Such a turn, I hope, captures the urgency found in Hughes’s poem twenty-four years later: “How long must I wait? Can I get it now—or must I hesitate?”

Altering Affinities at Midcentury: Langston Hughes, *The Chicago Defender*, and International Jazz

Hughes was asked to contribute a weekly column to the *Chicago Defender* by editor-in-chief Metz Lochard in 1942, a task he accepted not only for the economic security it would afford but for the larger African American audience he could reach. The column, running into the early 1960s, would cover a range of content; indeed, with the exception of a few series of columns, Hughes “present[ed] thematically unrelated topics week by week” (De Santis xvi). With that said, from 1959-1961 Hughes’s column displayed a deep concern for countries and communities that extended beyond categories of descent, with many of the columns positing new

global relations that privileged subjects long oppressed by imperial and colonial powers.¹¹³ In the years leading up to and surrounding his composition of *Ask Your Mama*, topics spanned everything from African decolonization to Cold War tête-à-têtes, Southern racial prejudice, and nuclear annihilation. And while Daniel Won-gu Kim is right that many of Hughes's 1959 columns displayed an "African (re)turn" of sorts, it was not just the African continent that interested Hughes as the decade turned to 1960.¹¹⁴ Stirred by Cold War tensions and national liberation, Hughes's attention extended well beyond a traditional Atlantic scale and exceeded the strict racial lines we might attribute to pan-Africanists of the period. In his May 28 column "White Folks, Watch Out," Jesse B. Semple, or "Simple"—Hughes's invented interlocutor for many of his *Defender* articles—describes a global shift in power he sees unfolding in this moment. He claims, "I once were a slave . . . I now am free. Africa once were nothing but colonies. Look at Ghana, look at Guinea. China used to be nothing but a stamping ground for foreign missionaries and foreign bankers. Is it now? . . . Look at India." He goes on to critique the process of Cold War integration ("What is wrong with our American white folks, thinking they can keep the world fenced in for themselves") and proclaims, "we are rising" that "we make up two-thirds of the world and three-fourths of Mississippi."¹¹⁵ Simple offers a similar sentiment on October 29, stating that "Africa is rising and Asia has done riz. Two-thirds of the world is so brown they don't need a suntan." He posits his own proposal for states' integration into the U.N., describing the US south as a collection of "underdeveloped countries" that would need to

¹¹³ Cedric Tolliver identifies a similar cosmopolitan impulse in Hughes's column during the 1940s, which he locates within a larger "African diasporic cosmopolitan culture." See Tolliver.

¹¹⁴ See Kim.

¹¹⁵ Christina Klein describes the "global imaginary of integration" that was forged by the US during the Cold War. As a model of relation that contrasted conventional ideologies of containment, it emphasized "forging intellectual and emotional bonds" with other countries and cultures as a means of "integrating the core industrial economies of the democratic West and Japan with the markets and resource-rich economies of the decolonizing periphery" (24-25).

“petition this Assembly for full integration with Ghana, Guinea, Harlem, and China under whose teaching they be taught how to associate with the rest of the world” (“Simple at the U.N.”).

The oscillation of scale evident in these two pieces—from regional to international, from African American minority to nonwhite majority—recognizes particular struggles for expanded freedom as part of the same global project. Two weeks after “White Folks Watch Out,” Hughes relates a speech Simple claims he would give if he were attending the presidential summit between Eisenhower and Khrushchev: “Let everybody have civil rights, white, black, yellow, brown, gray, grizzle, or green. . . the peoples has got to reach out their hands to each others over the leaders’ heads, just like I am talking over your leaders’ heads now” (“Simple at the Summit”). The same gesture is called upon in his December 31 article, with Ethiopia said to be “stretch[ing] forth her hand,” and Simple claiming that he “can feel that handshake clean across the ocean” (“Simple’s Happy New Year”). Often, the links established in Hughes’s column stem from a likeness in oppression, a kinship brought on via recognizable traumas similarly inflicted by Western powers. In July 1960, just days after beginning work on *Ask Your Mama*, Hughes published an article in which Simple relates a story from his past about a white man kicking him in the shins while he tries to retrieve a ball from the man’s lawn. In a dramatic upward-scaling of experience, he likens the assault to the US dropping an atomic bomb on Japan. Hughes responds, “[y]ou certainly can make some unconnected circles in your conversation,” to which Simple asks, “[d]on’t you see no connection between atom-bomb-dropping in Japan and shin-kicking in Virginia?” When Hughes says no, Simple states, “Then you are not colored” (“Simple’s Connections”).

Such associations, albeit comic in their presentation on the page, would continue with more of an edge in 1961. In March (only a month after Hughes would complete his epic poem), Simple faults white Christianity in the West for a slew of international atrocities:

King Leopold of Belgium. I read somewhere, that [he] cut off the hands of the Congo people to make them work harder. And them South Africans that shot all them natives at Sharpesville was and is Christians, as was them Germans that put all them Jews in the gas ovens in Germany, as is them that put Rev. Martin Luther King in jail in Georgia, as was them that dropped the atom on Japan, as is them that now wants the UN to save the Congo from the ghost of Lumumba who they have done killed dead in his grave (“Western, White and Wicked”).

Six months later, and this time out from under the guise of his “Simple stories,” Hughes doubles down, writing “there is China bigger than life just over the horizon remembering, no doubt the Oriental Exclusion Act. And Japan remembering Hiroshima. And Africa—‘old black funny-looking Africa’—remembering the slave ships” (“Untitled”). Time and again we see attempts on the parts of both Simple and Hughes to place these diverse countries in a global context, to join together the oppressed and dispossessed in contrast to white Western powers. Such readjustments, brought on by a new relationality, resonate with other thinkers of the time, including James Baldwin, who in 1960 wrote “[t]he American Negro can no longer, nor will he ever again be controlled by white America’s image of him. This fact has everything to do with the rise of Africa in world affairs” (qtd. in Singh 185). Hughes’s writings here trace both the history of oppression inflicted upon these diverse communities and the opportunity at present for them to “reach out their hands” and disrupt the current order on a global scale.

What Hughes’s column demonstrates is the extent to which many of its weekly installments sought to establish linkages across geographical space and cultural difference. Even in such a brief survey, we notice a rich discussion unfolding between Hughes and his readership around the limits of national or cultural attachment and the hardships that resonate despite shifts

in context and cultural identity. Among the several competing priorities found in his column between 1959 and 1961, an undoubted focus is the projection of a vision of global connectedness that privileges race but also extends beyond it. These altering alignments, brought on by a new relationality, resonated with thinkers like Martin Luther King, who made similar gestures after a 1959 visit to India: “the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racism and imperialism” (qtd. in Singh 185). The slippage in scale and identity present in Hughes’s column (“we make up two-thirds of the world and three-fourths of Mississippi”) becomes an attempt to bridge particularity with globality, not necessarily eliding difference in the process but privileging the power that arises in the recognition of a likeness and similarity of station. We need only turn to events like the Asian-African Conference in Bandung a few years before, with its calls for a “nonaligned” Third World ringing out and reaching the US via the black press, to find precedence for Simple’s rhetorical tactics and his lambasting of Cold War integration.¹¹⁶ The national scale that has become so important is also tampered with for effect: Louisiana, South Carolina, and Alabama are portrayed as underdeveloped countries compared to the likes of China and Harlem, a system calibrated to measure the international arena alongside the most localized geography of a New York neighborhood. What Simple leaves us with are questions about what constitutes a country or community, at what scale or limit those lines should be drawn, and in what ways those attachments might be better felt and with whom. Discussing the concept of peace a year before *Ask Your Mama* would be embarked on, Simple states, “I would work for peace . . . if I knew how, where and when—also what folks to work with” (“Simple Speculates On Peace”). And while we should avoid collapsing Simple’s stated views with those of the

¹¹⁶ Penny Von Eschen has cited press coverage of the Bandung Conference in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Chicago Defender* (*Race Against* 168-173).

author, what their exchanges stage are the debates and opportunities brought on by the possibility for expanded affiliation in the Cold War period.

These same impulses might also be recognized in one of the more significant forms of entertainment circulating around the globe at this time: vernacular music, and specifically jazz. Only a few pages from where Hughes's column was printed each week, the *Defender's* entertainment section informed readers of Nat King Cole's tours of Brazil and Mexico in 1959 and 1960, Harry Belafonte's visit to Japan in 1960, the Newport Jazz Festival's European tour through Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Austria, as well as the gallivants of many other artists including Louis Armstrong, Sarah Vaughan, Art Blakey, Lena Horne, and Eartha Kitt.¹¹⁷ Often these reports took care to recognize the impact of these artists in the countries they visited. In a September 1960 account of Nat King Cole's South American tour, the newspaper states that "it must be remembered that the tribute came at a time when things were not [sic] so cordial in certain centers of that country even for our top 'brass'" ("Rate Nat Cole"). This potential for mediation and engagement was also sounded in the exchanges between State-sponsored musicians traveling abroad and in some of the records released at home. Though the state-sponsored tours were extensions of Cold War diplomacy, the previous chapter showed how the artists often had other interests in mind, and many entertained frequent collaborations and jam sessions with local musicians not on the scheduled programs for each visit.¹¹⁸ Pair this with

¹¹⁷ Rachel Gillett describes a similar phenomenon during the interwar period, with a form of cosmopolitanism detectable in both the travel and lifestyles of black jazz artists in Paris and in the ways that a much larger black community—led by the press's coverage of these artists in the US—understood these experiences to be enactments of the promise of universal rights. See Gillett.

¹¹⁸ Penny Von Eschen writes, "[f]rom Gillespie's meeting with the pianist Lalo Schifrin in Buenos Aires, to Brubeck's incorporation of the sitar sounds of Abdul Jafar Khan during his tour in Bombay, to Ellington's collaboration with Ethiopian jazz-fusionist Mulatu Astatqé, African American artists and musicians used their status as goodwill ambassadors to establish relationships with musicians in Africa and the Third World" (*Satchmo* 256-257).

Randy Weston's *Uhuru Afrika* (1961) and Max Roach's *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* (1960)—both exploring the dimensions of African and African American relations and recorded the same year that Hughes began composing *Ask Your Mama*—and we see a distinct trend in the musical discourse as well, one geared toward an expanding geopolitical consciousness, particularly as a means of interrogating black diasporic belonging.

What becomes clear from 1956 to 1961 is that black writers and musicians were inspired by the shifts that an increasing scale of engagement might bring to questions of investment, interaction, and solidarity. While the early parts of the Cold War tamped down opportunities for black Americans to speak out in support of decolonization and Third World solidarity, by the end of the 1950s, “anticolonial struggles in Algeria and the Belgian Congo, and the nonalignment strategies of such leaders as Patrice Lumumba and President Sekou Touré of Guinea” reanimated opportunities to consider the shape and strength of international ties (Von Eschen, *Race Against* 185). Hughes captured these concerns in the pages of his weekly column, staging the sorts of discussions he hoped his readers might have in the wake of these events. And while jazz was proffered by the state as a universal language capable of promoting colorblind democracy, many artists—musical, but also literary—reclaimed it as the means through which alternative forms of minoritarian coalition could be heard, not all of which fell so easily within a diasporic frame. *With whom might we align?* This might be the predominant question weighing on the minds of government officials and artists alike. Such a question of willed affiliation stands as an early enactment of the “problem of solidarity” Hollinger claims inspires a cosmopolitan response, this period becoming a moment in which new affinities were possible, their limits not yet determined. In approaching Hughes's *Ask Your Mama*, we should recognize the international scale of the poem as not only extending the discussion Hughes was having with his readership in the

Defender, but also dovetailing with jazz's Cold War context and the affiliational aspirations that precede and coincide with it.

Margins Remade: Musical Cues, Poetic Form, and the Trope of Alteration

Perhaps the most conspicuous strategy that Hughes employs in his staging of cosmopolitan events in *Ask Your Mama* are the musical directions in the margins of the poem. Written as cues for musicians thought to accompany the performance of the piece, the marginal directions illuminate the value Hughes ascribes to musical performance and collaboration as a means of cultural exchange and coalition building. Of course, the interplay of poetry and jazz invoked in *Ask Your Mama* is in many ways a response to the Beat poetry of the 1950s that appropriated bebop stylization in their desires to fashion a new aesthetic of social rebellion. In its most recognizable form, the jazz-poetry connection was publicly acknowledged as a Beat phenomenon by midcentury, with the improvisation of artists like Charlie Parker interpreted and absorbed as a self-conscious subversiveness that could extend to white artists (Thomas 292). Hughes was skeptical of the Beats' parodic and appropriative use of jazz. At the 1959 AMSAC conference for black writers he chidingly asked, "Who wants to be a Beat?" (qtd. in Rampersad 310). Despite such claims, or perhaps in an effort to bolster them, Hughes made a small home for himself in this moment, performing to "capacity houses" multiple times at the Village Vanguard in 1958 alongside musicians Charles Mingus, Phineas Newborn, and Ben Webster. He also released his poetry-to-jazz album *The Weary Blues with Langston Hughes* that same year (Rampersad 279-280). As Aldon Nielsen claims, "the widespread public attention given to white poets' performances with jazz accompaniment gave added impetus to black poets who had always worked with jazz materials to release their own 'product'" (176). By 1960, jazz had not

only been appropriated by the state as a form of colorblind democracy but also by white poets searching for a new form of hip dissidence.

Yet, reading poetry to jazz was by no means a critically heralded moment of artistic syncretism. In his survey of the phenomenon, Nielsen cites poet David Meltzer's recollection that readings "seemed to separate from the music, the jazz only background to the poem, not interactive with it" (qtd. in Nielsen 177). Similarly, the *New York Times* review of Kenneth Patchen's 1959 performance with Charles Mingus described the artists as having "served their respective arts well, but separately. They found no suitable meeting ground" (Wilson). Performances also risked slipping into harsh discordance, with the music playing over the poet's verse. In his account of Patchen's work, John Ciardi recalls that "[w]orst of all the music kept drowning out the words" (qtd. in Farrington 367). By 1960, the interplay of music and poetry found itself vulnerable to either unconscious bifurcation or unbalanced interchange, with one form or the other slipping fatally to the background.

Contrary to such disconnection, even a cursory reading of the cues in *Ask Your Mama* reveals how central these sonic enmeshments are to the poem's larger concerns. The instrumentation signaled in the margins is often a combination of diverse instruments—a scraping guira, maracas, claves, and bongo drums—that are frequently brought together with the sounds of German lieder, French "Ça Ira,"¹² 12-bar blues, cha-cha-cha, calypso, and post-bop. They often cite themes or fragments ("a musical echo of Paris" [512]), or particular artists or songs ("blues in gospel tempo à la Ray Charles" [489] or "When the Saints Go Marching In" [481]). They also amend the instrumentation traditionally thought to accompany them with brands of Afro-Caribbean percussion, the effect of which is a momentary detachment of sound from place and a form of indigenization whereby familiar western fragments are placed within

African diasporic drum patterns. Additionally, the percussion at times acts similarly to the “percussive diaspora” Josh Kun has described, with the African drum said to “throb against blues,” “join the blues,” and “[beat] over blues,” establishing an audible link between African percussion and African American music. (178). Alternatively, several of the moods’ cues focus on specific Caribbean locales in isolation from African drums (“Gospel Cha-Cha,” for instance, with its reference to the Cuban cha-cha-cha, bongos, claves, and mambo). This suggests an almost rhizomatic percussive connection rather than a belaboring of heritage, influence, or necessary causality. The cumulative effect is a percussive sound that at times engages in diasporic linearity while in other moments celebrating immense particularities that impede swift lodgings within an evolutionary narrative.¹¹⁹ At different moments different associations are audible, to the point that cultural particularity and diasporic belonging are constantly in dialogue as the scale alters. By staging his own combination of music and poetry on the pages of *Ask Your Mama*, Hughes corrects the Beats’ frequent failures to join these two forms, while also addressing the limited racialist terrain that both the Beat movement’s and the state’s commandeering of this music afforded.

Recalling Jones’ oppositional reading practice, the musical cues also offer opportunities for particular lines to be read across the page, bringing together poetry and music in a way that allows conventional attachments—whether geographic or cultural—to be interrogated or extended. Musical emendations to poetic verse become an intermedial strategy for facilitating a cosmopolitan experience. The first mood of the poem, “Cultural Exchange,” contains multiple

¹¹⁹ Josh Kun has illuminated the specific “Afro-Cuban soundings” of Hughes’s poem—son, rumba, cha-cha-cha—calling the work “inter-American” and pronouncing it “African American poetry’s first Afro-Cuban jazz poem” (162, 172).

moments of such expansion. The mood stages the arrival of an African diplomat in the
 “QUARTER OF THE NEGROES,” which is located

BY THE RIVER AND THE RAILROAD
 WITH FLUID FAR-OFF GOING
 BOUNDARIES BIND UNBINDING
 (*Collected Poems* 477)

*far away,
 merges
 into piano*

Reading the poetic lines in isolation, the focus of the text is on the boundaries of the quarter. While emphasis is placed on their flexibility and perceived extension, the boundaries remain the metric and frame through which we understand the quarter’s geography. Turning to the cues, however, we are told that a “*lonely / flute call, / high and / far away, / merges / into piano / variations / on German / lieder.*” In their alignment with the stanza’s opening lines, the cues also engage with and interrupt the lines themselves, allowing us to read certain poetic lines and marginal cues together. Not only does the flute call merge with piano, but the act of merging, as a written directive, breaks “BOUNDARIES” from its potential “FAR-OFF GOING” descriptive, the latter now clearly a verbal noun connoting unbounded travel. This possibility of “FAR-OFF GOING”—a possibility imaginable given the quarter’s location by the water and railways—“*merges* BOUNDARIES.” We shift from a description of fluid objects to the action of mobile subjects, with a certain hopefulness for an expanded community brought on by individual excursion now sounded through the juxtaposition of musical instruction and poetic verse. The boundaries’ “unbinding” is an outcome rather than stated fact, and reading the lines in such a way moves us from a concept of flexible boundaries to the idea of boundaries merged, a seeming contradiction: those limit-lines meant to divide are brought together, perimeters and confines becoming unbounded contact zones. Such hopefulness of course grinds against the reality stated two lines later, that “NO TRAINS OR STEAMBOATS [are] GOING.” This oppositional reading practice then, reading the “musical echoes...vertically and horizontally, line by line,” allows for

more than an interrogation of Hughes's concern for "how we hear and how we read" (Jones 62-63); it also asks us to recognize moments in which these networks of alternative meanings actually facilitate reconsiderations of cartography and identity, here prompting shifts in inherited understandings of the limits imposed by geography's markings.

To examine the full effect of this intermedial practice, I quote at length the arrival of the African diplomat:

THERE, FORBID US TO REMEMBER, COMES AN AFRICAN IN MID-DECEMBER SENT BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT AMONG THE SHACKS TO MEET THE BLACKS: LEONTYNE SAMMY HARRY POITIER LOVELY LENA MARIAN LOUIS PEARLIE MAE	<i>until African drums throb against blues</i>
GEORGE S. SCHUYLER MOLTO BENE COME WHAT MAY LANGSTON HUGHES IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES WHERE THE RAILROAD AND THE RIVER HAVE DOORS THAT FACE EACH WAY AND THE ENTRANCE TO THE MOVIE'S UP AN ALLEY UP THE SIDE. (478)	<i>fading as the music ends. TACIT</i>

The African diplomat's arrival in the "QUARTER" not only reverses the familiar direction of exchange conducted by the State Department's sanctioned jazz tours,¹²⁰ but it also re-enacts the visits of African officials to the U.N., as well as visits Hughes himself hosted in Harlem. In a letter to Arna Bontemps in 1961, Hughes tells how his 20 East 127th Street address had become an informal meeting place for African artists and diplomats visiting the US, often under the advisement of the State Department. There were so many visits that Hughes requested an official stipend if he was to become "the official host of Harlem" (qtd. in Rampersad 341). As the diplomat arrives, we hear "*African / drums / throb / against / blues,*" which might signal a

¹²⁰ John Lowney calls this reversal a disruption of the "liberal worldview of the United States as the epicenter of 'freedom'" ("Jazz" 569).

separation or tension recognizable in the performance itself. We also witness how the musical accompaniment's "*fading*" simultaneously interrupts the first two lines of the second stanza, lines that might otherwise be read chiasmically ("GEORGE S. SCHUYLER MOLTO BENE [very well] / COME WHAT MAY LANGSTON HUGHES"). The cues then perform and measure intercultural exchange as it occurs in the poem, while also, through those interventions, articulating racial affinities that far exceed those Hughes might share with other black artists and leaders at home. In other words, the cues might be read as not only a performance of diasporic exchange, which includes the tensions that arise in its unfolding, but also as the means through which artists are moved further and further away from strains of black conservatism that have arisen in the wake of the McCarthy era. George Schuyler "fades" with every African visitor that "drums" on Hughes's door.

Finally, the musical "TACIT" is given not at the end of the stanza, but rather three lines before, placing emphasis on the multi-facing doors of the quarter. Calling for the silence of a voice or instrument, the "TACIT," or *tacet*, signals a long rest or pause with the expectation that the instrument will be sounded again. Interestingly, while the "TACIT" signals a musical break, its spelling might also refer to the word's adjectival function, as an unspoken or unvoiced idea that, while not openly stated, is still implied or understood. On the one hand then, the *tacit* signals a musical break that as a "figure of consonance" supplies the same direction to the verse: to pause, and to reflect on the multi-facing doors of the quarter. On the other hand, the *tacit* refers to a claim that, even in silence, is sustained; a certain trace is still held onto. That trace, signaled by the repetition of the quarter's location ("THE RAILROAD AND THE RIVER") is perhaps the imagined possibility of merging boundaries from the earlier stanza, now realized in the exchange between artists and diplomatic officials across national lines. In these two stanzas

the musical cues help express the possibilities and tensions that arise in the experience of diasporic exchange refracted through state power, the opportunity for such affiliations to then alter racial networks abiding here at home, and the realization of imagined affinities that arrive when those doors continue to remain open to them.

This emphasis on negotiation and realignment becomes a trope of sorts throughout the poem. And if we recall from Bender's description that what attends these cosmopolitan impulses is an "enriching partial reunderstanding of one's self" (121), then perhaps the most conspicuous example of this trope of alteration arrives in the seventh mood "Gospel Cha-Cha," in which experiences of encounter, alteration, and reflexivity are staged, only this time as an embodied shift brought on via musical circulation and exchange. "Gospel Cha-Cha," as Jean-Philippe Marcoux notes, acts as a "mapping of religions in the Diaspora," bringing together African-derived religious entities (Voodoo Damballah, Haitian Ogun), Afro-Caribbean and Brazilian locales (Fortaleza, Bahia) and US religious figures (New Orleans's Marie Laveau, Virginia's ex-slave minister John Jasper) (41). The single through-line that unites these disparate groups and locations is the music, and particularly the maracas, claves, and bongo drums found in the marginal cues. In the mood's opening passage, the music again necessitates the expansion of scale that the poem has relentlessly pursued up to this point:

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROS
 WHERE THE PALMS AND COCONUTS
 CHA-CHA LIKE CASTANETS
 IN THE WIND'S FRENETIC FISTS
 WHERE THE SAND SEEDS AND THE
 SEA GOURDS MAKE MARACAS OUT OF ME,
 ERZULIE PLAYS A TUNE
 ON THE BONGO OF THE MOON.

*Maracas . . .
 in
 cha-cha
 tempo,
 then
 bongo drums (503)*

Here Hughes demonstrates the "mutually attentive listening and responding" that Jones described as "jazz communication" (49), with the poem issuing calls for maracas and bongos that

the cues then respond to. Importantly, these cues shift from the sounds of maracas, bongos, and claves to gospel music, concluding with a rather lengthy instruction: “*Gospel / music / with a / very / heavy / beat / as if / marching / forward / against / great / odds, / climbing / a / high / hill— / to again / fade into / the dry / swish of / maracas / in cha-cha / time*” (504-505). As the name suggests, “Gospel Cha-Cha” synthesizes Afro-Caribbean instrumentation and gospel music, the swishing and rapping of the maracas and claves framing the gospel that Hughes calls for and performing an enmeshment similar to what we might imagine arising out of the circulation hinted at in the previous mood.

But if we return to the quoted stanza, we see that the speaker himself has become immersed in the soundscape, the music made manifest in and through the speaker’s body. We are told that while the palm trees and coconuts “CHA-CHA LIKE CASTANETS,” the speaker is moved by the sensations brought on by the setting, the sand and sea gourds “mak[ing] maracas” out of him, maracas that in the cues move in “*cha-cha tempo*.” This occurs later on in the mood as well, with Hughes writing that this same sand, these same sea gourds, “MAKE CLAVES OF MY SORROWS” (504). It is important to note the specificity of the instruments into which the speaker is metaphorically transformed. Maracas have Afro-Caribbean roots, while claves can be more definitively identified as having a Cuban origin (along with the titular cha-cha-cha itself).¹²¹ We might also consider the actual performance of the poem as well, the speaker reading “cha-cha” and “maraca” to the corresponding percussion and thereby establishing a similarity in sound. Such a performance then shuttles between the “bodily-oral” and “instrumentally-aural,” the metaphor literalized in the speech act of the poet. Hughes appears to root these instruments in the body of the speaker, thereby giving credence to the metaphor, but

¹²¹ Raul A. Fernandez writes that “[w]hile the rhythms beat out on the claves have been traced to African traditional musics, the claves themselves seem to have a definite Cuban origin” (26).

he also takes stock of the contingency of the instruments' production. They are formed in and through the body, and by the contents and conditions of the particular landscape in which that body is located.

And yet, along with Cuba, the mood travels through Haiti ("THE CITADELLE OF SHADOWS"), Jamaica ("BEDWARD!"), and Brazil ("AY, BAHIA!"), the text performing a geospatial shuttling both accompanied by and propelled through musical instrumentation. Looking at the mood as a whole, the maracas begin to take on added significance: they open the mood ("*Maracas . . . in cha-cha tempo*"), are the last sound heard before the TACIT, and complete the mood, both in the poetic verse ("CHA-CHA . . . CHA-CHA . . . CHA . . .") and in the cues themselves ("*the dry swish of maracas in cha-cha time*") (503-505). We might say, then, that the "swish-swish" of maracas not only frames the mood and accompanies each change in location, but in the speaker's transformation into the instrument, they also imaginatively allow for this geographical shuttling to occur. Just as the speaker transforms and moves the poem through these diasporic sites, the sound of maracas is ever-present, transatlantic travel figured through contemporaneous models of musical movement.

This particular sonic framing also complicates traditional representations of diaspora. On the one hand, the poem's suffusion of these major sites of diasporic linkage recalls the history of the slave trade, and the ways in which cultural memory is captured and rendered audible via musical forms. Hughes made similar claims about jazz in his column two years before, describing it as a music born of bondage, that "remembered Africa" with "rhythms tangled in the tall cane, caught in the white bolls of the cotton, mired in the rice swamps, chained on the levees" ("That Sad, Happy Music"). But these stanzas are not simply a restaging of forced dispersal, as we see with Hughes's discussion of the first "WHITE TOURIST" who visits the

“CITADEL OF SHADOWS” (503). Rather, this is a re-experience of such movement in the modern moment, figured through music’s circulation but not reflecting immediate attachment or cultural coherence. Following the series of references that move us through these diasporic sites, the cues call for the music to slowly die away until we are left with “*the / lonely / swish- / swish of / the / maracas . . . / TACIT,*” the final line before the break reading “HOW I GOT THERE I DON’T KNOW” (504). In this moment, arriving roughly at the center of the mood, we are launched again into the poem’s formal interstices: the musical TACIT simultaneously calls for silence and signals a break in the speaker’s own sense of cultural coherence. “HOW I GOT THERE I DON’T KNOW.” Ostensibly another reference to the slave trade, the line also becomes a statement of geospatial difference (how did I get *there*?) which might be read as a reassertion of particularity, profoundly affected yet still cognizant of an underlying difference. It is simultaneously a reference to historical dispersal and a present account of cultural distance, one only made possible through the circulating “swish swish” of maracas—themselves isolated before silence overtakes them—and the immediate onslaught of experience that overwhelms the speaker early in the mood. What is ultimately staged is another form of cosmopolitan experience metaphorically figured and sonically traced. The speaker undergoes a tangible alteration during his time in the tropical “QUARTER,” one imaginatively rendered as an embodied shift, and through the accompanying montage of diasporic locations, we arrive again at a form of acknowledgment that is not so easily reducible to transnational acceptance or ancestral identification. Rather, what is prompted is a reflection on cultural attachment, punctuated in this moment by the TACIT, a cue that signals a break but also recalls that which is implied, unvoiced, yet understood.

Hughes's combination of musical instruction and poetic form produces pockets of aesthetic excess, where meaning multiplies and space is created for new affiliations to be felt and old ones reexamined. It should be noted that such readings come about in the absence of music itself. What is required here *is* reading, not just performance on stage. In the only recording Hughes made from this material, he opens by stating that "the poem may be read with or without music," but that we might turn to the marginal cues to "hear the music that [he] heard" while writing.¹²² What the cues then represent is an (in)audible trace, not unlike the TACIT itself, a textual hint that captures both a sustained linkage and sounding potential. In this ambient space where sound meets text, the aesthetic encounter becomes a formal enactment of the experience Hughes wants to highlight, an experience of exchange and alteration, where new aesthetic arrangements parallel and give shape to the cosmopolitan attachments made possible in this period.

Technologies of Circulation: Jukebox "Quarters" and Audible Traces Across the Atlantic

While the musical cues continue to operate as a significant structural frame in the poem—opening up space in the text for shifts in meaning and reading practice—music also serves as a referential figure that historically contextualizes the aesthetic relations described in the previous section. Returning to the first several moods of the poem, the image of the "QUARTER OF THE NEGROES" remains singularly stationed, or at least figured in the abstract as a singular concept, and while the accumulating geographical sites exceed any particular locale (the first three moods makes reference to the American South, the Caribbean, and West Africa), they are nonetheless contained "[with]IN THE QUARTER OF THE

¹²² See Hughes, *The Black Verse*, Langston Hughes, *12 Moods for Jazz*, Buddah Records, 1969.

NEGROES.” This changes in the fourth mood, “Ode to Dinah,” which, although steeped in the legacies of hardship that have carried on since Reconstruction, illustrates a shift in how cultural space is oriented in the poem. Early in the mood, the speaker laments the economic stranglehold in which black Americans continue to find themselves heading into the celebration of “100-YEARS EMANCIPATION,” but he provides a brief respite in “MAMA’S FRUITCAKE SENT FROM GEORGIA,” which “CRUMBLES AS IT’S NIBBLED / TO A DISC BY DINAH / IN THE RUM THAT WAFTS MARACAS / FROM ANOTHER DISTANT QUARTER.” Here we receive our first real taste of another quarter, one that “WAFTS MARACAS” even as it is sprinkled with delectable traces from the American south. Notably, the maracas are figured as a trace wafting from another distant quarter, overlaid not only by the “*Traditional / blues / in gospel / tempo / à la Ray / Charles,*” found in the margins, but also by 1950s recording artist Dinah Washington (489). The process of black migratory movement is re-presented here as a black diasporic sound now syncretized (and synchronized) into a performance that brings distant quarters together.

This multiplication of the quarter is dramatically realized just a few stanzas later, only this time with a more deliberate turn to sound technology. Hughes describes those who are:

SUCKED IN BY FAT JUKEBOXES
 WHERE DINAH’S SONGS ARE MADE
 FROM SLABS OF SILVER SHADOWS.
 AS EACH QUARTER CLINKS
 INTO A MILLION POOLS OF QUARTERS
 TO BE CARTED OFF BY BRINK’S,
 THE SHADES OF DINAH’S SINGING
 MAKE A SPANGLE OUT OF QUARTERS RINGING
 TO KEEP FAR-OFF CANARIES
 IN SILVER CAGES SINGING.

*“Hesitation
 Blues”
 softly
 asking
 over
 and
 over
 its old (491)*

Recalling the mood’s reflection on Emancipation’s upcoming centennial, and the struggles that have sustained since that time, it is tempting to read these lines as unilaterally caustic, a tone that

certainly underlies some of Hughes's comments elsewhere regarding music's commercialization. And yet, in writing it as an *ode* to Dinah Washington, not only the "Queen of the Blues" but also the proclaimed "Queen of the Jukeboxes,"¹²³ we might turn to those "far-off canaries" and consider again what music and sound technology are performing at the level of scale and cultivated relation in this moment.

As I considered briefly in my introduction, the 1950s saw advancements in magnetic tape and sound editing that "led to an era that was less about recording specific musical performances than about making musical recordings." As a result, "[n]ew forms of listening emerged, as car radios, jukeboxes, and portable transistor radios played pop 45s, while high-fidelity stereo systems and FM radios played LPs in living rooms" (Denning 70). These new forms coincided with an internationalization and democratization of sound, an expansion of access that made it one of the primary cultural artifacts circulating during the Cold War. *Billboard* reported on "the globalization of the jukebox industry" in 1947 (Clegg 244) and in 1956 reported that coin-operated equipment—which includes amusement games, vending machines, but most significantly, jukeboxes—set a record for US dollar volume to world markets for the sixth year in a row, from 1950's \$3 million to 1955's estimated \$15 million (Knauf 86). In the international market, West Germany's coin machine exports increased by 17 percent from 1958 to 1959, a year wherein "nearly all West German industries, except the coin machine branch," saw a trend "toward a shrinkage in exports." These coin machines had markets as diverse as Australia, Hong Kong, and Venezuela. In the Middle East, the jukebox was said to have been "discovered...with such enthusiasm that the demand [could] hardly be supplied," and the German industry was

¹²³ Hughes mentions Dinah Washington's music in relation to the jukebox twice in his column, once in November 7, 1959's "Footholds and Toeholds" ("Then drop a dime on Dinah's new record before you go"), and again in an article discussing musical taste, racialized conceptions of sound, and the camaraderie of jukebox-listening ("Simple and the Sounds").

“scanning intently” the developing African market, with German exports “rising to all the nations involved in the independence movement” (“Erhard”). The jukebox, and the records that accompanied it, had a remarkable global circulation by the time of *Ask Your Mama*’s publication, and while perhaps a major American export, it was certainly not an exclusively American cultural artifact.

Returning to the quoted stanza, the poem turns from the particular, inhabited space of the black “QUARTER” to the silver “QUARTERS” clinking around in the jukebox. Until this point the “QUARTER” has referred almost entirely to the site of the black community, and has always been rendered singular. Such consistency accentuates this moment as a significant shift in the poem’s lexicon, all the while exhibiting echoes of its previous iteration. The homonymic playfulness Hughes exhibits becomes an expansion of the scale, intimacy, and struggle provided by such a quarter, where the site of one hundred-plus years of adversity and faux-progress has now been multiplied to recognize those other spaces in which political freedoms are being fought for. This is not to suggest that Hughes’s earlier references to the “QUARTER” (well over a dozen times by the poem’s fourth mood) can be tied to a single, locatable space on US soil; rather, what we experience is a shift from a singularly abstract “QUARTER,” universalizing in its expansiveness, to a recognition of particularity that is nonetheless linked within a network of sonic traces. Such a shift recalls the “cognitive opening or extension” that Collins and Gooley call for, with recognition and alteration here signaled through the circulation of coin-operated machinery. And given the ubiquity of the jukebox in territories across Asia, the Middle East, and North- and South America, the multiplication of the quarter now has a global resonance for those countries and communities struggling in their respective “CAGES.” Hughes turns to international sound technology as the operating figure for this relationality and expansion, the

“MILLION POOLS OF QUARTERS” now signifying the archipelagic links made possible through a globalizing music industry.¹²⁴ And while Hughes is certainly leery of the commodification of culture by global capital, we can detect the hint of opportunity that inheres in the circulation of cultural objects. As with the merging boundaries of the first mood, the sustained disillusionment and futility signaled by the canaries’ singing is momentarily undercut through the turn to music’s circulation. The “QUARTER” has thus been transformed in the recognition of likeness, cultural distance and distinction set aside in an attempt to make audible those traces that obtain across geographies.

This turn to sound technology as the means by which affinities across difference can be expressed is again taken up in the eighth mood, “Is it True?” where we get the poet’s seeming rebuke of the impulse to record difference, as well as the ability for particular resonances to still be broadcast and received across geographic divides. The opening stanza begins with:

FROM THE SHADOWS OF THE QUARTER	TACIT
SHOUTS ARE WHISPERS CARRYING	
TO THE FARTHEREST CORNERS SOMETIMES	
OF THE NOW KNOWN WORLD	
UNDECIPHERED AND UNLETTERED	
UNCODIFIED UNPARSED	
IN TONGUES UNANALYZED UNECHOED	
UNTAKEN DOWN ON TAPE—	
NOT EVEN FOLKWAYS CAPTURED	
BY MOE ASCH OR ALAN LOMAX (507)	

Interestingly, the next mood, “Ask Your Mama,” opens with essentially the same four lines:

FROM THE SHADOWS OF THE QUARTER
 SHOUTS ARE WHISPERS CARRYING
 TO THE FARTHEREST CORNERS
 OF THE NOW KNOWN WORLD:
 5th AND MOUND IN CINCI, 63rd IN CHI,
 23rd AND CENTRAL, 18th STREET AND VINE. (511)

¹²⁴ This reading departs from Milian’s, which characterizes the quarters as still “maintain[ing] Dinah’s invisibility and empower[ing] the white producers,” thereby extending the industry’s appropriation and exploitation of black artists (124).

Here, however, the hesitation “SOMETIMES” is absent from the third line, and we are actually supplied a list of the communities in which these whispers have finally arrived. The juxtaposition of these two iterations brings with it questions of folksong collection, translatability, racial (mis)perception, and diasporic linkage. By 1960, Folkways Records, founded by Moses Asch in 1948, had recorded an astonishing number of albums, including *Folk Music of Hungary* (1950), *Music of South Arabia* (1951), *Creole Songs of Haiti* (1954), *Bahaman Folk Guitar* (1959), and *The Topoke People of the Congo* (1959). That same year, Alan Lomax, only a few years removed from his biographical work with Big Bill Broonzy, was working through material collected from his 1959 “Southern Journey,” a trip prompted by the new stereo technology of the time.¹²⁵ In Hughes’s poem Asch’s and Lomax’s failures to capture the shouts on record signal a skepticism in the methods and technologies by which folk cultures are collected, calling to mind questions of marketed authenticity and white curation, the latter a process by which “collector and salvage ethnographer...claim to be the last to rescue ‘the real thing’” (Clifford 228).¹²⁶ As Meta DuEwa Jones has noted, “[t]hese muted articulations maintain their autonomy since they are inaccessible” (65), a sentiment that certainly resonates with Broonzy’s counterarchival project from the first chapter.

This shift from the uncaptured shouts of “Is it True?” to those arriving on US soil in “Ask Your Mama” is striking, as it turns our attention from (white) recorded failure to (black) audible trace, the poem again considering additional permutations of these distantly-connected quarters. Since its multiplication in the fourth mood, the quarter has taken on multiple resonances, with

¹²⁵ See Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World*, 316-317.

¹²⁶ Interestingly, Michael Asch, Moses Asch’s son and anthropologist at the University of Victoria, cites the same passage in his defense of his father’s work at *Folkways* in “Folkways Records and the Ethics of Collecting: Some Personal Reflections” (*MUSICultures* 34-35: 111-127).

the present shift being from “THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES” to “THE SHADOWS OF THE QUARTER.” Examining this latest iteration, the quarter might be in reference to one of the many “jukebox” quarters now linked through musical exchange, their “caged singing” having risen to cries for freedom that now carry over to the “NOW KNOWN WORLD;” or, it might be a return to a specific quarter within the US territory, the totalizing impulse perhaps returning briefly, but also mediated by the text’s focus on the shadow, here representing various iterations that exist and are now recognizable across the globe. Reading the shadow as a related trace of the American quarter resonates with earlier sections of the poem, with Hughes writing in the first mood, “IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGROES / NKRUMAH / IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGROES / NASSER NASSER / IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEGROES / ZIK AZIKIWE” (479). This early positioning of African leaders—Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria— as “in the shadow” of African Americans has an undoubted tinge of the evolutionary narrative that links diasporic communities to Africa through a rooted past, African progress dimmed in comparison to Western advancement. And while we may not entirely recuperate the connotations embedded in Hughes’s terminology, from a cosmopolitan perspective, one that has trumpeted merging boundaries and multiplying affinities grounded in a likeness of oppression, perhaps the shadow here and in “Is it True?” is simultaneously a troubling reference to a perceived comparative darkness and a straining to articulate a likeness as well, a semblance cloaked in the opacity of diasporic connection. We need only consider the string of columns Hughes devoted to African modernization in the *Defender* in 1959,¹²⁷ as well as his attendance at Nnamdi Azikiwe’s inauguration as Governor-

¹²⁷ See Hughes’s column from July-September of 1959, especially “How Europe Acquired Africa,” “Governments in Africa Today,” “Kenya: Hell in Paradise,” “Bread Not Enough in Congo,” “Africa: The Land of Apartheid,” and “Africa and Tomorrow’s World”; For a discussion of Hughes’s “African (re)turn” see Kim.

General of Nigeria in November of 1960 (three months before *Ask Your Mama* would be completed),¹²⁸ to complicate those readings of the shadow as nothing more than an evolutionary narrative doused in American exceptionalism. Instead, emphasis should be placed on the shadow's resonance with traceness and partiality, a semblance that communicates a linkage (not unlike the musical TACIT), but one that is bent in its realization. The shadow here becomes a recognizable likeness that cannot be entirely illuminated, that resembles and is forever attached but is also refracted at the very point of connection. The shadow becomes the response to the cues' call for the TACIT in the margins of the stanza: a break in the sonic assemblage where traces are still held onto, present if not entirely communicable.

This notion of the shadow as an always-already refracted affiliation then not only renders the "UNDECIPHERED AND UNLETTERED" shouts to be assertions wholly inaudible to white folklorists, but also whispers to the black communities in Chicago and Cincinnati, hushed murmurs that themselves are mere traces of the original utterance. Sound technology then, as it was with the multiplication of the "jukebox quarters," remains the optimal metaphor for this traceness in Hughes's poem. Those shouts can be circulated (via LP records, radio broadcasts, jukebox 45s, or international tours), and that circulation has real effects. But as Hughes appears to claim here as well, there are "limits to how well it can replay or create high-fidelity sound" (Jones 65). They arrive, but they also exist in traceness. What we see with the shadows and their whispers in "Is it True?" and "Ask Your Mama" is that, in both their original "untaken-down-ness" and their subsequent arrival, there is a push and pull to sound's expanded circulation, and it might also be the push and pull of diaspora and cosmopolitanism as categories of relation.

¹²⁸ In his overview of the relationship between Hughes and Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obiwu writes that at the 1960 inauguration ceremony Hughes was "honored by Zik's recitation of Hughes's poem 'Youth'" (159). Azikiwe and Hughes also only missed each other by one year in their respective studies at Lincoln University.

Shadows dim; they stretch, they disappear, and they surprise in their sudden re-emergence. As a figure articulating likeness and opacity, the shadow de-essentializes those relations communicated in the pan-Africanism or transnationalism that we might hear on key jazz records of the period. And this diasporic traceness, the opacity that attends likeness, can also be seen as cosmopolitan in its repeated staging of encounter, negotiation, and introspection. Those affiliations made audible are always subject to examination, the broadcast static and surface noise forcing re-listenings that spark shifts in relation and reassessments of those attachments thought to be permanent but that nevertheless fluctuate. The shadow here is an extension of the quarter's proliferation, only this time recognizing the partiality that undergirds any claim to full understanding. Such is the truth of all cosmopolitan experience: an altered sense of other and self that identifies new modes of attachment but is always already aware of an abiding difference.

Ask Your Mama was, by all accounts, a flop. With the exception of a few reviewers, mostly from the black press, the critical consensus was that of disenchantment and confusion.¹²⁹ But that did not stop Hughes from sharing the poem widely. He sent a copy to Bessie Head in South Africa; he read selections at the Shakespeare and Company bookshop in Paris, with Ted Joans accompanying on trumpet; and in 1962, at the US's first national poetry festival, Hughes concluded his reading with the poem's first eighty-four lines.¹³⁰ Perhaps this circulation and performance history was an attempt to give the poem the life Hughes tried to capture in its pages, to have it circulate and achieve the effects he envisioned in the text itself, all the while aware of how it might be altered as it encountered new contexts.

¹²⁹ See Rampersad 343-344.

¹³⁰ See Moore, Joans, Rampersad 357.

Despite this lack of success, I have suggested that Hughes's poem contributed to a larger discourse of expanding affinities in this moment, one that extended across aspects of the black press and the musical record. Recognizing this shared impulse to pursue new affiliations, to seek them out and to remain open to their altering affects, allows us to detect traces of cosmopolitanism circulating in this moment and inflecting its artistic production. Like Louis Armstrong's and Dave and Iola Brubeck's *The Real Ambassadors*, Hughes's particular challenge to jazz's appropriation (both by the state and by Beat artists) is really only detectable if we attend to the intermediality and aesthetic exchanges present in *Ask Your Mama*. These include the musical cues' intermingling with poetic form, and music's deployment as a referential figure whose circulation and technological reproduction determine the poem's scale of relation. But what we see in the poem is an extension beyond where *The Real Ambassadors* leaves us, an articulation of a cosmopolitanism that decenters the American state and the universalism it would espouse. New attachments proliferate and opportunities arise to revisit those that have become naturalized. Such an approach allows us to consider how cosmopolitanism might actually unfold, how an ethic of global relation—one so often delegitimized for its idealism or impracticality—can begin to take shape through the circulation and close consideration of aesthetic materials. Critics are just beginning to take seriously the cosmopolitanism in Hughes's earlier, non-poetic works.¹³¹ But given the expansion of musical production and circulation at mid-century, and recognizing Hughes's deep appreciation of and involvement in musical praxis, turning our ear to the sound technologies and musical syncretism in Hughes's poetry allows us to understand the means by which Hughes's cosmopolitanism takes shape, an aspirational experience of encounter and alteration that itself becomes a form of radical relationality.

¹³¹ See Tolliver, M'Baye.

Of course, within three months of Hughes finishing the *Ask Your Mama* manuscript, Alan Shepard became the first American to fly to space. The first spacewalk would occur four years later, in 1965, and in 1969 Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. If cosmopolitanism involved exchange and altering attachments, what might this turn to the *cosmic* have in store? What new ontologies or visions of belonging would become imaginable, and how might they continue to push beyond the cultural and political paradigms still dominating the Cold War US? As the space age ramped up, so too did the cosmic doctrine of bandleader and poet Sun Ra. It is to his vision of belonging we now turn, one carefully crafted for the “Cosmic-Cosmo-Tomorrow” (“Truth Is” 398).

CHAPTER FOUR

Synthesizing Sounds: Vibration, Poetry, and Belonging in Sun Ra's Space Age

In his 1966 essay “The Changing Same: (R&B and New Black Music),” Amiri Baraka claims that the rich variety of black musical forms, from the spirituals to the “New Thing,” is really a continuum of shared cultural expression. He writes, the “differences between the rhythm and blues and the so-called new music or art jazz . . . are artificial, or they are merely indicative of the different placements of spirit” (189). Baraka reads an essential source in this diverse music, a “blues impulse” that “through its many changes . . . remained the exact replication of *The Black Man In The West*” (180). Blues, gospel, Motown, Southern soul, they all carried a “musical energy” that could be brought together as the varied sounds of a changing though still very much linked community (Werner 120). In sketching this “changing same,” Baraka believed that Sun Ra, the bandleader and avant-garde jazz artist who has since become a forefather of Afrofuturist thought,¹³² was an anchoring presence in this politico-musical tapestry: “There are other new musicians, new music, that take freedom as already being . . . Sun-Ra’s is a new content for jazz, for Black music, but it is merely, again, the spiritual defining itself” (198-199). Here, perhaps the most significant figure in the Black Arts Movement absorbs Sun Ra’s sound

¹³² As the name suggests, Afrofuturism is a genre and field of thought that imagines a futurity with blackness at its center. Ytasha Womack writes, Afrofuturism “combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magical realism with non-Western beliefs. In some cases, it’s a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques” (9). Working at the intersection of race and speculation, Afrofuturism also, as Reynaldo Anderson claims, “destabilizes previous analysis of blackness” (qtd. in Womack 16).

into his musical vision, Ra's music heard as a mystically-inclined, new-age iteration of an ever-unfolding essence in black musical expression.¹³³

At the same time that Baraka was enlisting Sun Ra's music into his Black Arts program, the US government's international radio agency Voice of America frequently featured Sun Ra's music on its nightly jazz show *Music USA*. Specifically designed for international audiences thought to be vulnerable to Communist persuasion, the program refused to discuss the politics surrounding avant-garde jazz, meaning Sun Ra's sound was simultaneously incorporated into procedures of Cold War containment and cultural diplomacy. As biographer John Szwed writes of Ra's airtime on *Music USA*, "Sun Ra was becoming a weapon in the Cold War" (217). But these moments of musical mishearing extend beyond the US state department; instances abound of Sun Ra deviating from the accepted political trajectories of the black freedom movement as well. In 1971, just a year before filming his experimental science fiction film *Space is the Place*, Sun Ra was evicted from a house in Oakland owned by the Black Panthers due to an "ideological split."¹³⁴ In 1977 at the World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, the Arkestra was not permitted to march in the final parade because Sun Ra "would not agree to give the raised fist salute of Black Power" (Szwed 342). Constellating Sun Ra's activity across these political divides reveals how the sounds that emanated from Ra and his band came to both signify and struggle against the state's Cold War liberal project *and* a uniquely black particularity. As Willis Conover, the host of *Music USA* wrote, "Who is Sun Ra? Who is he really? Where does he come from . . . Sun Ra's answer is less than exact, but more than real. He

¹³³ Iain Anderson describes the free jazz artists Baraka cites—Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, Pharaoh Sanders—as the "mystical and intellectual religion" contingent of Baraka's vision, a "spiritual source of all black music unit[ing] the disparate forms" and thus inscribing someone like Sun Ra into black music's changing same (150).

¹³⁴ As Sun Ra himself stated, "we got kicked out by Eldridge Cleaver or somebody" (qtd. in Szwed 330).

answers without facts, but with truth. He answers without words, but with sound. Who is Sun Ra? The answer is in his music” (qtd. in Breckenridge 82). According to Conover, to simply hear Sun Ra’s music—increasingly avant-garde and electronic by the late sixties—is to understand him, his complex cosmological message conveyed through the otherworldly sounds of his Arkestra.

This chapter suggests that Conover’s claim, striking though it is, is a mischaracterization of Sun Ra’s process and political project. Competing discourses around race and freedom were incorporating Sun Ra’s sound into their programs, often to the detriment of Ra’s own vision. His music was simultaneously drafted into a continuum of distinctly black musicality as well as a jazz history prized and positioned as quintessentially American. It was heard as a bulwark against white contamination, and as freedom for Communist-leaning countries. It was a black nationalist cry and a harbinger of American democracy. The trouble here is that Conover sets up a contrast between word and sound that Sun Ra never adhered to. In an essay written for *The Cricket* in 1968, Ra writes, “My words are music and the music is words but sometimes the music is of the unsaid words concerning the things that always are to be” (469). For him, these aesthetic modes are inseparable and mutual constituted, highlighting the intermediality of Sun Ra’s thinking as well. As Brent Hayes Edwards writes of the essay, “music . . . is conceived as the ultimate extension of poetics, a mode of articulating what is presently ‘impossible’ or ‘unsaid’ in words alone” (*Epistrophies* 132). Indeed, in his poem “Of Coordinate Vibrations,” Sun Ra writes, “Music is a voice / A differential sound of words. / A grammar and a language / As well as a synthesizer” (262). But what if, to invert Edwards claim, Sun Ra’s *poetry* is the ultimate extension of his music, or at least the message misheard and mistaken time and again?

Or better yet, where do we arrive when we allow both modes to intermingle, to allow the performative possibilities of one to inform how we begin to understand the other?

As this dissertation has shown so far, African American artists navigated a tight representational space during the Cold War. While various vernacular forms became staples of a multifaceted US self-conception during the 1950s and 1960s, black artists turned to forms of intermediality and aesthetic mixing both to disturb the parameters of this music, and to also resignify the particular racialist visions that defined these musical traditions. As the 1960s carried on, Sun Ra's work reveals that the dialectic struggle between Cold War whiteness and Black Power did not exhaust the terrain of possibilities for black life and expressive culture. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, when his music was taken up in complex and even contradictory ways, Sun Ra published his first two collections of poetry and obtained a critical new weapon for his musical arsenal: the newly-invented analog synthesizer. Armed with an instrument whose source of sound was entirely electronic and that truly *sounded* electronic, Sun Ra's music could now more immediately launch into the future. And while his poetry was previously scattered across LP covers, performance programs, and broadsheets, these new collections allowed for a fresh packaging of his ideas. Couple this with *Space is the Place*, and Sun Ra's work becomes a remarkable catalog that extends across multiple aesthetic and political platforms. I follow both Brent Hayes Edwards and Paul Youngquist in taking these writings seriously, not only as innovative moments of sight poetry and sonic-linguistic manipulation, but as extensions of his musical message and elaborations of his unique socio-political philosophy. While dramatically opposed movements and institutions along the Cold War spectrum deployed Sun Ra's music to express their own political aspirations, the "man from Saturn" was developing new sounds and new aesthetic modes to articulate his own divergent vision of belonging.

Working across these multiple vectors of aesthetic innovation and political contestation, this chapter charts Sun Ra's vision by seeking to answer the following questions: how can we characterize Sun Ra's philosophy on being and belonging in a moment when blackness and black-authored sounds were simultaneously instrumentalized in the service of liberal democracy and strategically essentialized as a marker of black politics? Can we reconcile Sun Ra's commitment to Afrofuturist ontologies that extend beyond Earth-bound categories of race with his real-world activities, political aspirations, and aesthetic practices that are rooted in the particulars of black experience? And as an extension of the previous chapters' concerns, what do we gain not only when literature is taken up as a discursive response to musical mishearing, but also when we allow musical performance to inform our reading practices?

To answer these questions I return to a key term just seen in "Of Coordinate Vibrations," the synthesizer, and I use it both as a descriptor of Sun Ra's artistic process—one of re-appropriation and amalgamation¹³⁵—and as a metaphor of entanglement, a representative figure for how difference might come together without succumbing to sameness. As an instrument, the synthesizer generates, reshapes, and combines signals of different frequencies into a complete sound, thereby synthesizing "an array of sonic components in[to] . . . a harmonic whole" (Burke 188). It was a major instrument for Sun Ra and his Arkestra, and he is widely cited as one of the earliest artists to adopt its new sounds into popular music.¹³⁶ The synthesizer would also enjoy a prominent place on the control panel for Sun Ra's spaceship in *Space is the Place*, the instrument tasked with transporting bodies to a new planet and way of life. As Daniel Steinskog claims,

¹³⁵ Daniel Kreiss makes a similar point, describing Sun Ra's project as appropriating "technological artifacts and rhetoric" from the US space program and its aspirations, repurposing technologies and metaphors in the service of his own liberation model.

¹³⁶ Sun Ra acquired a preproduction model of the Minimoog synthesizer in 1969 and incorporated it on the second side of *My Brother the Wind, Vol. II*, as well as *The Solar Myth Approach, Vols. I and II*. It was also featured in performances in France and the UK in 1970.

“[t]he importance of synthesizers for Sun Ra’s sonic future cannot be overstated” (195). In one sense, the synthesizer models how to maneuver through Sun Ra’s work. Ra notably drew from theories as diverse as Egyptology, “spiritual science,” contemporary black literature and black folklore, 19th century Theosophy, gnosticism, and the Bible.¹³⁷ The synthesizer allows us to read across the multiple registers of Ra’s thinking, recognizing how he would re-tune these diverse philosophies so they might “vibrate” together on a similar frequency. Working across the musical, poetic, and filmic registers of Sun Ra’s work—in a way synthesizing our critical objects and reading practices—we can begin to understand the ideas coalescing in this moment for him, ideas which Ra sharpened and solidified as he shuttled across aesthetic divides.

More than a crystallization of method though, the synthesizer becomes a metaphor for relationality. Sun Ra would often describe people as music, as instruments or vibrations, the likes of which could be profoundly affected, even realigned: “My music does have a vibration somewhere within it that can reach every person in the audience through feeling” (qtd. in Szwed 345). As Kodwo Eshun writes, “Ra hears humans as instruments, sound generators played by the music they listen to” (161). In a noteworthy scene from *Space is the Place* Ra claimed, “[t]he people have no music that is in coordination with their spirits. Because of this, they’re out of tune with the universe.” I slightly adjust Eshun’s claim to suggest that Ra hears humans not just as instruments but as *vibration*, the likes of which are capable of adjustment and coordination within a synthesizing practice. For Sun Ra, people were not just out of tune with the universe; they were out of tune with each other. The synthesizer “filters” Ra’s emphasis on vibration as an aspect of ontology through a logic that models belonging as practices of coordination, of different “pitches” or “frequencies” cut and combined, even changed. And if Sun Ra posits

¹³⁷ See Edwards, *Epistrophies* 134; Szwed, *Space is the Place* 62-73, 294-299.

vibration as an ontological foundation, then the synthesizer lays bare the artist's ultimate desire: to explore what might lie beyond an exclusively identity-based affiliation, to privilege orientation and entanglement as divergent modes of belonging.

At a time of heightening calls for black particularity and affiliation along identity-lines, Sun Ra's writing turns instead to questions of (re)alignment and collaborative potential. Just as the synthesizer has the means to bring different frequencies into a more complex whole, Ra pursues what I call *synthesized belonging*, where a person's frequencies can be altered, and if not completely changed then at least bound together as an "other otherness." In this way, Sun Ra re-theorizes the tactics of musical suasion that defined Voice of America's duties as the sonic arm of the American state, while also redefining the essence that drove discussions of blackness and avant-garde jazz. Through the synthesizer, Ra's commitment to vibration, coordination, and music's transformational power becomes increasingly legible, as does his place within the tangled web of Cold War politics and black liberation.

I begin by briefly surveying two camps into which Sun Ra's music was drafted: Amiri Baraka's Black Arts vision and the multiculturalism depicted in Voice of America's *Music USA* radio program. Oscillating between these two projects, I track the concurrent discourses into which Sun Ra's music was drawn, discourses that he would reinvent in his own work. Tracing the ideological terrain his music traveled allows us to chart not only how music continued to be drafted into discussions of black politics and Cold War integration simultaneously, but also the stakes of Sun Ra's own interventions into questions of liberation and cultural belonging. I then turn to Sun Ra's poetry to examine how his work destabilizes conventional concepts of blackness through linguistic play and permutation. Sun Ra deliberately reinscribes and obscures blackness as a sign, defining it as anything from color and light to political affiliation, vibration, space, and

spirit. By multiplying blackness's meaning Sun Ra attempts to unsettle identity frameworks coalescing around the term, the likes of which he understood as relying on separatist or essentialized understandings. Teasing out and tracing Sun Ra's compounding definitions of blackness across his poems, we see the artist grapple with conventional identity categories, his own Afrofuturist vision simultaneously centering blackness while reimagining its contours.

If, as Sun Ra suggests, sound becomes the base property of being, then there are repercussions for our capacity for belonging in the age of synthesized sounds. The second half of the chapter briefly overviews how the synthesizer came to inform Sun Ra's musical performance and aesthetic practice, and how, along with his vision of bodies as vibration, the instrument can be abstracted into a new model for collectivity. I then return to his poetry, where this synthesized belonging receives its clearest expression, the instrument's practice of tuning and recombining intermedially translated and performed on the page. While this organizational logic—moving from poetry to music and then back to poetry—sacrifices a linear progression of thought, I hope that by moving in such a way we can see how the synthesizer aids in Sun Ra's shift from conventional categories of race toward a more dynamic collectivity. Tracing the vision Sun Ra crafted across various aesthetic modes, this chapter attempts to untangle Ra's dual project: to destabilize blackness as a contained and instrumentalizable category of affiliation and to offer an alternative vision of socio-political belonging.

Sun Ra and the Avant-Garde: Essential Black Sound or Cold War Weapon

By 1962, around the time Sun Ra and his Arkestra made a home for themselves in the East Village, the area had become a central hub for the burgeoning jazz avant-garde (Szwed

195).¹³⁸ Musicians like Ornette Coleman, Archie Schepp, and Cecil Taylor were experimenting with collective improvisation, time suspension, and freedom from harmonic structures and chord progressions. This expansive freedom came to define Sun Ra's performance both on and off the stage. He could be seen marching around the city in his stage clothes, "a short, loose robe and a skullcap emblazoned with occult symbols" (Szwed 183). Describing a show from that year, Szwed tells of a performance that included "recitations and chanted songs, a chorus of rhythm instruments surfacing under piercing flute solos, a furiously bowed bass, threatening bottom-heavy ensembles of horns, and weaving through it all, Sun Ra, moving about the stage conducting, carrying the flying saucer or using his cape as a prop" (191). In short, the Village's bohemianism seemed to suit Sun Ra and his bandmates. Around this time he would meet LeRoi Jones, already an established presence in the Village scene and who would come to describe Sun Ra as a "silent partner" in the impending movement: in his essay "Meanings of Nationalism," Jones appears to cite texts given to him by Sun Ra; Ra was part of the lineup for the benefit to raise money for the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School in Harlem; and the Arkestra performed music for *A Black Mass* when it opened in Newark in May 1966 (by which time Jones had changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka).¹³⁹ In his autobiography, Baraka describes Sun Ra as the "resident philosopher" of the Black Arts Movement (qtd. in Edwards 130). And as the avant-garde's connection to racial politics became clearer in Baraka's vision, Sun Ra became a constitutive figure in its unfolding.

¹³⁸ Sun Ra was born Herman Poole Blount on May 22, 1914, and developed the nickname "Sonny" as a young musician in the 1930s (Szwed 25). In the 1950s he began to experiment with the name "Sonny Ra," after the ancient Egyptian Sun god. On October 20, 1952 he changed his name to Le Sony'r Ra in the Circuit Court of Cooke County, Illinois, with Sun Ra the "abbreviated form for practical purposes" (83).

¹³⁹ See Szwed, *Space is the Place* 209-211.

As “the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept” (Neal, “Black Arts”), the Black Arts Movement was not only committed to an independent blackness isolated from a contaminating white power structure,¹⁴⁰ but it also adopted a critical and literary embrace of music to achieve this end. Baraka published *Blues People* in 1963 and *Black Music* in 1967; Larry Neal’s “Black Boogaloo: Notes on Black Liberation” (1969) devoted a section to black musicians, calling on them to “combine energy” and issue “wild screaming sounds” as a means of mobilizing; and the “Coltrane poem”—a phenomenon in which poets celebrated, eulogized, or drew formal inspiration from the famed saxophonist—took off as a distinct genre of work. As Jason Robinson suggests, black music became a metonym for black identity as a whole.¹⁴¹ In the wake of both the jazz tours and Beat appropriation, Baraka and others coordinated a response to legacies of musical appropriation—the “constant minstrel need, the derogation of the real” (“Changing Same” 205)—while also vaunting avant-garde jazz as a revolutionary tool for a revised black consciousness.

Black Arts was not unique in its adoption of avant-garde jazz as a political and ideological weapon. In addition to the jazz tours, which since their inception in 1956 were almost a yearly staple of the State Department’s cultural programming, Voice of America (VOA) launched *Music USA* in 1955.¹⁴² Hosted by Willis Conover and broadcast over short-wave radio

¹⁴⁰ As Howard Brick writes, Black Arts was “a distinct black aesthetic that would embrace African traditions of communalism and spiritualism in struggle against a debased white or Western culture” (Brick 107).

¹⁴¹ Black music having a central core obviously appealed to Baraka, who tasked himself with developing a black aesthetic apart from white culture, but it also resulted in a tightly delimiting category within which artists could function. The artists themselves—John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Sun Ra—were not always in sync with the project Baraka and others were crafting. Jason Robinson catalogs these divergences: “Coltrane’s apprehension to addressing specific political concerns in his music, Coleman’s plea for transcendence, Sun Ra’s sci-fi mysticism, the Aylers’ spiritualism, and other examples show that the musicians were not limited to any unifying narrative proposed by Black Arts writers” (30).

¹⁴² VOA, the US government’s international radio agency, was launched in 1942 as part of the Office of War Information. It later moved to the State Department where, for the duration of the Cold War, it served as “the nation’s ideological arm of anticommunism” (Krugler 1).

to exclusively international audiences, *Music USA* aired nightly to over eighty countries in its first year alone. It quickly became one of the most popular shows broadcast by Voice of America, with the Egyptian weekly *Al Zaa* claiming that “Conover’s daily program has won the United States more friends than any other daily activity” (qtd. in Von Eschen, *Satchmo* 14). But unlike the jazz tours, *Music USA* gave consistent airtime to the avant-garde, and while the percentages would fluctuate over the years, the late sixties saw more airtime than ever given to the “New Thing.”

As musicologist Mark Breckenridge has shown, Conover’s show played a crucial role in disseminating the avant-garde sound internationally.¹⁴³ Significantly, listeners overseas were sheltered from the political resonances and critiques that the avant-garde was subject to here in the US, and Conover was intent on keeping it that way. Breckenridge writes, “By presenting avant-garde jazz to overseas listeners without value-laden descriptions, Conover dealt with avant-garde music simply by providing airtime for the music. As opposed to his colleagues in the jazz community in the United States, he presented avant-garde jazz as a component of the jazz narrative, and not in accordance with political sentiments” (76). Conover’s objectivity, his willingness to let the “music speak for itself,” ultimately kept the new music on air. But by neutralizing the discursive space around the avant-garde sound, programs like Conover’s were able to firmly lodge it within the US political project. And as with Baraka’s mission, Sun Ra became a staple in Conover’s avant-garde lineup. He was the fourth most frequently-played avant-garde artist between 1962 and 1969, behind Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Roland Kirk. In 1967, the same year Baraka published *Black Music*, Ra was the “most frequently aired artist in the avant-garde category” (Breckenridge 217). Still, Conover’s reluctance to sketch any

¹⁴³ Breckenridge’s work on Voice of America and the avant-garde is one of the few projects devoted to Conover and his radio programming during the Cold War.

descriptive or sociopolitical context for his audience is striking. By divorcing it from everything else Sun Ra designed as accompaniment—the choreography and “cosmic flash and the glitter” (Szwed 191), but also the poetry recitations and verse he included on his album covers—*Music USA* sanitized Sun Ra’s message while still painting it into a Cold War corner.¹⁴⁴ By celebrating jazz’s “diversity” as its “universal effectiveness and potency” (235), Conover was able to incorporate it under the cloak of American integrationism, thereby situating Sun Ra as a figure who “sustained the ideological connection between jazz and democracy” (233).

What becomes clear in surveying these competing approaches to the avant-garde, and Sun Ra’s music specifically, is the tight representational space within which Sun Ra operated in the late sixties. In reading these contexts together I am not suggesting they were equal axes of (mis)representation when it came to Sun Ra’s work. The Black Arts Movement, shortcomings or no, had as its aim the radical re-defining and re-centering of black cultural life. Institutions like Voice of America provided cosmetic celebrations of black cultural production while rescripting their objectives and redirecting their political potential to align with state aspirations. Still, as the seventies approached Ra’s music could be heard as a cog in two very different political machines, as a signifier of essential blackness and as the sound of an America whose diversity could give way to universalism, with assimilation and color-blindness its stated goals. What we see in both Baraka’s Black Arts project and the US state’s international programming are discordant reimagings of the discursive space around blackness and black musical production. That Sun Ra’s music was drawn into both camps reveals a mishearing of the artist himself. His refusal to fit into a singular mold rendered his work ideologically flexible, which left it

¹⁴⁴ Breckenridge admits the incompatibilities between Sun Ra’s spiritual philosophy and the objectives of Voice of America, but he credits Conover’s impartiality and refusal to contextualize Ra’s music as the driving factor in the maintenance of this union.

susceptible to misinterpretation. And yet, rather than pivot away from sound as a framework and strategy, Sun Ra reimagines its capacity in the poetry he was writing in this moment, a shift in modality that reveals his complex investment in blackness's expanded contours and its capacity as a category of belonging. In short, if his music was subject to mishearing, perhaps his poetry could offer clarification as to where exactly he stood amid the period's ever-heightening politics of affiliation.

“What of these blacks and black?” Sun Ra’s Poetry and the Question of Identity

For all the critical attention Sun Ra has received in recent years his poetry is frequently overlooked, often deemed either too formally unsophisticated, too didactic, or just too *out there* to warrant close consideration. But Sun Ra was a prolific poet and his work had a small circulation at the time of its writing.¹⁴⁵ And while cataloging the varied themes of Sun Ra's writing can be difficult, several traits become clear across his body of work. As Brent Hayes Edwards describes, Sun Ra's poetry could often be campy, but in other moments overwhelmingly didactic. Some pieces serve as philosophical ruminations, while others have a bent toward the prophetic, even taking the form of a jeremiad. Many display his tendency toward mysticism or a “numinous naturalism” (Edwards 136-138), and they often display an aversion toward oppositions (sacred/secular, absence/presence, black/white).¹⁴⁶ But a constant throughout is Sun Ra's commitment to “the universality of music” (Szwed 320-321), and not just music but *sound*; many of the poems explicitly investigate sound's phonetic, material, and metaphysical

¹⁴⁵ Several pieces were included in Neal's and Baraka's Black Arts anthology *Black Fire* (1968); a piece of prose was included in *The Cricket* that same year; a few selections were even included in the *Black Umbra* anthology (1967-1968).

¹⁴⁶ Szwed talks of Sun Ra's desire to erase or blur all oppositions when describing his propensity for indirect and obscure interviews, but the impulse applies to his writing as well (*Space is the Place* 346).

properties in order to experiment and proliferate the possibilities for signification. Edwards describes Sun Ra's writing as a "poetics of recombination," a type of sight poetry that displays a focused attention to phonetic variation (145). As Sun Ra himself claims, "The phonetic dimension of words / The multi-self of words / Is energy for thought." His focus on how "sound inheres in the written word" is thus linked to his attempt to "[spell] something new and different, mankind's 'alter-destiny,' walking a tightrope between sign and speech" (152-153). Paul Youngquist similarly highlights Sun Ra's deference to sound as a manipulation of language's meaning, describing how his poetry "identifies and undoes the confusion that language inflicts" (88). Words are permuted so that different meanings can be smuggled in through similarities in sound. Describing his own process, Ra states, "[i]f you mix two chemical products you produce a reaction. In the same way, if you put together certain words you'll obtain a reaction which will have a value for people on this planet . . . To put words together . . . to paint the image that is necessary to put out the vibrations that we need, that would change the destiny of the whole planet" (qtd. in Szwed 319-320). Drawing on these approaches, I travel across several of Sun Ra's poems to reveal the effects of these linguistic permutations and variations on blackness as a category, one simultaneously centered and exceeded in Sun Ra's writings.

We see the beginnings of such a process in "The Cosmo Man," published in *Extensions Out*, volume II of Sun Ra's poetry collection *The Immeasurable Equation* (1972). The poem is two stanzas long, totaling nineteen lines, and it calls for the reader to "Get on the Cosmo train" a "word-express" that ostensibly shuttles passengers to a different way of thinking. Ra begins the second stanza with a truism: "night is night and day is day / And black is blackness every way . . ." But after calling for passengers to again board the Cosmo train, which we are told is "darker than the night," he writes:

Eyes that see always the light
 Is not accustomed to the night
 For night is night and day is day
 And light is light
 But rays of light are sometimes dark,
 And lights of dark are sometimes black.
 The schedule speaks to the Cosmo Man
 Run while you can. (116)

The second stanza expands from the tautological (night is night, black is blackness) to complicate the very terms that from the outset are taken for granted. “Light is light,” but rays of light are “sometimes dark;” black is blackness, but sometimes black is composed of “lights of dark.” The Cosmo train, as a “word-express,” repurposes spatial movement and interstellar travel as a site of play and linguistic unraveling. In Sun Ra’s hands, moving forward in the poem also means that words begin to express alternative characteristics, the “express” no longer a fixed route connoting rapidity but a practice of linguistic dispersal, transit giving way to transition, proliferation. The Cosmo train in effect “trains” its readers to embrace multiplicity in their perception of light. Eyes that “see always” one thing are taught, via this linguistic propulsion, to see that light is light, light is dark, and light is black. The poem privileges blackness in its progressive destabilization of “light,” but in doing so it also infuses it with additional significance. “The Cosmo Man” displays some of the previously outlined tenets of Sun Ra’s poetry: destabilization, redefinition, and phonetic play and permutation.

This notion of the “word-express” as guided passage to multiplicity takes on particular significance with regard to Ra’s evolving definition of blackness across his collected poems. In “Freedom Versus Black Freedom,” published in *The Immeasurable Equation* (1972), we open with the following three lines: “What of planet freedom? / Of black freedom planet? / Or planet black freedom?” (178). These three lines might be read as different iterations of political or identitarian allegiance, moving from a site of abstract liberal freedom to a planet that permits

black freedom specifically, ultimately to one that appears entirely constituted by its devotion to black liberation. This progressive movement away from planets only promoting freedom in the abstract resonates with the trope of “planetary exile” Ramzi Fawaz identifies in *Space is the Place* and other works of Afrofuturist cinema, the characters’ willful relocation to space representing “the search for another planet on which to produce a culture free of the racism, genocidal mania, and hierarchical economic systems advanced by Eurocentrism and Western imperialism” (“Space” 1103). But the fourth line of the poem continues to confound these categories: “What of these blacks and black?” The conjunction seems to at once bridge a colloquial, albeit reductive, identity category with abstraction, while at the same time distinguishing the capacity for swift interpellation (“these blacks”) from an as-yet-undefined category of blackness that includes and supersedes it. The rest of the poem continues:

There is not only a negro problem
 There is a world problem
 A world within a circle
 That tightens with every breath that earth breathes
 A world problem
 Because the problem is not in tune
 with the Spiral. (178)

In privileging a planetary scale, Sun Ra at first glance appears to link himself with other nationalist and postcolonial thinkers who read resonances across international divides where freedom struggles are unfolding. Indeed, this might help explain the turn to a blackness beyond “these blacks.” But still detectable is an impulse to move beyond these resonances as well, the title turning our attention to a freedom other than “black freedom,” and the proliferating terms for a shared planetary context—world, earth, circle, spiral—suggesting an entanglement that exceeds the domain of any identity location. Recall that during this period Sun Ra had quite a few misgivings about the trajectory of the black freedom movement. Even during the 1950s,

several of Sun Ra's Chicago broadsheets stated his censure and rejection of the black community, what appeared to be a form of internalized racism now considered "a political rejection of the old, conciliatory label of racial community, and the demand for its replacement with an adequately righteous term of self-determination" (Edwards, *Epistrophies* 143-144). And yet, the speaker in "Freedom Versus Black Freedom" still relies on images of US black suffering (lynching) to articulate this world problem ("a circle / That tightens with every breath"). The poem then attempts to abstract freedom from the local conditions that call for it, while still retaining the particularized trauma of racial violence as a descriptor of global distress. This might be an early response to what Wendy Brown would call the "wounded attachments" of identity politics, with marginalized groups' pursuit of political recognition defined by or entrenched within the historical harms they seek justice for. For Sun Ra, the history of racial struggle is repetition, a cycle (circle) that repeats and in repeating remains closed: "Man has not chanced to realize / The snares of liberty are supervised" ("The Spiral Way" 358). The speaker in "Freedom Versus Black Freedom" attempts to propel forward from conventional categories of affiliation and political striving, and yet still possesses a yearning to bear witness to histories of antiblackness that have yet to be redressed, to let them guide but not overdetermine his trajectory. From "these blacks" to "black;" from the circle to the spiral. Sun Ra's ability to propel forward while also looking back allows him to "discursively forg[e] an alternative future" (Brown 408), while also recalling those wounds as traumas that have yet to be rectified and indeed remain. Sun Ra can be heard struggling to disentangle himself from the definitional work of Black Arts and Black Power, while still attending to the discrimination and violence they combat.

As the “word-express” demands, blackness continues to permutate across Sun Ra’s collected works, beyond color in “The Cosmo Man” or cultural and political identity in “Freedom Versus Black Freedom.” In “The Black Rays Race,” a short seven-line poem, Ra begins, “See how the black rays of the black race / Have touched the immeasurable wisdom.” We are told that they are “not understood” and that “what they know is what they are,” with the final line reading, “See the unlimited freedom of the black rays” (83). Again we have sonic permutation, “black race” giving way to “black rays.” In “My Music is Words,” Sun Ra described how there are “different orders of being” and that “no order has a right to infringe upon the rights of another order of being, for each order has its own way and weigh of being . . . just as each color has its own vibration My measurement of race is rate of vibration-beams . . . rays Hence the black rays is a simple definition of itself/phonetic revelation” (467, ellipses in original). The language here sets up distinctions based on color, with each said to have its own vibration. But as he showed in “The Cosmo Man,” there are slippages in these distinctions. Nevertheless, across these two pieces Sun Ra conjoins a near-homophone that envisions blackness as energy emission, as distance traveled, as movement and vibration. In the penultimate line he also collapses ontology and epistemology (“what they know is what they are”). If the “black rays” have touched “the immeasurable wisdom, then the “black rays/race” itself, in Sun Ra’s estimation, exceeds conventional hailing or bodily containment; it is immeasurable. As Youngquist writes of the poem, a “limiting social distinction unfurls to unlimited freedom,” black Americans “becom[ing] a power source, beaming a wisdom that exceeds social confinement” (195).

“The Outer Darkness” continues along these lines. Two versions of the poem were published in 1972, one per volume, the former nineteen lines, the latter twenty. Version one

opens with “Black is space: THE OUTER DARKNESS / the void direction to the heavens” (294). The poem moves from descriptions of space to descriptions of music, ultimately linking the two: “music of the outer darkness is / the music of the void.” Ostensibly about outer space, it is telling that the line reads “Black is space,” not “space is black.” This connection between black, space, and the void again suggests a vision of blackness as open possibility rather than identity as such. As he writes in line nine, “The opening is the void,” which might move us away from a reading of the void as an emptiness caused by loss, and instead as a space of sheer potential. If black is space and space is void, then it is a void of possibility, a void with “direction.” The second version doubles down on this discussion of blackness beyond celestial space, turning explicitly to discussions of race. The speaker describes intergalactic music as the music of “the greater Blackness,” as “Black Infinity” and “Natural Black Music.” But while the latter phrase appears to fall back into the language of Black Arts, the eleventh line displays a turn of sorts:

And he who is not Black in spirit will never know
That these words are true and valid forever.
I speak of different kind of Blackness, the kind
That the world does not know, the kind that the world
Will never understand
It is rhythm against rhythm in kind dispersion
It is harmony against harmony in endless coordination
It is melody against melody in vital enlightenment
And something else and more (295)

This language of the “spirit” resonates with Baraka’s “changing same.”¹⁴⁷ At the same time, the speaker expresses an explicit desire to push beyond conventionally accepted understandings like Baraka’s, or even those perceived as legible and serviceable to the state. And yet he adopts the same strategy as Baraka to do so: through a turn to music. Instead of particular genres or styles,

¹⁴⁷ “The differences between rhythm and blues and the so-called new music or art jazz . . . are merely indicative of the different placements of spirit” (189).

the speaker describes interlocking rhythms, harmonies, and melodies, the likes of which struggle against one another, come together, disperse, and ultimately contribute to further ways of thinking. In this way Sun Ra continues to experiment with blackness as a multiplicitous sign. It is: identity, energy, movement, spirit, and in this instance, music.¹⁴⁸ And while it has the familiar tinge of immanence in the reduction of blackness to musicality, the speaker's insistent striving to challenge familiar associations should give us pause. In another poem, published on the record jacket of the 1966 release *When Angels Speak of Love*, Sun Ra tells of angels "[s]ynchronizing the rays of black darkness / Into visible being" ("When Angels Speak" 423). Here again it is not blackness but black darkness; not race but rays. Sun Ra does not necessarily dispel with essence—it is still rhythm, still "rate of vibration-beams"—but he moves the measurement beyond the body as such. Color distinctions are disputed. Bodies are superseded by "spirit" and vibration. Where he ultimately lands is unclear: it is identity, but also something more. It both precedes visible distinction and can be abstracted well beyond it. It demands individualist freedom at the same time that it troubles the capacity to claim it. And it rejects historical grounding, while still holding onto the trauma that cannot be contained by history.

What we are left with in Ra's poetry is a destabilization of blackness as a written sign, and perhaps by extension as a delineated racial category, even as the poems display an unmistakable centering of this very concept. Such an approach resonates with the abstractionist aesthetic that Phillip Brian Harper describes, which "invites us to question the 'naturalness' not only of the aesthetic production but also of the social facts to which it alludes, thereby opening them to active and potentially salutary revision" (3). While the question arises as to whether this is a project of definition or obfuscation, blackness remains at the core of Sun Ra's writings. In

¹⁴⁸ As Youngquist notes, "Sun Ra changes the race game from skin tone to sound tone" (192).

other poems he writes that “All that surrounds is black,” and that “[t]he blackout is the reign of the blackness” (“The Desperate Soul,” “Fabricate”). This commitment characterizes his larger vision and performance: pharaonic attire, biblical hermeneutics that reinterpret scripture through a black lens,¹⁴⁹ predominantly black bandmates. But the specificity of Ra’s definitions (blackness as light, as politics, as vibration, space, or spirit) is perhaps less important than what is revealed in his refusal to allow them to coalesce. As the freedom movement began to splinter and integration gave way to strategic division and separatism, as questions of essence and Afrocentricity took shape, self-determination was very clearly a central aspect of black life. And as we saw in his disagreements with various political factions, Sun Ra was committed to this principle to the nth degree; he was averse to anything he perceived as ideological containment or identitarian conscription. Sun Ra’s refusal to engage in coherent term-setting, his willingness to destabilize the very category that his contemporaries were struggling to solidify, should be read as a conscious, if not always clear intervention. But it should not be read as quietism, acquiescence, or abstraction for abstraction’s sake. As world builder, Sun Ra can be said to at once challenge tidy systems of meaning and in doing so allow multiple understandings of blackness to aggregate and disperse, in effect engulfing all aspects of social life.

And yet, such a project—one that challenges a fixed site for blackness and infuses it with shifting, overlapping meanings—means that the clean connections of identity-based affiliation, the type that in this moment might rely on clear, stable terms, are undermined. What type of engagement would remain? Could belonging be rearticulated? Taking our cues from Sun Ra and shuttling back across aesthetic divides, the answers reside in the electronic instrument taking off

¹⁴⁹ Szwed describes some of Sun Ra’s lectures at Berkeley as “the application of ancient history and religious texts to racial problems,” and “radical reinterpretation[s] of the Bible in light of Egyptology” (295).

at the time. In Sun Ra's hands, the new analog synthesizer underscores vibration as essence and translates the state's efforts to musically sway international listeners into a useable strategy for vibratory (re)alignment and an entangled collectivity. That this synthesizing practice would soon become traceable in Sun Ra's poetry also makes a fuller understanding of the instrument's role in his creative arsenal all the more crucial.

From Identity to Entanglement: Synthesizing Vibrations

At their core synthesizers are sound generators, electronic instruments that produce and combine signals of different frequencies into a complete sound. When an object oscillates it produces vibrations, both base vibrations and overtones that fluctuate at higher frequencies. A synthesizer produces and sculpts these sounds, subtracting certain frequencies, amplifying others.¹⁵⁰ The first voltage-controlled Moog synthesizers were released around 1965 (Vail 17), and they had discrete sections, or modules, that reflected the different stages of sound synthesis (i.e., oscillation, amplification, filtration¹⁵¹). Typically when an object oscillates to produce sound, it generates a "large primary vibration" called a *fundamental*, as well as a number of "smaller, suboscillations higher than the fundamental frequency." All these vibrations, including the fundamental, are called *partials*, and those vibrations that are of a higher frequency than the fundamental are called *overtones* (Shepard 40). With Moog synthesizers, these oscillator-produced waveforms could be modulated and filtered to craft more interesting sounds (Pinch & Trocco 17). For much of the 1960s, the synthesizer fit squarely in the territory of experimental music or Hollywood special effects, but with increasing availability and exposure, not to mention

¹⁵⁰ Synthesizers generate raw sounds through oscillating changes in electrical voltage, the likes of which arise, unsurprisingly, from the instrument's oscillators.

¹⁵¹ A filter is "a way to remove certain frequencies of sound from a waveform" (Pinch & Trocco 27).

the release of the more “performance-oriented” Minimoog in 1970, the instrument made the leap into popular music (21). In hindsight, the synthesizer was one of the most radical innovations in musical instrumentation because “rather than applying electricity to a pre-existing instrument, it uses a genuinely new source of sound—electronics” (Pinch & Trocco 7). To work with the instrument means moving away from sounds in the strictly musical sense and thinking of them as they really are: oscillating changes in air pressure, vibrating as they travel toward and within our ears.

Sun Ra visited Robert Moog’s studios in 1969 and later that year acquired a “preproduction model” of the Minimoog, one of the first portable keyboard synthesizers.¹⁵² As Szwed describes, “[i]t was just the sort of thing he had dreamed about: a self-contained system which generated sounds out of electricity, sounds which could be musical in a conventional sense, but was also capable of producing sounds which had never been heard before, unearthly sounds” (276). Youngquist elaborates: “part of the appeal of the analog synthesizer . . . comes from its sonic spectrum, which is almost infinite, practically speaking, because a player can vary any given tone’s pitch continuously rather than only through the meager twelve increments of the Western chromatic scale” (216). In some moments Sun Ra would use the synthesizer to produce conventionally “musical” sounds, but in others he would wield the instrument to produce sounds and tones previously unheard. Synthesizer in tow, Sun Ra could move in and out of conventional musicality, this new future of popular music sounding a lot like the future itself.

Interestingly, the term “synthesizer” is rarely used in Sun Ra’s writings. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, it pops up in the poem “Of Coordinate Vibrations” (262), and he

¹⁵² See Szwed, *Space is the Place* 276, Pinch & Trocco 8.

briefly and similarly uses it in the prose piece “The Air Spiritual Man.”¹⁵³ But infrequency aside, the synthesizer’s processes in many ways crystallize Sun Ra’s philosophy. His discussion of vibration as an ontological base pervades his musical, filmic, and poetic work during this period, and closer examination reveals how he imagined these vibrations being affected and ultimately coming together via a synthesizing practice. In the poem “Every Thought is Alive,” Sun Ra states that “vibration is a living being” (16). In “Precision Fate,” published in the *Black Umbra* anthology, he writes that “Every apparent thing is a living idea / Nature is an idea / The nature of a person is the vibration-idea or / Code of which a person is” (311). Likewise, in “Music The Neglected Plane of Wisdom” Sun Ra describes music as “existence,” and that the “name” of music “strikes the ear / And the sound of it rushes like a wild thing and takes its place as the core of / even the minutest part of being” (244). Across his poetry we see how questions of embodiment, consciousness, and sound converge around vibrations. They are the “nature” of a person, perhaps colloquially the “vibes” they put out. But as repeated pressure waves, vibrations also subsume the body during performance, overtaking and exceeding it while also lodging themselves not at the core but *as* the core of being. We can imagine the haptic experience of music here, its material power during a live show or from the subwoofers of a car or speaker system. The shift from “at” to “as” shows that Ra has no interest in separating these understandings. A person’s disposition—here figuratively cast as vibration—intermingles with the material qualities of sound that overwhelm the body in performance. They coalesce under a single term, affording music the capacity to meaningfully affect others. Vibration’s multifacetedness moves the discussion from temporary lodging (“at”) to constitutive entanglement (“as”), the divide between artist, audience, and instrument falling away.

¹⁵³ “MUSIC IS A VOICE, ANOTHER SOUND OF WORDS. A grammar and a language as well as a synthesizer, it is the reach towards it’s twin immortality” (“The Air Spiritual Man” 451).

Elevating music and vibration to a sphere beyond the strictly sonic was not unique to Sun Ra. Musicologist Erik Steinskog charts Ra's musically-inflected cosmological ideas within a genealogy of thinkers all the way back to Kepler,¹⁵⁴ but the sixties and seventies provide more than a few resonant thinkers as well. Nigerian drummer Babatunde Olatunji writes in his descriptions of world music that "rhythm is the source of all music, the rhythm we find in nature, in the universe . . . the source of all music is the natural rhythm of the universe, in the sounds we hear all the time all around us" (Olatunji 199). Alice Coltrane described in her live album *Transfiguration* that when her late husband composed the track "Leo," he "saw a vibration, which was . . . energy." Free jazz artist Anthony Braxton also described John Coltrane's music as capturing the "spiritual and vibrational situation of black people in the sixties" (Braxton 267). In an exchange with music critic Graham Lock, Braxton suggests, "I think what we call music is a limitation, but I think the world of vibrations is what this experience is part of" (qtd. in Lock 282). Braxton's turn to the "vibrational," as Carter Mathes writes, "moves beyond simply the oscillation of phonic matter into a broader concept reflecting the multidimensional possibilities that shape both individual experience and collective historical consciousness" (47). All of these artists elevate the "vibrational" not only to the level of political consciousness we find in post-Civil Rights free jazz, but also to that of the celestial. This constellation of musicians and thinkers working in the aftermath of Civil Rights saw sound and vibration existing both in relation to and beyond the music they were producing, phenomena that exist prior to any

¹⁵⁴ Steinskog cites a passage from Karsten Harries' *Infinity and Perspective* ("Kepler's God is not only a geometer but also a musician who created the universe as a harmonious whole. To understand the cosmos we have to attend to its music"), and then writes: "my belief is that the centuries-long tradition of relations between sound and the cosmos are at stake in Sun Ra's music too" (124-125).

arrangement, set, or instrumental echo.¹⁵⁵ For these artists vibration housed a productive slippage in meaning that, if harnessed, could produce various political and metaphysical possibilities.¹⁵⁶

If a person's "nature" could be conceived as vibration, then metaphorically speaking in the age of synthesized sounds one could imagine it being sculpted, coordinated, tuned to better fit a collective "sound." This was already the case in his performances with the Arkestra,¹⁵⁷ but Sun Ra's mythic vision extended well beyond the band stage. *Space is the Place* opens with Sun Ra walking among the vegetation of a different planet, describing how the "vibrations are different," that the beauty of this planet would "affect their vibrations." Similarly, he writes in the poem "On Solar Planes," "[n]ew sounds cause new vibrations" (278). With Sun Ra's Minimoog the oscillators are the devices that create these vibrations, the synthesizer then combining oscillators and shaping the amplitude and frequency of the tones produced. The question Sun Ra might have imagined as he moved from musical performance to filmic and poetic postulating is, could the analog synthesizer be an *analogue*? Could a person's inclinations and preconceptions be similarly reshaped?

Describing his live performances, Sun Ra once stated "the public is a part of the music too; if somebody comes in, then the acoustic changes. The music goes all the way around them and then comes back, so I can hear it" (qtd. in Szwed 146). Stories abound of audiences altering

¹⁵⁵ Critics like Daniel Kriess have also traced the relationship of this conception of coordinated energy to collective improvisation: "Given that the world was conceived in terms of patterns of energy for many of these artists, collective improvisation was premised on the idea that there was an emergent relationship between individuals, collectivity, and the environment that could be realized through creative engagement with musical artifacts" (66).

¹⁵⁶ This expansion into metaphysics certainly resonates with the hippie counterculture and psychedelic experience of the period, however Sun Ra himself was quite conservative in his approach to substance use. As Szwed writes, "He drew the line hard on drugs, for others and himself" (347).

¹⁵⁷ As Kriess writes, "[i]ntersubjective unity and consciousness coordination with the natural world were emergent properties of the individual band members' interactions with the technologies of musical production through collective improvised playing" (65).

the Arkestra's performance, as well as the performance in some way altering the audience. In a particularly tense 1970 show in Berlin, Ra responded to boos with an onslaught of space chords and sax screams that left the audience "subdued, if not entirely overcome" (Szwed 283). In a show in Detroit in 1969, the band's eruptions "seemed to freeze much of the audience in place. Some of their silence was reverent, some was stunned and some stupefied" (Edmonds 65). Describing the same show, MC5 band member Wayne Kramer states that the audience "stood still long enough—their minds stayed open long enough, and then they heard it. Below the level of consciousness, they got that this was valid, important, worthwhile" (qtd. in Sinclair 121). Sun Ra's performances were spaces of mutually constituted affect and interchange, sites allowing for multi-directional flows of feeling.

This exchange between Sun Ra's music and the crowd is central to understanding how his synthesizing desire extended beyond the band stage. In many ways it was a demonstration of what he would hypothesize in his poetry—indeed, what he thought could be developed socially. Expanding on this phenomenon, musicologists Janna K. Saslaw and James P. Walsh theorize Ra's music through the concept of "entrainment," or the "synchronization of entities" (149). For Saslaw and Walsh, actual compositions like "Space is the Place" pursued a kind of homeostasis between and among people. With its "conflicting metric structures" of melody, bass ostinato, and percussion, the music urges the audience to reconcile these "parallel streams of rhythm," developing a "new kind of entrainment [that also] reflects the lyrics' encouragement to the audience to expand their consciousness" (144). In other words, Sun Ra's music demonstrates the difficulties of creating entrainment, of reconciling different "frames of reference," and he hoped that "through the vibrations of his music . . . entrainment between the audience and the performers [would take] place, resulting in a higher state of being" (146). This "synchronization

between entities” describes Sun Ra’s desire for a synthesized belonging, one expressed all the more clearly in his writings and filmic work. In a statement about the instrument, he once claimed, “[t]he main point concerning the synthesizer is the same as in all other instruments, that is, its capacity for the projection of feeling” (qtd. in Szwed 277). We might imagine this projection as superimposition. The synthesizer as an image of frequency filtration and coordination is cast onto the audience and broader social sphere. A person’s “partials” might be reorganized so that a better, broader “sound” could be crafted. To the uninitiated ear this all sounds remarkably far-fetched. Sun Ra agreed. He liked impossibilities: “My job is to change five billion people to something else. Totally impossible. But everything that’s possible’s been done by man, I have to deal with the impossible” (qtd. in Szwed 295).

With all this talk of a person’s “nature” and the aspirational dream of coordination and realignment, we have to ask, what about race? Given his destabilization of blackness as a category in his poetry, the question remains, does vibration *replace* race in Sun Ra’s estimation, and if so, does this render it mutable? To be sure, vibration is a uniquely complicated keyword for Sun Ra, especially as it relates to race. In “My Music is Words,” Sun Ra writes that “each color has its own vibration,” that his “measurement of race is rate of vibration-beams” (467). But Brent Hayes Edwards reminds us that this essay, first published in *The Cricket*’s 1968 inaugural issue, effectively abandons the collection’s black nationalist frame, Ra emphasizing instead his own alienness (“My natural self is not of this world”). And when it came to composing music, “every part of any arrangement he wrote was suited to a specific individual, ‘according to his vibrations, capabilities, and potentials,’ because he sensed that each person, musician or not, gave off a different vibration, and each vibration had a different color.” Szwed goes on to cite a statement first published in 1975: “Can’t nobody else in the world play it. It’s just like a suit

made for you. It might fit somebody else who looks like you but it'll fit you [better] because it's made for you" (121).¹⁵⁸ Someone who "looks like you"—or to push the suit metaphor further, someone whose embodied experience resembles yours—might vibrate similarly. But for Sun Ra vibration does not uniformly overlap with the parameters of race affiliation. The social realities of race certainly seem to affect a person's vibratory disposition, but they do not determine it. Sun Ra appears to be mobilizing a different form of essence than Baraka's "changing same;" while both turn to sound as a governing core around which bodies might be plotted or organized, with vibration Sun Ra relieves it from being beholden to racial identity specifically. And though he wavers on whether vibrations are innate or alterable, they can nonetheless be synthesized.

If not synonymous with racial essence, this synthesizing project also risks submission to the color-blind discourses circulating and gaining steam in the 1970s. Previously overt systems of racial injustice absorbed some of the antiracist demands of the 1960s freedom movements, but also "insulated" more robust challenges to the racial order (Omi & Winant 86). This moment saw "strategic erasures within which the 'white norm' and silent operations of white privilege [did] not disappear but rather [became] 'submerged' within racial consciousness" (Mukherjee et al 7).¹⁵⁹ Given the apparent de-emphasis of race in Sun Ra's system, not to mention the political terrain of the 1970s—one of white reaction and racial rearticulation¹⁶⁰—concerns of unconscious enactment are certainly warranted. In fact, the synthesizer itself risks disguising additional forms of containment assumed to be eradicated given its expanded sonic spectrum. While the

¹⁵⁸ Szwed cites C. O. Simpkins' 1975 *Coltrane : A Biography*, in which he details Sun Ra's writing process for his band.

¹⁵⁹ Critics Roopali Mukherjee, Sarah Banet-Weiser, and Herman Gray trace the history of "postrace" to postwar "hegemonic orders of color blindness" and the variegated forms of late-century neoliberalism. This definition also draws from the work of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Sumi K Cho.

¹⁶⁰ See Omi & Winant 117.

instrument can “generate a much larger range of sounds than an analog instrument,” sound studies scholar Robin James suggests that “this range extends only as far as the limitations of the hardware and software one uses. Patches, cables, speakers, and so on—these background conditions regulate the process of sound production itself” (33). Combined with its capacity to regulate frequencies and amplitudes, the synthesizer risks enacting something like neoliberal deregulation, its expanded freedom cloaking “coercion and control” in a moment of heightening absorption and insulation at the hands of the state.¹⁶¹

Crucially, numerous accounts tell of Sun Ra refusing to have his vision limited by the presets and parameters of the instrument. During his initial visit to Moog’s studios in 1969 Sun Ra tested an early experimental synthesizer based on a theremin “that was activated by touching a band of metal.” Having difficulty, he was told by someone in the studio that “it responded differently to different people’s skin,” to which Sun Ra joked, “You *know* what that means . . . Even machines can be racist! We got to be ready for the space age” (qtd. in Szwed 276). Even more remarkable, musician and Moog employee Jon Weiss visited Sun Ra in New York City after he acquired the Model B, recalling that “he had taken this synthesizer and I don’t know what he had done to it, but he made sounds like you had never heard in your life, I mean just total inharmonic distortion all over the place, oscillators weren’t oscillating any more, nothing was working but it was fabulous” (Pinch & Trocco 222-223). Artistic deviation, oddly functioning machinery; these historical details complicate the straightforward criticisms levied on the instrument and speak more to the unique capacities and imagination of the artist in whose care it could be found.

¹⁶¹ James is drawing on Jacques Attali’s metaphor of the synthesizer as “illusory freedom” here.

The liberatory affordances of the synthesizer also extended beyond Sun Ra's work during this time, lending further credence to its potential as a figurative model for identity and relationality. Transgender artist Wendy Carlos was a pioneer in synthesized music, collaborating with Bob Moog on a custom synthesizer and now rightly credited with translating the instrument into popular music. Carlos's innovative album *Switched-on Bach* (1968)—an electronic reinterpretation of Johann Sebastian Bach's music—was released a year before Sun Ra visited Moog's studio, and the album went on to win three Grammy awards in 1969. In their discussion of *Switched-on Bach*, Pinch and Trocco speculate that Carlos's work with the synthesizer related specifically to her identity as a trans woman,¹⁶² while Roshanak Kheshti makes this connection even more explicit. Citing the heading for Carlos's online biography page, "WENDY CARLOS IS THE ORIGINAL SYNTH," Kheshti uses Donna Haraway's "cyborg" and its pleasurable "confusion of boundaries" to link Carlos's music and identity specifically. She states: "Like Haraway's cyborg, Carlos as 'Original Synth' can also be read as a manifesto. It is a manifesto that challenges widely circulated claims about Carlos's gender and sexuality, calling into question the limited, binary way Carlos has been defined . . . To be 'the Original Synth' is to do away with that binary logic, just as Haraway proposes the cyborg imagines a 'world without gender'" (19). Kheshti imagines the synthesizer as an ontology of making, "the perpetual production of new combinations" (28) and by merging the musician and instrument, she sees Carlos crafting a future "that exceeds the limits of gender/genre" (21). While there is little in Sun Ra's writings to suggest that he had gender on his mind in his theorizing of the synthesizer's imaginative potential, weaving he and Carlos together reveals that the synthesizer was becoming

¹⁶² Pinch and Trocco write that "While some people used the transformative power of the synthesizer to escape from the prison of 'straight' society, to help them transcend to new states of consciousness, Wendy, we suggest, may have used it to help her transcend her former body and her former gender identity" (138).

a device by which to think through questions of identity, both racial and gendered. By 1970, then, the synthesizer was embraced and reconceptualized not just as an instrument, but perhaps also as a relational model, becoming a way of challenging prescribed categories of being and belonging.¹⁶³

Nowhere are these gestures more evident than in Sun Ra's poetry, where the properties of the synthesizer can inform our understanding of his pursuit of a new coordination, one that fails to succumb to either mechanized containment or color-blind ideology. To conceive of bodies as vibrations capable of synthesizing does not assume an ontology of equivalence or program of sameness, and in turning to poetry to abstract the instrument as a framing device, its would-be limitations fall away. In this final section I return to Sun Ra's poetic oeuvre to illuminate how these synthesized vibrations are translated into poetic form, becoming a concept that appears and reappears intermedially, and that reimagines preset parameters of affiliation while also refusing to succumb to raceless generality.

“My Music is Words”: Sun Ra's Synthesizing Poetics

Sun Ra's 1972 “The Sound Image” surveys several of the possibilities that come alive when sound becomes a genuine organizing logic. Ra first describes music as “the universal language” and “[t]he bridge-communication sound,” suggesting that music transcends language barriers but also, through the physical image of the bridge, actively connects bodies and sites in space. But the poem goes on to provide a remarkable image of the “sound mirror,” which

¹⁶³ My use of “reconception” draws from Kreiss's citation of Rayvon Fouché, who describes African American reclamations of technological agency as a continuum of “redeployment, reconception, and re-creation.” Reconception involves “redefining a technology's meaning through its use in a way that subverts its primary function” (59).

showcases not only sound's connective potential but also its revelatory power. The image extends across much of the poem, so I quote at some length:

Pure music is what you must face.
 If you limit, if you reject, if you do not consider
 If you are selfish-earthly bound,
 Pure music is your nemesis.
 You cannot pretend: you will accept or you will
 reject.

There is no middle ground.

The mirror of pure music is a negative field/feel that photographs
 The image-mind-impression soul and psychic-self even the potential
 immediate alter-destiny/destinies.
 [...]
 It is a mirror that you must hear
 Vibration . . . rhythm . . . harmonic sound is hidden in each melody.
 It is never what it seems to be
 You can only hear what the mirror sees. No more, nor less is ever allowed.
 The sound mirror is what you see of you that's sound.
 If you're not sound,
 Then you're not pure
 Pure is real-sincerity
 And pure knows pure is sound and true
 It's all what the music says of you
 It's not what the music you say of it.

IT'S ALL WHAT THE MUSIC SAYS OF YOU
 The music is the living mirror of the universe. (350-351)

Sun Ra's didacticism is again on full display, as is his conflation of aesthetic modes.

Language is used to posit music as a mirror, but also as a "negative field/feel that photographs."

The poem imagines sound materialized through an artistic mode and object that both capture and reflect images, and yet somehow it still retains its tactile quality (its "feel"). The claim is simple enough: "pure music" can reveal one to oneself, and the results are unequivocal. As the line states—and as the line break and offsetting underscore—there is no middle ground. And Ra again indulges in split meanings with "sound," moving from noun to adjective, from audible phenomena to a barometer of one's condition. Incorporating sound's varied meanings is a familiar tactic for Sun Ra. In a broadsheet from his days in Chicago he once wrote "ONE NOTE

IS A SOUND” and then followed with “SOUND also means FOUNDED ON TRUTH OR RIGHT. ARE NEGROES SOUND? . . . sound doctrine is base doctrine. BASE is FOUNDATION.” The broadsheet’s homonymic playfulness results in “the aural [being tied] to the ontological,” the possibility of bodies existing as aural sound rather than as “substance with a physical reality” (Ragain 550-551). Sound’s meaning hovers between aural energy, ontology, and epistemological precision. Political theorist Alex Zamalin suggests that for Sun Ra “[t]he elasticity of language meant it could be remade” (100), and perhaps along with it could go the parameters of the day-to-day. Similarly, Nathan Ragain writes, “everything about Sun Ra’s poetics suggests a desire to evoke (but not quite systematize) an alternative foundation that is at once mythological, etymological, and ontological” (551). Moving from the earlier poems in the previous section—which like the broadsheet read sound (as vibration) functioning as a core component of being—“The Sound Image” captures sound’s ability to *measure* one’s “vibrations” as well, determining a person’s “soundness.” Ontology shifts and then gives way to assessment.

Similarly, Sun Ra’s description of the mirror as “a negative field/feel” uses phonetic association to combine senses and link the individual to a larger collective. A near-homophone, “field” and “feel” supposedly describe the mirror’s constitution. But if the poem’s musical mirror is a field then Sun Ra is demanding we think of it spatially, as a region in which points (perhaps bodies) can be organized or plotted. And much like a magnetic or gravitational field, to use such language foregrounds the relation between points or bodies; we understand one only through its association with the larger whole. But the mirror is also a “feel,” a haptic sensation capable of being individually experienced (or “feel’d”). The slash makes the simultaneity of these states all the more evident, serving as a conjunctive shorthand that collapses space and sensation. Such a strategy recalls similar methods of phonetic patterning in which homophones create sonic

patterns that fail to register according to conventional readings of a given line or stanza. As Robin James writes, “[t]aken together, these sounds form frequency patterns that are perceptually coded out of the poem’s verbal form and content,” thereby establishing frequencies beyond dominant logics of reading (119).¹⁶⁴ The near-homophonic toggling of “field” and “feel,” bolstered by the slash, allows a vision of sound that subsumes the individual yet still emphasizes his or her place in relation to the other bodies making up this sonic field. The poem thus intermedially performs this sonic capacity. And though neither this nor the use of “sound” in the previous paragraph are perfectly homophonic, they still exemplify ways of sonically forging associations that shift how we conceive of relation. Bodies being sound, sensing sound, the process now understood as necessarily relational. By pursuing the multiple avenues of meaning that language’s sonic dimensions open up, Sun Ra conjures new ways of imagining both existing and connecting.

Two additional notes should be made about “The Sound Image.” First, while Sun Ra allows for zero prevarication when it comes to being “sound,” he does remain open to potential. The mirror in Sun Ra’s mind is not a blunt instrument; its measurements are nuanced, or rather capable of reading nuance, so long as a person’s trajectory bends toward “soundness.” In fact, though the language of “no middle ground” seems committed to absolutes, Ra refuses to close down his terms. In addition to the “field/feel” description, we are told that the mirror “photographs / The image-mind-impression soul and psychic-self even the potential / immediate alter-destiny/destinies.” Risking total obscurity, Sun Ra errs on the side of abundance. But the point may be that in dealing with sound, both literally and etymologically, we are necessarily dealing with slippage. Youngquist characterizes sound’s dissipation and evanescence as its

¹⁶⁴ James draws on the work of Christina Sharpe and M. NourbeSe Philip here.

“fugitive quality.” Just as sound occurs, it fades; “[u]nlike portraits or statues or books, it cannot outlive the moment of its occurrence” (80).¹⁶⁵ Like the portrait and the statue, a photograph or mirror might be capable of representational permanence or at least immediate exactitude. But with a mirror “you must hear,” one’s representational containment is explicitly called into question. To be immersed in sound is to understand one’s self relationally, but to *be* sound or see one’s self as sound would mean to do away with fixed or contained categories of self-recognition, the hard lines that traditionally define us now oscillating, permeable. This porousness becomes a representation of one’s potential within Sun Ra’s coordinating framework.

Second, I want to suggest that we can again synthesize our reading of Sun Ra’s poetry here. We recall in “The Outer Darkness” that Sun Ra describes blackness as a “kind / That the world does not know,” that is “rhythm against rhythm [. . .] harmony against harmony [. . .] melody against melody” (295). “The Sound Image” provides another triptych of sorts in lines forty-seven and forty-eight, with the mirror composed of “vibration . . . rhythm . . . harmonic sound [. . .] hidden in each melody.” And we are told that the mirror is “never what it appears to be.” Though certainly subtle, the similar language of unknowing (“the world does not know;” “never what it appears to be”) and the shared definitional terms allow for a faint echo to be heard across these poems; though not a perfect repetition, a certain resonance can still be detected. In some ways this answers the question of *‘soundness’ according to what?* To be “sound” suggests an ideal for one to be measured against. Here, Sun Ra just might be retaining blackness as an unstated cipher in this piece, not necessarily as an identity-demand but as a way of privileging difference in relations or as a constitutive aspect of coordination and (self-re)alignment. This becomes integration defined against the terms of the dominant body, a reverse-assimilation in

¹⁶⁵ Recorded sound might be thought of as a counterclaim, but as Youngquist states, even recorded sound “evanesces when reproduced,” achieving “only an afterimage of its passing” (80).

which the collective body (or rather, collective sound) organizes according to a logic of difference rather than sameness (qua whiteness). Such a minute textual echo hints at how minoritized bodies are not just included in coordination but centralized as the governing bloc according to whom the “soundness” of all others can be measured. And given Sun Ra’s penchant for linguistic association, not to mention his reading of texts like the bible as though they were codes to be deciphered,¹⁶⁶ to tease out connections across his works would be to follow in the methods he devised. The “fugitive quality of sound” then also becomes the fugitive quality of difference in “The Sound Image,” the “silent operations of white privilege” and the white norm inverted here in an effort to reimagine an alternative organizing frame (Mukherjee et al 7). In sum, the flexibility of language in “The Sound Image”—its phonetic playfulness, the proliferation of terms and meanings, as well as its referential possibilities with respect to the rest of Sun Ra’s oeuvre—offers up a vision of coordination in which individuals imagined as sound can be understood relationally, can have traditional lines of division remapped, all the while qualifying this commitment to abstraction through detectable traces of a presiding difference.

What may only be an interpretive possibility in “The Sound Image” becomes much more pronounced in “The Other Otherness,” a poem with three versions that can be read as progressive developments in thought. The first 1972 version reads like a statement of pride and mission: “we who are / Know we are to is / To be / [. . .] To feel our worthless pricelessness / Invaluable similitude” (285). The last four lines of the poem are particularly noteworthy: “Movement out to behold kindred outerness / An other-otherness / That is not like them / If they are of a non-similarity vibration.” In 1980, Ra would change these lines: “Movement out to behold kindred

¹⁶⁶ “To those who seek true wisdom, the bible should be considered as Code (Cod) word instead of the Good Word or God Word. If you regard the bible as the ‘Code Word,’ you will be able to gain its hidden secrets” (“Solaristic Precepts,” qtd. in Szwed 76). Also, see Youngquist 36.

othernesses / Of and from other worlds / beyond worlds / Beyond worlds,” and in another version that same year, a more robust shift: “To behold kindred otherness / Cosmo-mysteries / Of an other otherness / That is not like to or of / Their themness / If they are of a non-similarity / Vibration-intensity” (286). Across these three versions, Sun Ra seems to be experimenting with how bodies can be organized around difference. He shifts from “outerness” and “other-otherness” in the 1972 version to “othernesses” in the next iteration, to finally a “kindred otherness” and an “other otherness” without the hyphen. The distinctions are slight but significant. The spatial focus of “outerness” gives way to a relational “other-otherness” in the first poem. Here, the hyphenated compound “other-otherness” seems to be one way for differences to be synthesized in response to prevailing lines of division. This shifts to the plural “kindred othernesses” in the first 1980 version, an alternative combination but one that highlights the category as one of profound relation still defined by multiplicity. Ra finally embraces a middle-ground in the final poem, listed in *The Immeasurable Equation* as “1980, version 2.” We have a singular “kindred otherness,” as well as “an other otherness,” the hyphen now revised away. Significantly, across all three versions Ra never says “*another* otherness.” This would suggest a repetition of the same categorical relegation upheld by existing racial structures. In his attempt to craft an alternative assemblage, he is ultimately after a separate *form* of otherness, one not so easily contained by presently functioning identity categories, and that both embraces and remained defined by its distance from some mythical norm or homogenizing power. Similarly, from the first version to the third we see another shift: from “non-similarity vibration” to “non-similarity / Vibration intensity.” Again the shift implies qualification, or at least complication in the service of expansion. Sun Ra coordinates this newly crafted kinship according to similarities in vibration, but he moderates these parameters, suggesting that those beyond this category

remain there not because of their vibrations per se, but because of their vibration “intensity.” Even in his own carefully articulated categories, Ra recoils from containment. If ontologically speaking vibration is a different form of essence, then Sun Ra refuses to allow it to unilaterally prohibit affiliation. Again, the “sound mirror’s” measurements remain attuned to potential. In 1980’s version 2, Sun Ra suggests that vibrations can be amplified or tempered, that they measure one’s capacity for relation but never overdetermine it. With “The Other Otherness” Sun Ra wants to carve out a different category for organized bodies, one defined by difference, while also allowing slippage between the very categories he defines, a person’s vibratory potential making such entry possible.

Reading across all three variations of “The Other Otherness,” Sun Ra’s experimentation with a synthesized belonging becomes clear. His revisions reveal a commitment to a category of belonging continually defined by otherness (in other words, opposed to the sameness to which liberal integration might aspire), and by structuring it as an *other* otherness he refuses any reduction to familiar categories of abjection or cultural hegemony. As Zamalin claims, this shift instantiates Ra’s “futuristic orientation at odds with structures of thought that sustained US racial domination” (99). Importantly, “other” remains both the noun and modifier in Sun Ra’s structure. As a term repeated, it both defines the category and alters it; difference becomes both descriptive and constitutive. As long as the structure repeats, it would seem to prevent Ra’s own category from coalescing into sameness as well. It is always being actively “othered”—though on its own terms, apart from the debilitating practices of the present. As a poetic instantiation of Sun Ra’s synthesizing desire, the other otherness crafts a form of belonging that escapes the regulation that critics fear the instrument enacts. Though the synthesizer’s hardware determines the possibilities of literal sound production, the translation of “instrument” to “conceptual

model” *via poetry* allows Sun Ra to project an unbounded collective. Ultimately, the synthesized belonging of the “other otherness” is defined by the distinct, the additional, the variant.

This capacity to avoid a collapse into sameness recalls a unique quirk about the early synthesizer itself. As Pinch and Trocco describe, “[o]ne of the key features of the Minimoog, which differentiates it from other synthesizers, is that the oscillators do not lock together. If you tune them together, they stay slightly out of tune with each other and roll through each other, producing a very pleasant choral effect” (234). The Minimoog’s initial power supply was simply too noisy, meaning it hindered any locking tendencies between oscillators. The very thing that powered the Minimoog to bring together new sounds made it impossible for those sounds to ever perfectly align. Perhaps this quality earned the Minimoog a principal role in the navigation console for Ra’s spaceship in *Space is the Place*, the instrument tasked with transporting bodies to a new planet. Admittedly, Sun Ra’s new kingdom in the film is “the kingdom of darkness and blackness, and none can enter except those who are of the black spirit.” Ra would end up transporting a number of characters according to this principle, most notably several black teens from the youth center, the “black part” of Jimmy Fey, and also a group of whites (said to be cut from the film so as to avoid the “wrath” of the NAACP).¹⁶⁷ With his poetry in mind however, this notion of “black spirit” becomes much more than racial essence, even as much of the film would suggest otherwise. Instead, it functions as a shorthand for a more complicated mode of affiliation that Sun Ra was actively cultivating in his writing, one that centers minoritized bodies but refrains from complete separatism, racialized containment, or assimilationist erasure. Just as he manipulated the Minimoog to craft unprecedented electronic sounds, Sun Ra can be thought of as fashioning a form of relation in his poetry modeled after this music, frequencies altered,

¹⁶⁷ See Youngquist 224; also Szwed, *Space is the Place* 332.

combined though never uniform. As a form of synthesized belonging, Ra's "other otherness" retains the same oddly reflexive power that the instrument possessed, to orchestrate different bodies into a more complete sound, while never allowing them to fall into the same invariable tune. As we have seen in the return to his poetry, Ra struggles against the insidious architecture of a universal model. And in that struggle, he arrives at some other desire: to adjust our frequencies and synthesize us, without standardizing our sound. To craft a "pleasant choral effect" through an always-slightly-out-of-tuneness. This desire for coordination is neither a "normalization of frequencies" (James 10), nor a domestication of difference. At its core, it is a search for harmonic wholeness grounded in variation.

Without a doubt, Sun Ra's pursuit of a synthesized belonging bears a striking resemblance to black feminist theories that have worked to develop affinities across difference. The Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement was only a few years from release at the time of Sun Ra's writing, and its intersectional approach to interlocking oppressions made clear the possibility for political investments across lines of difference, while still retaining a particularity in focus.¹⁶⁸ A year later, Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" described the connective power of female bodies being "in tune" with one another: "The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference" (51). Most recently, Kevin Quashie has theorized the concept of "black female oneness," a habitat or "ethical orientation to being in the world," a "manner of being alive that eclipses the social logics of identity," and which becomes instead something like an

¹⁶⁸ The statement's opening paragraph offers the following: "The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (15).

“ontology of relations”¹⁶⁹ (72, 68-69). Sun Ra’s synthesized belonging—pursuing relations across traditional lines of identitarian demarcation—resonates deeply with some of these ideas.

Unfortunately, Sun Ra’s gender politics are a frustrating and disheartening reality to contend with. While he brought in June Tyson as a vocalist and dancer for the Arkestra, his conservatism and patriarchal domineering could still be detectable. As Szwed notes, “Sun Ra viewed women as potentially dangerous, as distractions from the divine purpose.”¹⁷⁰ And while Tyson would become like a family member to Sun Ra over the years, “it was still possible for him to sometimes ask her to leave the recording studio if things were not going well: ‘I can’t create with women in my environment’” (250). These failures reveal the contradictions that arise when we hold Sun Ra’s pursuits and his politics in tension, how the radical vision he offered drastically exceeded what he himself was capable of in terms of gender relations at this time. In the face of these shortcomings—which are profoundly disappointing and impossible to overlook—perhaps our only recourse is to double down on the devotion to *potential*, to the hopeful incessant striving that a synthesizing desire still encapsulates. Returning to Wendy Carlos and Roshanak Kheshti as critical interlocutors, we might still embrace the synthesizer as “the perpetual production of new combinations”—the constant othering of otherness—and in those combinations strive toward the more complete sound Sun Ra called for if not always practiced, where difference is embraced and collaboratively orchestrated rather than erased.

Sun Ra’s synthesizing desire receives perhaps its most moving expression in the poem “Message to Black Youth,” with which this chapter concludes. Published in 1971, “Message” is a clear departure from Sun Ra’s other works. The abstractions of earlier poems are set aside, and

¹⁶⁹ Quashie borrows “ontology of relations” from Vittorio Morfino’s work on relationality in Spinoza.

¹⁷⁰ Sun Ra was known by many to be celibate, and as an adolescent he suffered from a severe hernia related to cryptorchidism (Szwed 10).

in their place we find a surprising sincerity. Speaking directly to a young black audience at the opening Ra writes, “Never say you are unloved / I love you / In all the simplicity of the word” (240). He goes on to reframe moments in earlier works that might be misinterpreted: “If I deny you / It is only love / Seeking a way to make you hear / The thought essence of being.” He continues, “[n]o one could ever care more / Than I.” With “Message” Sun Ra’s depth of feeling is finally laid bare, each line encouraging and consoling young black Americans. The plainness of his language ensures that his commitments are not mistaken, and the willful obscurities from earlier poems, the linguistic playfulness and dual meanings, are gone. He writes, “Never say you dwell alone / And think you walk unseen in the darkness / Of the dark black blue golden brown of you” (241). Sun Ra tempers his earlier didacticism in favor of an unquestionable compassion, the piece all the more remarkable because of its ability to serve as not a corrective but an illumination of his larger project’s primary commitments.

But crucially, the scale and audience for “Message” shifts in the final stanza. “Other youth take heed,” he writes, continuing:

prepare
 discipline-precision
 You will see an abstract tomorrowness myth
 A triumph of otherness love
 Not the earth definition of But then
 What does the earth know about such things?
 Still you shall claim it too
 It is great enough for that and more
 Not at first meant to be that way
 But second thoughts bring other thoughts
 Into mind reality/myth
 Other youths if real in the myth shall partake. (241)

Sun Ra returns us to the notion of others, forecasting a “triumph of otherness love.” And again, he refuses conventional categories of otherness, the “earth definition” here being what he dispensed with in “The Other Otherness.” The love that anchored Sun Ra’s early testimonial is

now “great enough” to center black bodies but also to exceed them, the poem moving from “black youth” to “other youth” in the final stanza. Those outside the black community have been “second thoughts” in the poem and in Sun Ra’s system, but their difference is also their contribution. “[S]econd thoughts bring other thoughts,” the stratification of racial politics giving way to a valuable assemblage, what Saslaw and Walsh might call “a single homeostatic frame of reference” (149), one that is constituted by otherness and other(ed) thinking. And he admits at the end that what we are really dabbling in is myth. “Other youths if real in the myth shall partake.” And “myth” is precisely what Sun Ra offers in response, what he has been offering in all the musical, filmic, and poetic works considered in this chapter. It is a newly imagined otherwise, one of different organizing principles, and of alternative ways of moving through the world. If “real,” if “sound,” then others may join as well. And while discussions of music and vibration fall away in “Message,” the aural does appear just once, in Sun Ra’s attempt to “make you hear / The thought essence of being.” Youngquist describes this line as “Love mov[ing] through its apparent absence to make essence audible” (194). But as we have seen, essence’s audibility is also a person’s vibratory potential, their fundamentals and partials, and their capacity to be combined into an *other* sound, one that syncs together in a choral effect but that never perfectly calibrates. In many ways “Message” captures the essence of Sun Ra’s program: a commitment to particularity while also rejecting a racial essence; a pursuit of other relational forms, the likes of which become communicable through sound’s apparatus; and the recognition of how immensely difficult such a project can be. Indeed, at present he would call it impossible. But for Sun Ra it is a starting place, a space-age map for after the end of the world. Myths are beginnings; and as he says, “[a]fter the myth comes the origin” (“Sound Myth”).

CONCLUSION

In the summer of 1960, there was a riot at the Newport Jazz Festival. Since its inauguration in 1954 in the wealthy class's Rhode Island resort city, the festival served as an avenue for "elevating the status of jazz" (Anderson 31-32). Plucking jazz from the cabarets and nightclubs, and coordinating lectures, exhibitions, and film series to accompany the performances, the Newport Jazz Festival worked to establish jazz as in line with narratives of American exceptionalism and progress, as a valuable native art form "dissociate[d] . . . from protest and rebellion" (24). As the festival carried on, however, the commercial impulse to expand and appeal to a wider, younger audience transformed it into something more like a primordial spring break for young music revelers,¹⁷¹ "a new form of postwar leisure, a kind of luxury for the masses" (Saul 105). On July 2, 1960 thousands of youths, inebriated and unable to access the sold-out event, attempted to storm the festival grounds, only to be confronted by police. The conflict spilled out into the streets outside the festival, where the young crowd turned violent, hurling bottles at police and damaging cars and windows. The marines and National Guard were called upon, the bridges leading into Newport were sealed, and in the aftermath the city council revoked the Festival's license and cancelled its remaining performances that weekend. As Scott Saul describes, "if jazz had been linked in the white mind to sexual license and general impropriety, then the Newport riots demonstrated that this notion was a self-serving fiction propagated by college-age whites to justify their own alcohol-lubricated good time" (101). The riots at Newport showcase the disastrous collision of two of the appropriative

¹⁷¹ Scott Saul describes how "By 1957, the Newport Jazz Festival had become a northeastern version of Fort Lauderdale, a summertime ritual whose attendance swelled from 13,000 in a casino to 50,000 in an open air park" (111). Anderson similarly describes it as a "prototype spring break weekend" (33).

processes this dissertation has traced throughout the fifties and sixties: the redefinition of jazz as a universal, colorblind American art form, and jazz as sensual excess and spiritual revitalization for its white listeners.

Strikingly, that same weekend and just a few blocks from where the Newport Festival was being held, musicians Charles Mingus and Max Roach established a counter-festival dubbed the “Newport Rebels” festival. Not only was Newport’s commercial, stodgy feel a point of criticism for the musicians, but the wage scale—which reportedly “rewarded largely white name acts at the expense of largely black innovators” (Anderson 51)—led Mingus and Roach to collaborate and put on their counter-festival. Here, African Americans made up the overwhelming majority of musical acts; the festival was organized largely outside the constraints and structure of the music industry; and the lineup included more experimental jazz performers like Eric Dolphy, Abbey Lincoln, and Ornette Coleman.¹⁷² And though the distribution of the counter-festival’s profits was less than ideal,¹⁷³ the statement made by its actualization was nothing short of profound: black jazz artists could wield their power and radically oppose the appropriative practices that the Newport festival promulgated and the “credibility deficits” they suffered as a result.

Pairing the 1960 riot at Newport with its corresponding “Rebels” counter-festival, we see a striking distillation of the familiar history of musical appropriation and resistance into which this dissertation has intervened. Critics have rightly celebrated the counter-festival as a powerful oppositional statement to Newport and to the larger industry’s ongoing practice of sidelining black innovation and dampening its “intended social charge” (Saul 114). A *Time* magazine

¹⁷² See Anderson 50-51.

¹⁷³ Saul writes that “The profits from the festival were divvied up in the most haphazard manner—with musicians nipping away at the kitty until Kenny Dorham decided to abscond with the full remainder. If these were the economics of a jazz utopia, they had a decidedly human face” (126).

reporter said the counter-festival was “like an extension of the sit-ins. I called it a sit-out” (qtd. in Saul 125). Historian Iain Anderson characterizes its fierce economic independence as indicative of its “radicalism” (50),¹⁷⁴ while Scott Saul goes further:

If the history of the civil rights movement were written as a series of cultural skirmishes—disputes over the appropriate form of art, conflicts over how artists might organize themselves and control the rewards of their profession—then the Newport Jazz Festival might be considered one of the Movement’s most revealing 1960 flashpoints, along with the understandably more famous student-led sit-ins. In the unlikely atmosphere of Newport, an older group of black artists tried to translate Martin Luther King’s prophetic vision into a working blueprint of their lives, using the ‘creative extremism’ that King invoked as the Movement’s spirit” (123).

Saul would go on to say that the actions of Mingus and Roach “also spoke to the radical impulses that coalesced in the mid-1960s under the name of Black Power” (124). In many ways the histories told of Newport and the rebels’ counter-festival are of white cultural and economic appropriation and black resistance, assimilation and liberation, agency undermined and then profoundly reclaimed. The counter-festival’s achievement in executing an oppositional vision in the shadows of Newport’s commercialist behemoth is both remarkable and representative of where the discourses around jazz and the avant-garde were headed as the 1960s carried on.

But in the sobering light of day after the Newport riot, and just as the ruling came down that the festival’s remaining acts would be cancelled and its license revoked for future years, a surprising moment occurred. Langston Hughes, the scheduled emcee for Sunday’s afternoon lineup, wrote a blues. Learning that his “Blues Afternoon” session would be the last act to appear at Newport before the cancellation went into effect, Hughes tells Chicago radio host Studs Terkel in a later interview: “I went into the press room and I didn’t have any paper or anything on me, and got a Western Union telegraph blank and wrote a blues for Newport: ‘Goodbye, Newport

¹⁷⁴ As Ingrid Monson describes the financial arrangement the festival made with the Cliff Walk Manor hotel: “The musicians would keep all of the proceeds from the entrance fees since the owner, Nick Cannarozzi, expected to make extra profits on the bar and hotel rooms” (184).

Blues.” He goes on to describe how pianist Otis Spann gave the lyrics a melody and then performed it live with Muddy Waters to close out the festival. Terkel responds by reading a report on the event from the *Providence Journal*: “it’s a few moments later, after an original blues tune at the end of the Newport Jazz, the performers walked silently off the stage. Audience began shuffling out, many of them wet-eyed. Two men began dismantling the canvas walls, a technician dismantled the microphones on the stage. Someone closed the piano, Langston Hughes with a trembling voice said, ‘Goodbye, Newport’” (“Langston Hughes”).

This dissertation has taken as its focus how artists responded to the appropriation of traditionally black music at midcentury. As I have shown, this repurposing of musical culture was so expansive that it unfolded on multiple, overlapping scales: domestically, in terms of the receptions and rearticulations of the blues and jazz by white audiences, and geopolitically, in terms of the state’s use of jazz in its diplomatic and integratory mission. The backdrop to this was of course the limited political and discursive terrain available to black artists and intellectuals during the 1950s and 1960s, the likes of which created competing discourses of assimilation and complicity on the one hand, and later sharply defined political opposition emphasizing particularity above all else. What the previous chapters have shown, however, is that certain black artists in this moment shirked the demands of this binary between complicity and resistance, at times collaborating with these appropriative bodies or re-appropriating from them, and neither abandoning blackness nor embracing its strict consolidation. At a time when the question seemed to be, “who owns black culture?” these artists instead offered an understanding of it that was variegated, internally complex, even cosmopolitan. And as I have shown, their means of achieving this was an embrace of intermediality, an aesthetic “in-between-ness” that could “change dominant representational codes and . . . challenge seemingly stable

constructions, which lie at the heart of essentialist and totalizing worldviews” (Neumann 525). Each of these artists—Big Bill Broonzy, Louis Armstrong (in collaboration with Dave and Iola Brubeck), Langston Hughes, and Sun Ra—might have been considered “political outliers” given their unmappability within the binary logics of the Cold War. In many ways, this project has been an attempt to work through their outlier status, to make visible their responses to the midcentury musical moment that are often illegible when resistance is celebrated as such.

By the time he had written “Goodbye, Newport Blues,” Hughes had served on the Newport Jazz Festival’s board of directors, which included familiar names like jazz scholar Marshall Stearns and Voice of America host Willis Conover. His excitement over the festival’s earlier years led him to write “Jazz as Communication,” a short essay he delivered at a panel at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival, which champions the genre’s expansiveness and its influence on everything from Rock and Roll to Jean Paul Sartre.¹⁷⁵ But in “Goodbye, Newport Blues” he asks “What’s gonna happen to my music? / What’s gonna happen to my song?” Couple this with Spann’s powerful vocals and Waters’ amplified guitar,¹⁷⁶ and the result is both a collaborative lament and challenge, a critical response to the events of the night before and statement of resilience made within the confines of the failed festival’s grounds.

What “Goodbye, Newport Blues” illustrates is yet another example of Hughes’s intermedial process, a poet sketching a blues on a blank telegram to then be translated into the final musical performance at Newport in 1960. The lyrics do not shy away from this question of musical ownership (“What’s gonna happen to my music?”), and yet the fact that it is a blues, that

¹⁷⁵ As Rampersad writes, “Perhaps no one was more fascinated than Langston by the strikingly emotional response to black music by this supposedly sophisticated audience of whites” (254).

¹⁷⁶ Adelt describes how Waters’ performance at Newport in 1960 was “a rather raucous set of electric blues,” which pushed against his earlier album release that covered folk blues and the image on the album *Muddy Waters at Newport 1960*, which had him holding John Lee Hooker’s “semi-acoustic guitar” instead of his own electric Fender Telecaster (30).

it is performed at Newport as the festival's "mop-up act" (Saul 131), and that it straddles the divide between poetry and music again frustrates how we might approach it. Does its performance within Newport's commercialist engine sap it of its discursive power? If it fails to register alongside the "radical impulses" of Mingus's and Roach's counter-festival, then is it doomed to be contained within the appropriative logics that ultimately caused Newport's demise?

As I hope has become clear in the previous pages of this project, the difficulty answering this question lies with the terms themselves. The logics of complicity and resistance, assimilation and liberation, while crucial to the work of many black artists during this period, also leave other acts sidelined. To demand they be legible within such discourses leaves their aesthetic complexity and political potential unseen and unheard. "Goodbye, Newport Blues" was performed for a predominantly white audience at a festival whose own parasitic attachment to traditionally black music led to its cancellation that year. But it also asks what the future of blues and jazz music will be in the wake of such appropriative violence, and in asking, it forces its audience to reckon with the prior evening's unfolding. It re-appropriates the festival space to censure its proceedings, and Waters' own performance style, his "mixture of deep Delta blues with a rhythm and blues beat and amplification" (Tracy 10), departs from the "conceptualizations of folk and authenticity increasingly enter[ing] discourses of blues music in the first half of the 1960s" (Adelt 30).¹⁷⁷ So in his collaboration with Newport, Hughes adopts the blues form and reclaims the stage to shed light on the failures of the festival's (white) attendees; and in its collaboration with Waters' electric guitar the performance troubles white America's growing

¹⁷⁷ Adelt describes how the Newport Folk Festival contributed to the "invention of a racialized blues tradition . . . in the selected authentication of an imagined premodern folk blues, and the rejection of electrified blues despite the fact that black blues musicians in Chicago had firmly embraced this electrification more than a decade before" (30-31).

image of the blues as an authentic, rural-folk form. Again, we have collaboration, re-appropriation, re-articulation. Hughes ultimately offers a more robust response to this event in *Ask Your Mama*, the focus of chapter three, where we saw an approach to black music that is cosmopolitan in its vision, that leans toward proliferating attachments and critical reflection rather than a cordoning off of culture. And like “Goodbye, Newport Blues,” the complex vision alive in *Ask Your Mama* only becomes discernible when these binary logics are exceeded and when we remain attuned to the artist’s aesthetic blending and boundary-crossing.

I want to conclude by looking at one final Hughes piece, his 1956 lecture “Jazz as Communication,” because it captures so succinctly the ambition and aesthetic practice that defines this dissertation’s focus. And as a work developed for and performed at Newport, it serves as a companion piece to “Goodbye, Newport Blues.” The lecture is short but deceptively complex, not only in how it works to destabilize conventional musical boundaries but how it positions black music as both culturally specific and yet unable to be contained. Hughes opens the essay with, “You can start anywhere—Jazz as Communication—since it’s a circle, and you yourself are the dot in the middle. You, me” (368). Already we have a move toward openness, a re-focusing of the listener at the privileged center of this sound’s history, a space that is also shared with others. The essay goes on to trace the music’s history with the blues, and frustrates many coalescing genre distinctions of the time: “Life is as hard on Broadway as it is in Blues-originating-land. The Brill Building Blues is just as hungry as the Mississippi Levee Blues . . . Somebody is going to rise up and tell me that nothing that comes out of Tin Pan Alley is jazz. I disagree. Commercial, yes. But so was Storeyville, so was Basin Street” (368). Not only are colloquial generic distinctions muddled, but so too are music’s formal divides: “Jazz seeps into words—spelled out words,” Hughes states, expanding the form’s purview and our own capacity

to understand it (369). He sketches a panorama of cross-medial influence, describing writers from Ralph Ellison to Jacques Prévert who have been influenced by and even incorporated jazz into their writing. But he also reverses the flow of direction, describing musicians like W. C. Handy and Perry “Mule” Bradford as poets, saying “the ones of the music were the best” (370). Finally, in his own definition of jazz, he claims, “To me jazz is a montage of a dream deferred. A great big dream—yet to come—and always *yet*—to become ultimately and finally true” (370).

A montage of a dream deferred. As a filmic or photographic process, the montage involves producing a composite “by combining different pictures or pictorial elements so they blend with or into one another” (OED). The elements coalesce into a composite whole, but without losing their distinctiveness. And as a dream deferred, this composite of fragments is also an unfinished becoming, forward-facing rather than invested in roots or possession. The reference, however, is to Hughes’s 1951 book-length poem *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, and perhaps more specifically his short poem “Harlem,” included in *Montage*. “Harlem,” which *The Encyclopedia of African-American Writing* describes as an anthem of black America (384), opens with the famous question: “What happens to a dream deferred?” And yet, in closing his lecture Hughes claims, “Jazz is a heartbeat, its heartbeat is yours. You will tell me about its perspectives when you get ready” (370). What we have here in “Jazz as Communication” is Hughes concentrating on the listener in his discussion of jazz (the “dot” at the center of the circle), re-sketching the music’s formal contours, and re-centering the black experience through poetic reference. We have jazz as the deferred dream of black America, now a montage whose continuity is necessarily understood in fragments, and is always tragically waiting to be realized. But the dream’s possible “explosion” in “Harlem”—the poem’s final line asks of the deferred dream, “*does it explode?*”—registers differently here; a certain hopefulness can be felt in the

final lines of his lecture five years later. We now have jazz as *communication* as well—as musical performance, as literary translation, and here as formal lecture—emphasizing the music’s capacity to exceed its formal containment but to also operate as a mode of reciprocity. As he writes in his *Defender* column in 1959, “The Negroes of the New World created jazz but now it belongs to everybody—our gift of rhythm to all the peoples of the earth” (“That Sad, Happy”). Again, race is centered and exceeded, coupled with the music and also set aside to hear the music’s heartbeat in another. Hughes does not limit the aesthetic form’s reach as a way of realizing this deferred dream. He appears willing to take the risk that such openness results in; indeed, it is the risk that would result in his blues four years later. But through his emphasis on becoming, Hughes embraces the ongoing project of re-framing rather than re-containing, somehow finding a way to both hold on and let go.

It is this gesture that the artists of this dissertation have pursued: holding on and letting go, finding new forms of expression in the in-between. When we remain attuned to the artist’s committed crossing-over of aesthetic boundaries, we see a willingness to embrace not just intermediate but alternative ambitions: a reimagining of music’s attachments, racially or otherwise, and a pursuit of the possibilities that lie beyond those immediately legible within the binary logics of the Cold War. We find innovation and collaboration in these works, cultural exchange and even coalition-building. What we see in Hughes’s lecture and in all of the works considered is a hopefulness for a future beyond rigid divides, a dream yet to come, but that in the revitalizing space between music and writing is also a dream that is always already becoming.

Bibliography

- Adelt, Ulrich. *Blues Music in the Sixties: A Story in Black and White*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010.
- Albright, Daniel. *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts*. Yale University Press, 2014.
- Anderson, Iain. *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Anderson, Tim J. *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Armstrong, Louis as told to David DuChes. "Daddy, How the Country has Changed!" *Ebony*, May 1961, 81-90.
- Arneson, Eric. "Civil Rights and the Cold War At Home: Postwar Activism, Anticommunism, and the Decline of the Left." *American Communist History*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2012, pp. 5-44.
- Asch, Michael. "Folkways Records and the Ethics of Collecting: Some Personal Reflections." *MUSICultures*, vol. 34-35, 2007, pp. 111-127.
- Bailey, Carol. "Reappropriation as Contestation: Reconstructing Images of Black Women in Kate Rushin's *The Black Back-Ups*," *MELUS*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2017, 177-199.
- Baker, Houston A. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Baldwin, James, "Sermons and Blues." *New York Times*, 29 Mar. 1959, p. BR6.
- Baraka, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)." *Black Music*, New York: William Morrow & Company, 1968, pp. 180-211.
- . "Jazz and the White Critic." *Black Music*, New York: William Morrow & Company, 1968, pp. 11-20.
- Batiste, Stephanie Leigh. *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
- "Belafonte in Japan, Talks of Problems." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Aug 27 1960, p. 18.
- Bender, Thomas. "The Cosmopolitan Experience and Its Uses." *Cosmopolitanisms*, NYU Press, 2017, pp. 116-126.

- Bennett, Robert. "Songs of Freedom: The Politics and Geopolitics of Modern Jazz," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2009, 51-66.
- Berg, Manfred. "Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism: The NAACP in the Early Cold War." *The Journal of American History*, vol. 94, no. 1, 2007, pp. 75-96.
- Birdsong, Destiny O. and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, "Black Atlantic and Diasporic Literature." *Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*, edited by Yogita Goyal, Cambridge University Press, 2017, 143-156.
- Bohlman, Philip V. "Ontologies of Music," *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook & Mark Everist. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 17-34.
- Braxton, Anthony. *Tri-Axium Writings*. San Francisco: Synthesis Music, 1985.
- Breckenridge, Mark A. "Sounds for Adventurous Listeners": *Willis Conover, The Voice of America, and The International Reception of Avant-Garde Jazz in the 1960s*. 2012. University of North Texas, PhD dissertation.
- Brick, Howard. *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s*. New York: Twayne Publishers; Prentice Hall International, 1998.
- Brooks, Daphne. *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*. Harvard UP, 2021.
- Broonzy, Bill. *Big Bill Blues: William Broonzy's Story as Told to Yannick Bruynoghe*. New York: Oak Publications, 1964.
- . *The Big Bill Broonzy Story*, Verve, 1961.
- Brown, Wendy. "Wounded Attachments." *Political Theory*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1993, pp. 390-410.
- Brubeck, Dave. "The Beat Heard 'Round the World." *New York Times*, Jun 15 1958, p.SM14.
- Brubeck, Iola. "Iola Brubeck's World Take a Holiday or Blow Satchmo or Everybody's Coming entire musical play" (1959). *The Real Ambassadors – Scripts and Ephemera*. 1. <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/trawth/1>
- . Liner Notes. *The Real Ambassadors: An Original Musical Production by Dave and Iola Brubeck*. Columbia, 1962. LP.
- . "The Real Ambassadors script and sheet music used at Monterey Jazz Festival" (1962). *The Real Ambassadors - Scripts and Ephemera*. 3. <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/trawth/3>
- Burden-Stelly, Charisse. "Cold War Culturalism and African Diaspora Theory: Some Theoretical

- Sketches,” *Souls*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2017, 213-237.
- Burke, Andrew. “‘Moogie Wonderland’: Technology, Modernity, and the Music Documentary.” *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop*, edited by Robert Edgar, Kristy Fairclough-Isaacs, and Benjamin Halligan, Routledge, 2013, pp. 185-194.
- Burke, Patrick. “Race in the New Jazz Studies.” *The Routledge Companion to Jazz Studies*, edited by Nicholas Gebhardt, Nichole Rustin-Paschal, and Tony Whyton, Routledge, 2019, 185-195.
- Butterfield, Matthew W. “Race and Rhythm: The Social Component of the Swing Groove,” *Jazz Perspectives*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2010, 301-335.
- Camal, Jérôme. *Creolized Aurality: Guadeloupean Gwoka and Postcolonial Politics*. The University of Chicago Press, 2019.
- Carruthers, A. J. *Notational Experiments in North American Long Poems, 1961-2011: Stave Sightings*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017.
- Charters, Samuel B. *The Country Blues*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1975.
- Clegg, Mindy L. “When Jazz Was King: Selling Records with the Cold War.” *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2015, pp. 243–254.
- Clifford, James. “On Collecting Art and Culture,” *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 215-251, 1988.
- Coleman, Elizabeth Burns, Rosemary J Coombe, Fiona MacArailt. “A Broken Record: Subjecting ‘Music’ to Cultural Rights.” *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, edited by James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Collins, John F. and Carole McGranahan. “Introduction: Ethnography and U.S. Empire.” *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire*, edited by Carole McGranahan and John F. Collins, Duke University Press, 2018, 1-24.
- Collins, Sarah, and Dana Gooley. “Music and the New Cosmopolitanism: Problems and Possibilities.” *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 99, no. 2, 2017, pp. 139–165.
- Coltrane, Alice. “Krishnaya – Live.” *Transfiguration*. Warner Records, Inc., 2005
- “The Combahee River Collective Statement.” *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, edited by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017, pp. 15-27.
- Coney, John. *Space Is the Place*. Plexifilm, 1974.

- Cray, Ed. "Reviewed Work(s): The Country Blues by Samuel B. Charters," *Western Folklore*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1960, 139-140.
- Crist, Stephen A. "Jazz as Democracy? Dave Brubeck and Cold War Politics," *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2009, pp. 133-174. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jm.2009.26.2.133.
- Davenport, Lisa E. *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War*. University Press of Mississippi, 2009.
- Dougan, John. "Objects of Desire: Canon Formation and Blues Record Collecting." *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2006, 40-65.
- Denning, Michael. *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution*. Verso, 2015.
- De Santis, Christopher C. "Introduction," *Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender: Essays on Race, Politics, and Culture, 1942-62*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Dinerstein, Joel. *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America*. The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton UP, 2000.
- Dworkin, Ira. "'Near the Congo': Langston Hughes and the Geopolitics of Internationalist Poetry." *American Literary History*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2012, pp. 631-657.
- Edmonds, Ben, "Their Space Was My Place: Sun Ra and MC5 at the Grande Ballroom, Detroit, June 1969." *Sun Ra: Interviews and Essays*, edited by John Sinclair, Headpress, 2010, pp. 57-67.
- Edwards, Brent Hayes. *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination*. Harvard UP, 2017.
- . "Langston Hughes and the Futures of Diaspora." *American Literary History*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2007, pp. 689-711.
- . *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- . "The Sound of Anticolonialism," *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, edited by Ronald Radano & Tejumola Olaniyan. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 269-291.
- Edwards, Erica R. *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*. Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 2012.

Ekpo, Denis. "Manifesto for a Post-African Art." *The De-Africanization of African Art: Towards a Post-African Aesthetics*, edited by Denis Ekpo and Pfunzo Sidigi, New York: Routledge, 2021.

The Encyclopedia of African-American Writing: Five Centuries of Contribution: Trials & Triumphs of Writers, Poets, Publications, and Organizations, edited by Bryan Conn and Tara Bynum. Amenia, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2018.

"Erhard Lauds German Coin Trade." *The Billboard*, vol. 72, no. 12, Mar 21 1960, p. 74.

Eshun, Kodwo. *More Brilliant Than The Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*. London: Quartet Books, 1998.

Farrington, Holly. "'I Improvised behind Him...Ahead of Time': Charles Mingus, Kenneth Patchen and Jazz/Poetry Fusion Art." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2007, pp. 365–374.

Fawaz, Ramzi. *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

---. "Space, that Bottomless Pit: Planetary Exile and Metaphors of Belonging in American Afrofuturist Cinema." *Callaloo*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2012, pp. 1103-1122.

Feinstein, Sascha. *Jazz Poetry: From the 1920s to the Present*. Greenwood Press, 1997.

Fernandez, Raul A. *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College, 2006. Print.

Filene, Benjamin. *Romancing The Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

---. "'Our Singing Country': John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past," *American Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 4, 1991, 602-624.

Fintoni, Laurent. *Bedroom Beats & B-Sides: Instrumental Hip Hop & Electronic Music at the Turn of the Century*. Velocity Press, 2020.

Fitts, Dudley. "A Trio of Singers in Varied Keys." *New York Times*, Oct 29 1961, p. BR16.

Fosler-Lussier, Danielle. *Music in America's Cold War Democracy*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*. New York: Picador, 2003.

- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking Recognition." *New Left Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2000.
<https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii3/articles/nancy-fraser-rethinking-recognition>
- Frazier, E. Franklin. "The Failure of the Negro Intellectual." *On Race Relations: Selected Writings*, edited by G. Franklin Edwards. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 267-279.
- Garabedian, Steven P. "The Blues Image in the White Mind: Blues Historiography and White Romantic Racialism." *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2013, 1–19.
- Giddins, Gary. *Natural Selection: Gary Giddins on Comedy, Film, Music, and Books*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.
- Gikandi, Simon. "Race and Cosmopolitanism." *American Literary History*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2002, pp. 593–615.
- Gillett, Rachel. "Jazz and the Evolution of Black American Cosmopolitanism in Interwar Paris." *Journal of World History*, vol. 21, no. 3, Sept. 2010, pp. 471-495.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard UP, 1993.
- Gioia, Ted. *How to Listen to Jazz*. New York: Basic Books, 2016.
- Goyal, Yogita. *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Graham, Shane. *Cultural Entanglements: Langston Hughes and the Rise of African and Caribbean Literature*. University of Virginia Press, 2020.
- Griffin, Farah Jasmine. *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday*. New York: Free Press, 2001.
- Greene, Kevin D. *The Invention and Reinvention of Big Bill Broonzy*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018.
- Hamilton, Marybeth. *In Search of the Blues*. Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2008.
- Hamilton, Jack. *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination*. Harvard UP, 2017.
- Hansberry, Lorraine. "Genet, Mailer, & the New Paternalism." *Village Voice*, 1 Jun. 1961.
- . "Images and Essences: 1961 Dialogue with an Uncolored Egghead Containing Wholesome Intentions and Some Sass," *Conversations with Lorraine Hansberry*, edited by Mollie Godfrey, University Press of Mississippi, 2021.

- Harper, Phillip Brian. *Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Literature*. NYU Press, 2015.
- Hatschek, Keith. *The Real Ambassadors: Dave and Iola Brubeck and Louis Armstrong Challenge Segregation*. University Press of Mississippi, 2022.
- Helton, Laura E. "On Decimals, Catalogs, and Racial Imaginaries of Reading." *PMLA*, vol. 134, no. 1, 2019, 99–120.
- Henderson, Stephen E. *Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References*. New York: Morrow, 1973.
- Higginson, Pim. *Scoring Race: Jazz, Fiction, and Francophone Africa*. Boydell & Brewer, 2017.
- Hintzen, Percy C. and Jean Muteba Rahier "Introduction: Theorizing the African Diaspora: Metaphor, Miscognition, and Self-Recognition," *Global Circuits of Blackness: Interrogating the African Diaspora*, 2010.
- Hoffman, Frank A. "Reviewed Work(s): The Country Blues by Samuel B. Charters; The Rural Blues: A Study of the Vocal and Instrumental Resources by Samuel B. Charters," *Midwest Folklore*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1961, 175-177.
- Hollinger, David A. *Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity: Studies in Ethnoracial, Religious, and Professional Affiliation in the United States*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.
- . "How Wide the Circle of the 'We'? American Intellectuals and the Problem of the Ethnos Since World War II." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 2, 1993, 317-337.
- "How Nat Cole Thanked South Americans with Tunes Told in Album." *Chicago Defender (Daily Edition)*, Nov 05 1959, p. 21.
- Hughes, Langston. "Africa And Tomorrow's World." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 19 1959, p. 10.
- . "Africa, The Land of Apartheid." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 12 1959, p. 10.
- . *The Black Verse, Langston Hughes, 12 Moods for Jazz*, Buddah Records, 1969.
- . "Bread Not Enough In Congo." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 5 1959, p. 10.
- . *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Edited by Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- . "Footholds And Toeholds." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Nov 7 1959, p. 10.

- . "Gloomy Day At Newport." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Jul 23 1960, p. 10.
- . "Governments In Africa Today." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Aug 8 1959, p. 10.
- . "How Europe Acquired Africa." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Aug 1 1959, p. 10.
- . "Jazz as Communication." *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Volume 9: Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, edited by Christopher C. De Santis, Columbia: University of Missouri Press: 2002, 368-370.
- . "Kenya: Hell In Paradise." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Aug 29 1959, p. 10.
- . "That Sad, Happy Music Called Jazz." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Jan 24 1959, p. 10.
- . *Selected Letters of Langston Hughes*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015.
- . "Simple At The Summit." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Jun 11 1960, p. 10.
- . "Simple At The U.N." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 23 1961, p. 8.
- . "Simple and the Sounds." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Jul 2 1959, p. 10.
- . "Simple Speculates on Peace." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Jul 11 1959, p. 10.
- . "Simple's Connections." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Jul 09 1960, p. 10.
- . "Simple's Happy New Year." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Dec 31 1960, p. 10.
- . "Untitled." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 16 1961, p. 8.
- . "Western, White And Wicked." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Mar 18 1961, p. 10.
- . "White Folks Watch Out." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, May 28 1960, p. 10.
- Jackson, Lauren Michele. *White Negroes: When Cornrows Were in Vogue... and Other Thoughts on Cultural Appropriation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2019.
- James, Robin. *The Sonic Episteme: Acoustic Resonance, Neoliberalism, and Biopolitics*. Duke UP, 2019.

- Joans, Ted and Bourne St. Clair. "Ted Joans on Langston Hughes." *The Langston Hughes Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1997, pp. 71-77. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26435205>.
- Johnson, E. Patrick. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Johnson, Ronna C. "Three Generations of Beat Poetics." *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 80–93, 2013.
- Jones, LeRoi. *Blues People*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1999.
- Jones, Meta DuEwa. *The Muse Is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word*. University of Illinois Press, 2013.
- Keil, Charles. *Urban Blues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Kelley, Robin D. G. *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- . "Notes on Deconstructing the Folk." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 97, no. 5, 1992, pp. 1400-1408.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Kheshti, Roshanak. *Switched-on Bach*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
- Kim, Daniel Won-gu. "'We, Too, Rise with You!': Recovering Langston Hughes's African (Re)Turn 1954-1960 in An African Treasury, the Chicago Defender, and Black Orpheus." *African American Review*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2007, pp. 419–441.
- Klein, Christina. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middelbrow Imagination, 1945-1961*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Knauf, Ken. "\$15 Million Record Year Seen For 1955 Coin Export Trade." *The Billboard*, vol. 68, no. 6, 1956, p. 86.
- Kreiss, Daniel. "Appropriating the Master's Tools: Sun Ra, the Black Panthers, and Black Consciousness, 1952-1973." *Becoming: Blackness and the Musical Imagination*, special issue of *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2008, pp. 57-81.
- Krugler, David F. *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953*. University of Missouri Press, 2000.
- Kun, Josh. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

- Kutzinski, Vera M. *The Worlds of Langston Hughes: Modernism and Translation in the Americas*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012.
- “Langston Hughes, John Sellers, James Cotton and Otis Spann discuss blues music.” *WFMT*. 15 Jul. 1960. Studs Terkel Radio Archive. <https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/langston-hughes-john-sellers-james-cotton-and-otis-spann-discuss-blues-music?t=47.01%2C57.01&a=NatuThisIs%2CSingInThat>
- Lefkowitz, Aaron. *Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Miles Davis: A Twentieth-Century Transnational Biography*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018.
- Lewis, Cara L. *Dynamic Form: How Intermediality Made Modernism*. Cornell UP, 2020.
- Lindberg, Julianne. “I Like to Recognize the Tune: Interrupting Jazz and Musical Theater Histories.” *The Routledge Companion to Jazz Studies*, edited by Nicholas Gebhardt, Nichole Rustin-Paschal, and Tony Whyton, Routledge, 2019, 27-36.
- Lock, Graham. *Forces in Motion: the Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1988.
- Lomax, Alan. “Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on black men and white women, sex, and relationships,” T1008.0, Track 6, 13 May, 1952. *The Association for Cultural Equity*, <https://archive.culturalequity.org/field-work/big-bill-broonzy-1952/paris-552/interview-big-bill-broonzy-about-black-men-and-white>
- . “Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on Joe Turner,” T1007.0, Track 5, 13 May, 1952. *The Association for Cultural Equity*, <https://archive.culturalequity.org/field-work/big-bill-broonzy-1952/paris-552/interview-big-bill-broonzy-about-joe-turner>
- . “Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on the record industry and playing in bands,” T1008.0, Track 2, 13, May 1952. *The Association for Cultural Equity*, <https://archive.culturalequity.org/field-work/big-bill-broonzy-1952/paris-552/interview-big-bill-broonzy-about-record-industry-and>
- . “Interview with Big Bill Broonzy on why he loves the blues, reading and writing, pride, and black unity,” T1008.0, Track 4, 13 May, 1952. *The Association for Cultural Equity*, <https://archive.culturalequity.org/field-work/big-bill-broonzy-1952/paris-552/interview-big-bill-broonzy-about-why-he-loves-blues>
- Lorde, Audre. “Uses of the Erotic : The Erotic as Power.” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, New York: Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 49-55.
- Lordi, Emily. *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American Literature*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2013.

- Lott, Eric. *Black Mirror: The Cultural Contradictions of American Racism*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017.
- . *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford UP, 1993.
- “Louis Armstrong, Barring Soviet Tour, Denounces Eisenhower and Gov. Faubus,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1957, 23.
- Louis, Wm. Roger and Ronald Robertson. “The Imperialism of Decolonization,” *The Journal of Commonwealth History*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1994, 462-511.
- Lowney, John. “Jazz, Black Transnationalism, and the Political Aesthetics of Langston Hughes's Ask Your Mama.” *American Literature* 84.3 (2012): 563-87.
- *Jazz Internationalism: Literary Afro-Modernism and the Cultural Politics of Black Music*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017.
- Mack, Kimberly Renee. *The Fictional Black Blues Figure: Blues Music and the Art of Narrative Self-Invention*. 2015. University of California, Los Angeles. PhD dissertation.
- Mackey, Nathaniel & Art Lange (eds.). *Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry & Prose*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1993.
- Mahon, Maureen. *Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll*. Duke UP, 2020.
- Mailer, Norman. “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster.” *Advertisements for Myself*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959, pp. 337-358.
- Marcoux, Jean-Philippe. *Jazz Griots: Music As History in the 1960s African American Poem*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012.
- Mathes, Carter. *Imagine the Sound: Experimental African American Literature after Civil Rights*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Matthes, Erich Hatala. “Cultural Appropriation Without Cultural Essentialism?” *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2016, pp. 343-366.
- Maxwell, William J. “Ralph Ellison and the Constitution of Jazzocracy,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2004, 40-57.
- M'Baye, Babacar. “Cosmopolitan Critiques of Colonial Abuse in Langston Hughes's African Travel Writings.” *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 83, no. 1, 2018, pp. 5–21.
- Meade, Guthrie T. “Copyright: A Tool for Commercial Rural Music Research.” *Western Folklore*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1971, 206–214.

- McNally, Dennis. *On Highway 61: Music, Race, and the Evolution of Cultural Freedom*. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2014.
- Medovoi, Leerom. *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*. Duke UP, 2005.
- Milian, Patrick. *Intermedial Modernism: Music, Dance, and Sound*. 2019. University of Washington, PhD dissertation.
- Miller, Karl Hagstrom. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Monson, Ingrid. *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call out to Jazz and Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Moore, David Chioni. "The Bessie Head-Langston Hughes Correspondence, 1960–1961." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2010, pp. 1–20.
- Moreno, Jairo. "Imperial Aurality: Jazz, the Archive, and U.S. Empire." *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, edited by Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan, 2016, 32-45.
- Mukherjee, Roopali, Sarah Banet-Weiser, Herman Gray, editors. *Racism Postrace*. Duke UP, 2019.
- Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." *The Drama Review* vol. 12, no. 4, Black Theatre, 1968, pp. 28-39.
- . *Black Boogaloo (Notes on Black Liberation)*. San Francisco: Journal of Black Poetry Press, 1969.
- Neumann, Birgit. "Intermedial Negotiations: Postcolonial Literatures." *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*. De Gruyter, 2015.
- "Newport Jazz Festival Set for Jaunt Abroad." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 05 1959, p. 19.
- Nielsen, Aldon Lynn. *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Nwankwo, Ifeoma Kiddoe. *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Obiwu. "The Pan-African Brotherhood of Langston Hughes and Nnamdi Azikiwe." *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2007, pp. 143–165.

- O'Connell, Christian. "The Color of the Blues: Considering Revisionist Blues Scholarship." *Southern Cultures*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2013, pp. 61–81.
- Olatunji, Babatunde. *The Beat of My Drum: An Autobiography*. Temple UP, 2005.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd Edition. Routledge, 1994.
- Pinch, Trevor and Frank Trocco. *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer*. Harvard UP, 2002.
- Porter, Eric. *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Posnock, Ross. "The Dream of Deracination: The Uses of Cosmopolitanism." *American Literary History*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2000, pp. 802–818.
- Quashie, Kevin. "To Be (a) One: Notes on Coupling and Black Female Audacity." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2018, pp. 68-95.
- . "The Trouble with Publicness: Toward a Theory of Black Quiet," *African American Review*, vol. 43, no. 2-3 (Summer/Fall 2009), pp. 329-343).
- Quigg, Doc. "Top Jazzmen Greet German Hornmen, Drummers in Cafe." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Dec 17 1960, p. 19.
- Ra, Sun, "The Air Spiritual Man." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 450-454.
- . "Black Myth." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 79.
- . "The Black Rays Race." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 83.
- . "The Cosmo Man." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 116.
- . "The Desperate Soul." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 128.
- . "Every Thought Is Alive." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 160.

- . "Fabricate." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 162.
- . "Freedom Versus Black Freedom." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 178.
- . "Message to Black Youth." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 240-241.
- . "Music the Neglected Plane of Wisdom." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 244-245.
- . "My Music is Words." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 467-471.
- . "Of Coordinate Vibrations." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 262.
- . "On Solar Planes." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 278.
- . "The Other Otherness (1972)." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 285.
- . "The Other Otherness (1980, version 1)." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 285.
- . "The Other Otherness (1980, version 2)." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 286.
- . "The Outer Darkness (1972, version 1)." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 294.
- . "The Outer Darkness (1972, version 2)." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 295.
- . "Precision Fate." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 311.

- . "The Sound Image." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 350.
- . "Sound Myth." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 353.
- . "The Spiral Way." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 358.
- . "Truth Is Bad Good." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 398.
- . "When Angels Speak." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 423.
- . "Words and the Impossible." *The Immeasurable Equation: the Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken, Wartaweil: Waitawhile, 2005, p. 431.
- Rabinowitz Deer, Tova. *Exploring Typography*. New York: Thomson Delmar Learning, 2006.
- Radano, Ronald, "Introduction: Music and Race, Their Past, Their Presence." *Music and the Racial Imagination*, edited by Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Ragain, Nathan. "A 'Reconcepted Am': Language, Nature, and Collectivity in Sun Ra and Henry Dumas," *Criticism*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2012, pp. 539-565.
- Rajewsky, Irina O. "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality." *Intermédialités*, no. 6, 2005, pp. 43-64.
- Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986-1988.
- Randle, William. "Toward a Better Understanding of the Blues." *Phylon*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1962, 99-103.
- "Rate Nat Cole Top Goodwill Ambassador." *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 17 1960, p. 19.
- Redmond, Shana. *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*. NYU Press, 2013.
- Reed, Anthony. *Soundworks: Race, Sound, and Poetry in Production*. Duke UP, 2021.
- "Remote Lands to Hear Old Democracy Boogie." *New York Times*, Nov 18 1955, p. 16.

- Riesman, Bob. *I Feel So Good: The Life and Times of Big Bill Broonzy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Rippl, Gabriele. "Introduction: Why Intermediality?" *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*. De Gruyter, 2015.
- Roberts, Brian Russell. *Artistic Ambassadors: Literary and International Representation of the New Negro Era*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013.
- Robinson, Jason. "The Challenge of the Changing Same: The Jazz Avant-garde of the 1960s, the Black Aesthetic, and the Black Arts Movement," *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2005, pp. 20-37.
- Roy, William G. *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Russworm, TreaAndrea M. *Blackness is Burning: Civil Rights, Popular Culture, and the Problem of Recognition*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016.
- Saslaw, Janna K. and James P. Walsh. "From Rays to Ra: Music, Physics, and the Mind." *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Imagination*, vol. 2, edited by Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard, Mads Walther-Hansen, and Martin Knakkegaard, 2019, pp. 133-152.
- Saul, Scott. *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties*. Harvard UP, 2003.
- Schenker, Frederick J. "Listening for Empire in Transnational Jazz Studies." *The Routledge Companion to Jazz Studies*, edited by Nicholas Gebhardt, Nichole Rustin-Paschal, and Tony Whyton, Routledge, 2019, 231-238.
- Shepard, Brian K. *Refining Sound: A Practical Guide to Synthesis and Synthesizers*. Oxford UP, 2013.
- Sinclair, John, "The Great and Wondrous Sun Ra: A Conversation with Wayne Kramer, London, June 2008." *Sun Ra: Interviews and Essays*, edited by John Sinclair, Headpress, 2010, pp. 119-123.
- Singh, Nikhil Pal. *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Smethurst, James. "'Don't Say Goodbye to the Porkpie Hat': Langston Hughes, the Left, and the Black Arts Movement." *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2002, pp. 1225–36.
- Springer, Robert. "Folklore, Commercialism and Exploitation: Copyright in the Blues." *Popular Music*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2007, 33–45.

- St Clair, Bourne. "Ted Joans on Langston Hughes." *The Langston Hughes Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1997, pp. 71–77.
- Stein, Daniel. *Music is My Life: Louis Armstrong, Autobiography and American Jazz*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012.
- Stein, Daniel & Martin Butler, "Musical Autobiographies: An Introduction." *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2015, 115-121.
- Steinskog, Erik. *Afrofuturism and Black Sound Studies: Culture, Technology, and Things to Come*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Steintrager, James A. & Rey Chow. "Sound Objects: An Introduction." *Sound Objects*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Sterling, Cheryl. "Race Matters: Cosmopolitanism, Afropolitanism, and Pan-Africanism via Edward Wilmot Blyden." *Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2015, p. 119-145.
- Stoever, Jennifer Lynn, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. New York: NYU Press, 2016.
- Stoler, Ann Laura in conversation with Carole McGranahan. "Afterword. Disassemblage: Rethinking U.S. Imperial Formations." *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire*, edited by Carole McGranahan and John F. Collins, Duke University Press, 2018, 477-489.
- "Summary," *Ask Your Mama*. Avie Records. <http://www.avie-records.com/releases/ask-your-mama/> (accessed January 30, 2019).
- Szwed, John F. *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2010.
- . *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra*. Edinburgh: Mojo Books, 2000.
- Tate, Greg. "Introduction: Nigs R Us, or How Blackfolk Became Fetish Objects." *Everything But the Burden: What White People are Taking From Black Culture*, edited by Greg Tate. New York: Broadway Books, 2003.
- Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'*. Princeton University Press, 1992, 25-73.
- Thiem, Darius L. "Negro Folksong Scholarship in the United States," *African Music* vol. 2, no. 3, 1960, 67-72.
- Thomas, Lorenzo. "'Communicating by Horns': Jazz and Redemption in the Poetry of the Beats and the Black Arts Movement." *African American Review*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1992, pp. 291–298.

- Titon, Jeff Todd. "Reconstructing the Blues: Reflections on the 1960s Blues Revival," *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. N. V. Rosenberg, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993, 220–240.
- Tolliver, Cedric R. *Of Vagabonds and Fellow Travelers: African Diasporic Cosmopolitan Culture and the Cold War*. University of Pennsylvania, PhD dissertation, 2009. Ann Arbor: ProQuest.
- Tracy, Steven C. *Langston Hughes and the Blues*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Vail, Mark. *The Synthesizer: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding, Programming, Playing, and Recording the Ultimate Electronic Instrument*. Oxford UP, 2014.
- Von Eschen, Penny M. *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- . *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Wald, Elijah. *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.
- Warren, Kenneth W. "Appeals for (Mis)recognition: Theorizing the Diaspora." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, Duke University Press, 1993, 392-406.
- Werner, Craig. *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America*. University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Westover, Jeff. "Africa/America: Fragmentation and Diaspora in the Work of Langston Hughes." *Callaloo*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2002, pp. 1207–1223.
- Wilson, John. "JAZZ AND POETRY SHARE PROGRAM." *New York Times*, Mar 17 1959, p. 42.
- Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013.
- Woods, Clyde. *Development Arrested: the Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*. New York: Verso, 1998.
- Yanow, Scott. "Real Ambassadors." *All Music Guide: The Definitive Guide to Popular Music*, edited by Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Stephen Thomas Erlewine, Backbeat Books, 2001, 1174.

- Yost, Brian. "The Changing Same: The Evolution of Racial Self-Definition and Commercialization." *Callaloo*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2008, pp. 1314-1334.
- Young, James O. and Conrad G. Brunk. "Introduction." *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, edited by James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Younquist, Paul. *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of Afrofuturism*. University of Texas Press, 2016.
- Zamalin, Alex. *Black Utopia: The History of an Idea from Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism*. Columbia UP, 2019.