This Feeling Tone:

The Sound of Black and Jewish Collaboration 1981-2006

by

Alexander Ullman

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Committee in charge:

Professor Scott Saul, Co-Chair
Professor Tom McEnaney, Co-Chair
Professor Nadia Ellis
Professor Namwali Serpell
Professor Chana Kronfeld

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Abstract

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"Are conversations pathways to the exchange of understandings?" asks poet Claudia Rankine in *Just Us: An American Conversation* (2020). Or, she wonders, "are conversations accommodations?" *This Feeling Tone: The Sound of Black and Jewish Collaboration 1981-2006*, explores these questions by returning to a crucial nexus within American social and cultural history—Black and Jewish-American dialogue—and asking what we gain from actively listening to the voices at play in it.

This Feeling Tone offers fresh interpretations of six key 20th-century American artists by listening closely to recorded conversations as well as their collaborative poetic and dramatic artworks. I pair them as follows: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich; Anna Deavere Smith and Studs Terkel; and George C. Wolfe and Tony Kushner. By employing interdisciplinary methods—prose description, melodic transcription, and close listening—I explore how sound is inscribed by complex and often unequal power relations. My approach—which crosses disciplines, fields, methodologies, and archives—aims to make such relations more perceptible.

There's a common historical narrative about "Black-Jewish relations" in the twentieth century, one that suggests that these two identity groups emerged from World War II in a common civil rights coalition but then ended the century at odds. *This Feeling Tone* challenges this abstract narrative of declining relations with a material history of relationships between six artists/activists. I argue that Lorde and Rich forged a feminist counterpublic by negotiating the dynamics of race, gender, and sexuality during public performances of lyric poems. I suggest that Smith invented "headphone theater" by revising Studs Terkel's tape-recording technique for the stage. And I contend that, together, Tony Kushner and George C. Wolfe inflected Bertolt Brecht and Zora Neale Hurston's rhythmic aesthetics to redefine the "sung-through" musical for the postmodern era. By studying how these artists labored to confront ethnic, racialized, and gendered histories of sound, *This Feeling Tone* uncovers a radical and perilous history of collaboration — not as democratic safeguard but as embodied social practice.

This Feeling Tone thus offers a more nuanced answer to Rankine's question: conversation is both a "pathway"—a means to move across a stage, a way of working through difficulty—and also an "accommodation": a room, a place, or a space where embodied voices haunt the walls of the house of difference.

For Naima

This Feeling Tone:
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Author's Note

Throughout *This Feeling Tone,* I choose to keep the word black, and its various forms that index African diasporic identity, in lower case, while I choose to keep the word Jew, and its various forms that index Jewish diasporic identity, starting with a capital letter.

A word on this choice.

There are divergent perspectives and practices across the critical landscape concerning the capitalization of "black." For instance, in his 2021 collection of essays *Who Will Pay Reparations on My Soul?*, Jesse McCarthy writes that he "tends to agree philosophically with Fred Moten that what is most important about blackness is its dispersive and de-essentializing qualities, its resistance to the assumptive logics of possessive individualism and state power, a function that I would argue is better captured aesthetically by the lower case" (McCarthy 4). His argument is that the choice to use the lower case has both political and aesthetic import, but not *too much*: any offense taken from the choice would be the result "something deeper" than "orthographic alteration." In contrast, in her 2021 monograph *Liner Notes for the Revolution,* Daphne Brooks "turn[s] back to capitalizing Black…in the spirit of emphasizing a core principle framing [her] book's aims: to reveal and explore the shared sociohistorical and cultural conditions of various peoples of African descent resulting from systemic subjugation across space and time" (D. Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution* ix). The claim here is that capitalization aligns with the political principles of the subject matter, and the implicit question is not what causes offense but what the work at hand demands.

The capitalization of the word "Jew" has not had as much critical debate in the current moment, though it does have a fraught history. T.S. Eliot famously de-capitalized it in his poem "Burbank with a Baedeker," a move that was largely seen as anti-Semitic (anti-Semitic is another word that needs orthographic problematization). Jean Francois Lyotard famously also used the lower-case in his book *Heidegger and "the jews"* (1990), so as to "indicate that I am not thinking of a nation" but rather some more abstract form of the unrepresentable, the forgettable, the abject. Rodger Kamenetz's book *The Lowercase Jew* offers a poetic attempt to undo these histories, reclaiming the lowercase against anti-Semitism and erasure. "Poets," he writes in the final verse of the titular poem, "you should be careful the words you choose/ Remember, there are no lower case Jews" (Kamenetz 177)

It would seem to me, then, that the politically urgent move to make would be to lower case the "j" of jew, so as to shake up the critical landscape in "jewish studies," in the vein of hoping to "de-transcendentalize," to borrow Samuel Delany's word, the whole concept of the "jew." This choice would also be in tune, I believe, with the anti-essentialist aesthetics and politics of the Jewish artists I consider. But because the present work is explicitly tied to thinking about cross-diasporic encounter, I choose to keep the word black in lower case and capitalize the word Jew. I believe that the decision calls attention to the history of unequal power relations between these groups in an American context, as well as the productive incommensurability of the aesthetic traditions that I consider throughout.

INTRODUCTION

Diaspora sounds noisy in Anna Deavere Smith's 1992 play *Fires in the Mirror*. The now canonical play is known for its polyvocality—for how it challenged mainstream journalism after the 1991 Crown Heights riots by inflecting dozens of recorded interviews through the voice of a single actress (herself). But unlike the 1993 published edition, or even its concomitant PBS adaptation, the archival recording of the original 1992 production begins with the avant-garde composer Joseph Jarman's alto saxophone blaring against a heavy backbeat (*Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities [Videorecording]*). In the Western aesthetic imagination, noise is the constitutive outside of music, and saxophones can only produce one note at a time. In the recording, however, the noise *is* the music. In the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) aesthetic he helped define, Jarman's horn roars winded multiphonics over the loudspeakers to the rhythm of an alarm. The soundscape then fades out as the play begins. Another archival recording of Jarman's—a sonic cue entitled "Tone"—suggests that this audible noise-music dialectic might live on in the structural rhythm of the play, dividing up the scenes (*Fires in the Mirror [Cues]*). "Tone" sounds like a digitally produced radar signal flickering against steady static. I listened for this "Tone" while experiencing the twenty-six characters, twenty-nine scenes, and ninety-minutes that make up the archival recording of *Fires*. But I couldn't quite hear the signal nor the static.

I heard other tones, however. In "Static," one of the earliest scenes in the play, Smith performs an "Anonymous Lubavitcher Woman" folding laundry in her home. She tells the story of her baby accidently knocking the volume on her radio to a blistering volume: "it was just static, it was blaring, blaring" . When Smith performs the words "static" and "blaring," she uses what linguists describe as a "Jewish English" intonation: raising the "a" of "static" [stjeæɾɪk] from normative English pronunciation and performing a high-peak rise-fall on the second "blaring" (Burdin 263). While this vocal register indexes intra-diasporic belonging, the noise of the radio occasions cross-diasporic confusion. Because it's shabbat, Jewish law (halachah) prevents the woman from turning off the radio herself. Stuck, she walks outside to elicit help, even if she can't ask directly ("I hope I have the law correct") (Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* 7) . She eventually finds a "little boy [who] was black," and invites him into her house. But he is confused about why she can't turn off the radio herself: "I just stood there looking kind of dumb." In the PBS adaptation, Smith gestures a set of puppy-dog-eyes she imagines the woman to have communicated her need non-verbally. This is a constructed monologue, after all: one that Smith says she transcribed from a recorded phone interview and supplemented with later visits to the woman's home. The scene ends with the black boy turning off the radio and Smith as the Lubavitcher Woman reflecting on both the stereo and stereotype: "He probably thought … Jewish people are really smart [but] they don't know how to turn off their radios."

For this secular Jew, the tone of the "Anonymous Lubavitcher Woman" scene is comic, but I would hardly call comic the entire artwork that is *Fires*. Smith's aesthetic revels in multiplicity, even at the level of the word. That's part of its noisiness. While "static," for instance, signifies the noise of the radio and cross-diasporic miscommunication, the word—by virtue of its sound—gains new, diasporic meaning later in the play. In "Rope," Smith performs Angela Davis lecturing on racism, colonialism, and interracial solidarity: "I'm interested in community that is not static … we have to find different ways of coming together, not that old notion of coalition" (Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* 32). In her performance, Smith evokes Davis signature style of moving between professor and preacher: the word "static" stressed against a

lecture-like monotone and a deep fall on the last syllable of "notion." But this melodic movement is paralleled by the oceanic metaphor Smith (as Davis) uses to describe solidarity: "I feel very anchored in my various communities. But … the rope attached to that anchor should belong enough to allow us to move/ into other communities, to understand and learn" (Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* 31). In the published 1993 edition of the play, Smith breaks the line between "to move" and "into" to indicate a spoken and thus performed pause, the stillness of sound contrasting with the diasporic motion of the image. As in the moment of the Lubavitcher woman's facial gesture, performance is the noise that disrupts any static interpretation of the literary object.

Experiencing the archival recording of *Fires* from thirty years out, the play admittedly feels, at times, very dated. It's honestly very hard for me to take any monologue seriously after Fred Armisen's numerous parodies of the form.[1] But it was also impossible for me not to experience the play with at least a partial concern for the contemporary politics of representation around black and Jewish identity. In juxtaposing competing histories of genocidal trauma and witness testimony, the play risks committing the cardinal sin of Afropessimistic thought: analogizing the black American experience to *anything*.[2] From this vantage, the play risks flattening cultural difference into false equivalence. Listening to her perform "Jewish English" while holding a copy of the play in my lap, I also understood the critiques from Jewish critics. For Adam Zachary Newton, for instance, *Fires* is not dialectical, textual, or Levinasian enough. Its logic of juxtaposition, he writes, is "very different from the asymmetry of face-to face … What's missing is rootedness of context, of lifeworld—the blood and sinew of habit, practice, and belief—what literature as text, not performance, can embody" (Newton 164). From this vantage, the play risks reifying the very forms of cultural stereotype it claims to interrogate and upend.

Yet *Fires* isn't about "blood and sinew," and it refuses to reduce embodied performance to the metaphor of an idealized face or of a written text. Like all the artworks I attend to across *This Feeling Tone: The Sound of Black and Jewish Collaboration 1981-2006,* the recording of Smith's play is not only a historical document of a specific cultural moment but an occasion to ask how sound and diaspora encounter each other through embodied performance. Experiencing the "liveness" of the 1992 production through the archival recording—rapidly shifting vocal registers, the audible silence of the stage, an audience reacting in real time, remnants of costume

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[1] See the *Portlandia* B-roll "One Man Show" for the most incisive, Smithian parody: http://thunderant.com/project/one-man-show. Also, his Saturday Night Live Skit from December 17, 2011 entitled "Tony Palmese's Broadway hit, 'Half Jewish, Half Italian, Completely Neurotic!'"

[2] Afropessimism, in Frank Wilderson's formulation, rebukes comparison because "analogy mystifies, rather than clarifies, Black suffering" (Wilderson 41). But Afropressimism is also a "narrative mode" that is, ironically, rife with simile and moments of black and Jewish encounter. Wilderson's personal narrative, for instance, starts with a psychic break produced by a story about a confrontation between his Palestinian friend and an Ethiopian Israeli soldier: "when…being frisked and molested by Black Jews was more humiliating and of a greater threat to the psychic life of Palestinians than being frisked and molested by White Jews, my dream of solidarity and redemption went into free fall" (Wilderson 243). See also "Chapter One: Wake" from Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), which aims to disentangle loose comparisons between black and Jewish particularity in the context of teaching a course on comparative trauma theory and history (Sharpe 12). See also Ben Ratskoff's essay "Rethinking Jewish Diaspora: On Analogy, Translation, and Abjection," where describes how white politicians and scholars of African diasporic life were turning toward Jewish analogies, which he describes as symptomatic of a "trend of postwar liberalism that sought to manage on-going crises of anti-Blackness and Black militancy through analogies, paradigms, and limiting cases of Jewish suffering" (Ratskoff 36).

that linger on Smith's body across characters—I was struck by the play's historicity. By historicity, I mean the way the artwork interacts with histories of appropriative identification and with its specific cultural moment, when some black and Jewish artists and scholars were keenly rethinking the relationship between art and politics via the cultural meaning of sound and diaspora.

Staged seventy-five years after *The Jazz Singer* first assimilated sound into screen through scenes of Jewish blackface, *Fires* offered an immanent critique of that film's cultural legacy. Jarman's horn inaugurates this critique. *The Jazz Singer* famously has no jazz in it, but *Fires* begins with the sound of jazz's most politically urgent iteration. And unlike the milquetoast dramas that followed *The Jazz Singer* and that trafficked in tokenism and fantasies of racial harmony—including works like Harold Rome's *The Zulu and the Zayda* (1965) and Alfred Uhry's *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989)—*Fires* challenged the racial ventriloquism of *The Jazz Singer's* plot and the sonic realism of its form. As Michael Rogin influentially argued, Al Jolson (formerly Asa Yoelson) starred in film's first "talkie" *The Jazz Singer* as an imagined version of himself, a "Jakie Rabinowitz" who finds his voice as an Americanized "Jack Robin" by rubbing his face with burnt cork and singing "My Mammy" (Rogin 91). In *Fires,* a black female actor moves into and out of a character who is not an imagined version of herself but a white, orthodox Jewish mother she interviewed, one who encounters black people in her lived experience but also through Smith's performance practice. This is not simply a reversal of the roles but fundamentally a different speech situation. Every *speaking as* in *Fires* is always already a *speaking to*. Racial ventriloquism becomes, in Smith's work, not just the target but also the means for challenging the racist aesthetics of the Hollywood Film era—aesthetics that joined "white supremacist structural domination with cross-racial desire" to create a cultural realm where black people could never represent themselves (Rogin 12). Smith, instead, inaugurated a novel form of monologue theater where the black actor need not simply represent themselves but could dare to represent anyone. She was, as Daphne Brooks writes, one of the many black, feminist performers who "expanded … notions of what's expressively possible, powerful, and humanly restorative in a world that never showed them enough love" (D. Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution* 40). "To attack blackface" traditions, Rogin writes, "may simply be another way of putting it on" (Rogin 99), but Smith was also a theorist of sound and diaspora: she offered an aesthetic rooted in Brechtian estrangement and diasporic cultural identity. "Identity in motion," she calls it, referring to identity that "lives in the obvious gap between the real person and my attempt to seem like them" (Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* xxxiv). This *decalage* manifested not just between actor and character but in the "broken sentences" (what linguists call "intonation units") of everyday speech: "Identity … lives in the unique way that a person departs from the English language." Thus, when Angela Davis uses the image of a rope attached to an anchor as a metaphor for describing cross-diasporic encounter beyond that "old notion of coalition"—a "move" (pause) "into"—she describes most readily not a utopian society but Smith's ethnographic practice. Smith was theorizing "the break" on the stage at the same time that Nathaniel Mackey and Fred Moten were doing so on the page. And her necessarily collaborative work unsettled limited notions of singular authorship and cultural authenticity.

If *Fires,* then, was a radical intervention into the representation of black and Jewish cultural encounter*,* it was also a product of its time. Smith's play was historically concomitant with the rise of two academic fields, "sound studies" and "diaspora studies," both crucial to the present study. *Fires* engages not directly with these fields but with the cultural forces that produced them. "Sound studies," for its part, aimed to historicize and challenge the separation of

the senses, calling into question the default ocularcentrism of Western culture and engaging with non-Western, synesthetic, embodied histories of perception. It offered scholars a means of engaging directly with the cultural meaning of sound technology and the cultural practices of communication that necessitated a technology's emergence. Perhaps its most famous trope is what Pierre Schaeffer called the "acousmatic situation," or the perception of sound as separated from its source.[3] "Diaspora studies," for its part, celebrated another kind of gap, since it questioned narratives of origin and logics of return. The word "diaspora" has Jewish roots, appearing in English translations of a Greek translation of Deuteronomy 28:25.[4] But by the 90s the word offered a vocabulary for thinking about various forms of cultural identity, what Stuart Hall described as identity "not [as] an essence but a positioning" (Hall 72). According to Brent Hayes Edwards, the term—especially in its adjectival form (diasporic consciousness, diasporic ethics, diasporic literature, etc.)—became a way of doing comparative work within and between "overlapping diasporas" that emphasized distinct yet historically contemporary cultural practices (B. H. Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora" 64).[5] If the fields of "sound studies" and "diaspora studies" meet in the thematics of the gap—the gap between sight and sound, the gap between homeland and hostland—they also meet in this term: cultural practice.

The present study began with this question: what are the cultural practices in which sound and diaspora meet in twentieth and twenty-first century American culture? Beyond analyses of Hollywood film, studies of sound and of specifically literary culture have historically maintained a focus on written representations of dialect, translation, and music.[6] But *This Feeling Tone* aims

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[3] The composer and environmentalist R. Murray Schafer introduced the term "soundscape" into scholarly discourse in his 1977 book, *The Tuning of the World*; with his colleagues in the World Soundscape Project, he inaugurated the discipline of acoustic ecology. The field of sound studies, as it has come to be known, has its own journals: *Soundscape: A Journal of Acoustic Ecology*, founded in 2000; *Sound Studies*, founded in 2011; and the *Journal of Sonic Studies,* also founded in 2011. It has its own professional organizations: the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE), established in 1993, and the European Sound Studies Association, founded in 2012; and has seen the publication of a growing number of handbooks and anthologies designed for use in college and university courses, most notably Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld's *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (2011), Jonathan Sterne's *The Sound Studies Reader* (2012), and David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny's *Keywords in Sound* (2015).

[4] Robert Alter's translation reads, "נְגָפְךָ֙ לִפְנֵ֣י אֹיְבֶ֔יךָ בְּדֶ֥רֶךְ אֶחָ֖ד תֵּצֵ֣א אֵלָ֑יו וּבְשִׁבְעָ֥ה דְרָכִ֖ים תָּנ֣וּס לְפָנָ֑יו וְהָיִ֤יתָ לְזַעֲוָה֙ לְכֹ֣ל ו יְהֹוָ֔ה יִתֶּנְךָ֖ מַמְלְכ֥וֹת הָאָֽרֶץ׃" or "The Lord will render you routed before your enemies. On one way you will sally forth toward him, and on seven ways you will flee before him. And you will be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*). Ben Ratskoff has tried to shift the analysis of diaspora to the study of abjection [l'za'avah] (Ratskoff 37). Most recently, Shaul Magid attempts a distinction between the "not yet" of "exile" (galut) and what he considers the "more neutral state of dispersion: 'diaspora' or 'golah'" (Magid 13).

[5] As Brent Hayes Edwards writes, "diaspora points to difference not only internally (the ways transnational black groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language) but also externally: in appropriating a term so closely associated with Jewish thought, we are forced to think not in terms of some closed or autonomous system of African dispersal but explicitly in terms of a complex past of forced migrations and racialization—what Earl Lewis has called a history of 'overlapping diasporas'" (B. H. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora* 60). In Jewish spaces, "diasporism" emerged as a coherent religio/political identity in the early 2000s, with the term serving as a portmanteau of the "diasporic nationalism" that Simon Dubnov proposed in the late nineteenth century as an alternative to the territorial claims of political Zionism. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz famously described how "radical diasporism … heightens [the] understanding among Jews of diverse backgrounds/cultures/ethnicities that we need each other in part *because of* our differences …" (Kaye/Kantrowitz xi).

[6] For dialect, see North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*. For translation, see So, *Transpacific Community: America, China, and the Rise and Fall of a Cultural Network*; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. The animating

to widen the net of the study of sound and diaspora to the cultural practices of embodied poetic and theatrical performance. It returns to this cultural moment when black and Jewish artists, in their individual work but also in collaboration with each other, were challenging the legacy of appropriative identification through the poetic, theatrical, and embodied representation of sensory and locational split. Smith's experiments with verbatim theater sit at the center of *This Feeling Tone*, but the study moves beyond *Fires* to ask what kinds of cultural practice—what techniques of speaking, listening, and rhythm—emerge at this node between embodied performance, sonic practice, and diaspora. Of crucial concern are the collaborations between artists: not just the artworks they created together but their aesthetic relationships with each other. "Labor" is a word that sits at the center of the word "collaboration." By studying how black and Jewish artists labored to confront ethnic, racialized, and gendered histories of sound, *This Feeling Tone* uncovers a radical and perilous history of collaboration, not as democratic safeguard, but as embodied social practice.

Breaking the Frame of the "Black-Jewish Dialogue"

What does inter-diasporic collaboration sound like between these artists? It often sounds like conversation. The term conversation has a particularly fraught valence in the context of cross-diasporic encounter between black and Jewish artists in the Americas. They're always already grappling with this inherited framework of the "black-Jewish dialogue." Cornel West writes in the introduction to *Fires,* for instance, that the play "humanized the Black-Jewish dialogue" and "de-patriarchalized our conversation" (Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* xix). But it would be a mistake to suggest that Smith's innovations in the realm of cultural realm had any substantive effect on the realm of the political. Even by the mid-nineties, Smith had doubts about the legacy of inter-ethnic solidarity. As she expressed to Tony Kushner in 1996:

> The idea that Jews and blacks have lost something that they had. I'm struggling with that now, because I don't know if the union we had was real, or if it was symbolic. And the media very quickly takes what's real and makes it symbolic by trying to figure it out. (Kushner and Smith 1:06:24)

It makes sense that Smith, one of the 90's most celebrated playwrights, would struggle with the idea that something has been "lost." She and Kushner were speaking just six months after Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March, which, as she notes in the interview, "caused a lot of anxiety in many corners," both black and Jewish. A relationship believed to have solidified in the civil rights era around a liberal voting bloc, was now, in the eyes of many, threatened by the Nation of Islam's central place in black activism.[7] Smith's struggle with this perceived loss also may have stemmed from her own artistic investment in critiquing the "media" and its portrayal of "Jews and blacks." Here she was, speaking in 1996, face to face, with one of the foremost Jewish

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scene of most literary studies of sound and diaspora is the acousmatic "Prologue" to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* where the narrator listens to Louis Armstrong in the dark of his hole: "I like Louis Armstrong because he made poetry out of being invisible" (Ellison 8).

[7] For many black men, the issue was not so much the Nation of Islam's rise to power, but how many of the speeches that day were anchored in a politics of individual uplift, rather than in one of combating structural oppression. See Henry Louis Gates, "Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise, Scene: The Million Man March," 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oz1YpvsQ_Ug.

playwrights of her time. No wonder she struggled to understand this loss when the relationship seemed so present.

Smith wasn't the only one troubled by this narrative of decline; contemporary scholarly literature was similarly haunted. According to Rachel Rubinstein, until at least 1998 the field of "Black-Jewish relations" focused largely on literatures of the 1960s and was arguably a "story told by Jewish scholars" about how this particular form of coexistence "provides the key to America's multicultural future (and past)."[8] By 2003, the field had experienced a Smith-ian split:

> Critical work on Jews and African Americans… falls roughly into two categories: those texts that treat black-Jewish relations as a real thing, a historical and cultural phenomenon worthy of sincere and serious attention; and those that set out to problematize or even undermine the realness of black-Jewish relations, meaning to address it as a discursive and textual construction—a made thing. (Rubinstein 393)

During the past twenty years, scholars have "incorporate[d] a more mutually constructive model into their versions of a black-Jewish literary dialogue" (Rubinstein 394) and expanded their purview to include modernist texts, women's literature, Caribbean contexts, and work by and about black Jews.[9] Over this same period of time, however, the field has experienced its strongest critiques from Black studies (disputing the grounds of analogy), Jewish Studies (disputing the grounds of sole authorship), and American studies scholars (disputing the grounds of its liberalism and US centrism).[10] In other words, the narrative of declining "relations" has served as a perennial trope in the critical imagination of black and Jewish multiculturalism in a US context. But even as scholarly discourse attempts to move away from the conservative idea that we must always measure the failure of the present "dialogue" against the "Golden Age" of

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[8] Rubinstein refers to what she calls a third "wave" of "Black-Jewish relations" studies that includes Budick, *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation*; Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*; Goffman, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature*; and Newton, *Facing Black and Jew: Literature as Public Space in Twentieth-Century America*.

[9] For Caribbean contexts, see, Phillips, *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination*. For modernist and feminist contexts, see Harrison-Kahan, *The White Negress: Literature, Minstrelsy, and the Black-Jewish Imaginary*. For mixed-race analysis, see Bromberg, "'A Little More Jewish, Please': Black and Jewish Secularity and Invisibility in Fran Ross's Oreo"; Pierce, "Jews of Color and the Policing of White Space." The decade between 2010-2020 also notably featured at least four dissertations on the topic by scholars of color. See Crawford, "Ghetto: An Historical, Aesthetic, and Theoretical Modality"; Singleton, "Facing Jazz, Facing Trauma: Modern Trauma and the Jazz Archive"; Mekonen, "'Somewhere in the Flesh Mirror I Saw Myself': Black-Jewish Poetic Encounters Vis-à-Vis the Holocaust."

[10] Afropessimist skepticism of multiethnic projects has, ironically, informed thinkers in Jewish studies, including Ben Ratskoff's argument in "Against Analogy" that the way for white Jews to be in solidarity with Black suffering in the US is to resist analogy and embrace their complicity in systems of oppression). See also Shaul Magid's essay "Judeopessimism: On Antisemitism and Afropessimism." As Dean Franco writes in a 2012 article in *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, the field is largely unidirectional in authorship: "an uncomfortable reality remains: with few exceptions, we find that it is mostly scholars of Jewish literature who are seeking comparisons with other ethnic literatures, and not the other way around" (Franco 13). See also Itzkovitz, "Notes from the Black-Jewish Monologue." Keith Feldman has powerfully critiqued the field on the basis of its nationalist myopia, arguing that the field of "Black-Jewish relations" continues to "domesticate" global conceptions of race into a US-centric "liberal pluralist ethnic relations paradigm"(K. P. Feldman 11).

the sixties, Smith's central question—was the relationship "real" or "symbolic"—echoes within and beyond the field like a refrain.[11]

What happens if we interrogate the very terms through which this narrative, and by extension this field of "Black-Jewish relations," perpetuate themselves: What are "relations"? What is "dialogue"? *This Feeling Tone* picks up these questions by listening closely to artworks central to poetic and dramatic history of the past forty years, offering fresh interpretations of six artists/activists—three Jewish and three black—who had relationships with each other. I pair them as follows: Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde; Studs Terkel and Anna Deavere Smith; and Tony Kushner and George C. Wolfe. In addition to engaging the synecdochic movement typical of this field, which takes Jewish and black intercultural contact as an opportunity to make claims about US culture at large, *This Feeling Tone* asks what "relations" and "dialogue" meant for each of these artists in their own work but also in their artistic collaborations with each other: I examine how Rich and Lorde negotiated the meaning of a poem as they read it out loud; how Anna Deavere Smith adapted Studs Terkel's literary forms for the stage; how Kushner's themes of diasporic identity, sexuality, and illness—so often couched in the language of interiority—became externalized through patterns of light and sound under George C. Wolfe's direction. In its largest ambit, *This Feeling Tone* offers a cultural history of collaboration, anchored in archival documents and recordings. It works from the premise that any theory of collaboration is inseparable from a material history of the embodied performance of conversation.

"This sort of mutual conversation thing, it's very strange," Kushner says to Smith halfway through the event at the Herbst Theater in 1996 (Kushner and Smith 54:26). Kushner's comments energize Smith: "Let's test the form," she says, "of the supposed real-life conversation in front of eight hundred people." This kind of meta-moment—exhibiting what linguistic anthropologists call "metapragmatics"—will animate all the performances I consider across *This Feeling Tone*, both representations of conversation within the artworks and the recorded conversations that I consider alongside them. In these meta-moments, questions about the "real" or "symbolic" aspects of Jewish and black cultural history clash with the supposed "real-life" qualities of performed conversation. In this interaction, calling attention to both the form and format raises the risk of making the private very public: "So, how's the apartment?" Kushner jokes. But this awkwardness also forces them to scrutinize what histories brought them to be on stage in the first place: their work together on Smith's *Twilight,* the influence of Bertolt Brecht, their mutual love of director George C. Wolfe, and a shared desire to challenge theatrical form. Indeed, over the course of the evening, the question of whether "Jews and blacks" have a "real" or "symbolic" relationship is only one of many political questions that circulate between them. They ask: is racism conquerable by democratic means? Does social change occur through evolution or revolution? What are the limits of multiculturalism, and how must it be reconceived? Is it the political artist's responsibility to give an audience hope? Across *This Feeling Tone*, I attend to moments when interlocuters, poetic speakers, or dramatic characters resist the reification of "conversation" into meaningless cliché, especially that of the "black-Jewish dialogue." In these moments, the political stakes and aesthetic histories of collaboration buried under the term "relations" become more perceptible.[12]

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[11] For the most recent iteration of this, see Jeff Melnick's article in the *Guardian* from February 27, 2024: "the "Black-Jewish alliance" as it's commonly imagined is not, or at least is not reliably, an actual thing."

[12] The term "relations" in this context had become so stale even by the early 2000s that Adam Zachary Newton dubbed it "*blackjewishrelations*," which, "like those portmanteau words by Faulkner or Joyce that were meant to

But I found that when listening over and over to the audio recording of this conversation, this meta-moment becomes less distinct, more emblematic. Hearing sounds that exceed the published transcript—the laughter of the audience, the reverb against the walls, the small side-talk with producers—makes it feel as if the audio is more "real" than the text.[13] This is at least partially a ruse, what sound studies scholars call the fallacy of "fidelity."[14] What reaches the ears are (at least) two voices mediated by time, architectures of stage design, modes of technological production and distribution, textual histories of print and performance, and social genres of speaking and listening. As Alexandra Vazquez describes, the acoustic details of any recording aren't merely copies of originals but instead "portals into histories that resist coherent narrative structures," demanding that any act of critical listening consider the recording's relation to a concatenation of historical contexts and archival documents (Vazquez, *Listening in Detail* 21). This is to say that, as the conversation between Smith and Kushner becomes more "real" in a repeated listening, it also becomes more "symbolic," or highly mediated. Attending to recordings (sometimes with transcript in hand, sometimes not) across several archives—City Arts and Lectures, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the New York Public Library Theater on Tape and Film Archive, the Pacifica Radio Archives, and the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue Archive—brings the more nuanced, radical, and perilous histories of dialogue that constitute *This Feeling Tone* to the surface. Repeated and close listening—two of my main methods throughout this work—are also crucial ways in which the binary of "real" and "symbolic" itself becomes complicated, yielding a series of other sonic and diasporic dialectics between stillness/motion, orality/textuality, surface/depth, archive/repertoire, and so on. Each one of my chapter pairings thus documents a cultural history of aesthetic collaboration and an archival history of embodied performance at the same time that it attempts to tease out threads of entanglement that exist within and between the various binaries at play.

This evening between Smith and Kushner begins, in fact, not with conversation but with each artist performing recent work aloud. Trading back and forth, Kushner reads a fiery polemic and a few song lyrics, while Smith acts out her "organic poetry."[15] We might think of their readings as parallel monologues, but even monologue forms like lyric, for instance, have long been thought of as themselves conversational: ventriloquism, thematics of possession, and shifting use of the first person are all techniques that suggest that the "voice" of a literary text is not singular but rather "intrinsically" choral (Wheeler 109). What the recording captures is not only a "real" conversation between Smith and Kushner, but also, initially, a more "symbolic" conversation between the embodied vocalizations of their written work. *This Feeling Tone* claims that in the artwork of these artists, the voice is itself is a kind of "media" and that listening

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evince compression or dissolve boundaries… is being asked to do too much work, a beanpole on steroids, simultaneously overwrought and underweight" (10).

[13] For the transcript, see Vorlicky, *Tony Kushner in Conversation* (1998)

[14] See Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003).

[15] Kushner, for his part, read three new pieces: a song lyric from a play currently in progress; a letter to President Clinton he wrote in response to a state of the union address the administration asked him to draft; and an epithalamium he wrote for a heterosexual couple in his friend group. Each of these pieces explores an aspect of Kushner's sexual identity in relation to an aspect of American political history, and Kushner offers a vocal orientation toward the written word that clashes or harmonizes with the content of the utterance. Smith, for her part, reads four "poems," two in the voices of popular figures "George's Jazz" (George C. Wolfe) and "Defining Moment" (Studs Terkel)—and two in the voices of incarcerated women: "Wicked Women" (Sherri Rideout) and "Mirror to her Mouth" (Paulette Jenkins). Each of these readings are an attempt to explore what Smith calls the "broken sentence," which is a phrase that describes both her then current work with incarcerated women and her aesthetic-ontology: the idea that identity lies in the interruptive rhythms of everyday talk.

to their performances raises a series of questions about the relationship, not just between Kushner and Smith, but also between their "real" and "symbolic" voices: how do their embodied voices performing their poems differ from their conversational voices? How do sonic details of their performances—pitch, speed, pause length—clash or harmonize with the content of their utterances? How do their many voices engage or disregard certain ethnic, racial, or sexual stereotypes? In what ways does the very sound of the recording inform what we think of as "real" or "symbolic" about "Jews and blacks"? What sonic, embodied, or affective material does the recording fail to capture?

These questions, I believe, are not epiphenomenal to the study of "relations" and "dialogue." Every material history of conversation, I argue, is inseparable from a material history of embodied performance. Theories of conversation, from Mikhail Bakhtin to Michael Warner, rarely acknowledge even the sonic or embodied qualities of speech. The elision of sound and embodiment from these analyses arises, at least in part, from sound's perceived immateriality and the now well-documented ocularcentric bias of Western culture. The consequences of such elision include a mostly page-based cultural history of "black-Jewish dialogue," one that submerges the oral and aural particularities of the interlocuters. Another consequence is that we repeatedly get amnesic statements in publications like *The New York Times*, statements like "in recent years, a new bond between Black and Jewish activists have emerged," without any recognition of the long legacy of radical, leftist artists and activists who worked in solidarity and collaboration (Bergner). Part of the goal of *This Feeling Tone,* then, is to call attention to progressive, white Jewish artists who heeded Ralph Ellison's call to Irving Howe to "speak as a Jew" (Budick 20) and James Baldwin's call to Normal Mailer to interrogate his "relationship to his own life" (Baldwin 292).[16] But this work also requires engaging with the history of radical black and Jewish collaboration as embodied performance and with how this history leaves archival traces in recorded sound. The voice—like any form of archival media—can bear, betray, or refuse the mark of racial, ethnic, religious, gendered, and sexual histories, and it is thus a crucial site of personal and cultural knowledge. "The voice," writes Nina Eidsheim in the recent *Oxford Handbook of Voice Studies* (2019), is "the body's chief technology of difference" and "as topic, object, and practice," it is impossible to grasp from any one method of scholarly inquiry (Eidsheim and Meizel 6). By employing interdisciplinary methods—prose description, melodic transcription, close listening—I show how sonic performance is heavily inscribed by complex, unequal histories of cultural power and cross-diasporic desire in the artwork created by and between these cultural figures. An approach that crosses disciplines, fields, methodologies, and archives aims to make these histories more perceptible.

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If "black-Jewish relations" have been steadily declining since the 1960s, the decline of conversation has ostensibly had a much longer downward arc. "Conversation is in bad shape," writes essayist Stephen Miller in *Conversation: A History of a Declining Art* (2008) (Miller xi). Miller attempts to track the beleaguered social form from the Book of Job to the present, arguing that conversation is so endangered precisely because it the most ineffectual of social experiences. "[Conversation] is not a means to an end," he claims (Miller 13) But in pursuing conversation as a transhistorical concept, Miller offers a theory that demands politeness as its most valuable and

[16] The phrase "speak as a Jew" are not Ellison's exact words but Emily Budick's paraphrase of the exchange that took place in *Dissent* and *The New Leader* between 1963-1964.

fungible commodity ("To rescue conversation, people need to be persuaded that the benefits of politeness exceed the costs") (312) and, perhaps predictably, ends up vilifying black art ("it is worrisome to think of young people living on a steady diet of rap music") (262).

Conversation has a long history as the social medium of choice for political and cultural figures who disguise their racism behind democratic values, especially in a US context. Jay Fliegelman has argued, for instance, that Thomas Jefferson was theorizing conceptions of American orality at the same time as he was theorizing the nation, literally writing diacritic marks into the Declaration of Independence to indicate spoken pauses (Fliegelman 15). Such sonic moments ostensibly enacted representative democracy, binding the orator and auditor through a sympathetic connection that—following Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*—instantiated the relationship of representative to constituent. Evoking the Latinate etymology of *conversari*— "to turn oneself about, to move to and fro"—this conception of oratorical performance could then be repeated in everyday conversation, enacting continuous revolutions in miniature ("Converse"). But Jefferson's theories were deeply racist, disguising the question of "who" can speak behind the question of "how" to speak, and, as I'll show in part two of this study, they relied on a theory of submissive audition that both Studs Terkel and Anna Deavere Smith have attempted to challenge in their work.[17] Yet the idea of power-free, rational, critical dialogue has persisted in the contemporary political discourse and art of the neoliberal era, whether defended by conservatives as legalized "free speech," abstracted academically as Jürgen Habermas's "forceless force of the better argument," or aestheticized as desirable and politically efficacious in popular TV dramas like Aaron Sorkin's *The West Wing*.

Interpersonal dialogue has become a discursive target for the academic and activist left, not for its disappearance but for its stubborn presence as a smokescreen for political power, racism, and colonial dominance. In 1990, Gayatri Spivak lamented the cooptation of formerly subversive theories of talk: "Bakhtin has been taken up by the progressive bourgeoisie. Heteroglossia and dialogism are words that are used to cover over repressive dominance" (Spivak and Harasym 142). Throughout the culture wars of the nineties, the rhetoric of conversation felt particularly insidious for black artists who "decried the ineffectuality of conversation as a proxy for social change"; "the talking cure," wrote playwright Clinton Turner Davis in 1997, "had failed black artists repeatedly" (Catanese 65-66).[18] Even in leftist, Jewish spaces today, conversation signifies an empty liberal platitude thwarting direct action: e.g., the conversation about Israel-Palestine is over, says Jewish-Palestinian activist Dylan Saba. Merely listening is not enough (Angel et al.).[19] On the grounds of its ineffectuality, conversation

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[17] As Stephen Best has shown, nineteenth century copyright law attempted to navigate this legacy of racism *and* the future of mechanical vocal reproduction by holding two incommensurables at once: that the voice was both an inalienable aspect of personhood and an alienable property within the market (Best, *The Fugitive's Properties* 19). And as Farah Griffin has shown, these paradoxes of the voice (as individual and collective, as alienable and inalienable) have extended into the twentieth century, where the very image of the Black female singer serves as a metonym for national crisis, signifying both the deep need for the nation to heal in times of crisis but also a vocal "challenge to the United States, revealing its democratic pretense as a lie" (Griffin 121).

[18] Afropessimist thought has most recently energized this critique. Frank Wilderson, for instance, considers multi-racial dialogue itself a third tier of "terrorism" against Blackness, behind the violence of political and civil society: "The third tier of terror that threatens the imagination and the enunciation of Black thought—the terror of left-wing counter-hegemonic alliances—should not be dismissed as incidental or inessential, nor should it be trivialized as an ensemble of bad attitudes that can be overcome through dialogue … For it is an essential terror" (Wilderson 221).

[19] The actual quotation is: "So often, I feel like, there's this framework where cooperation, dialogue, is the ultimate horizon. That is, for Palestine advocacy, where the best thing that you could hope to achieve is to have someone

occupies the space on the political spectrum where, strangely, leftist activists and conservative historians meet. They seem to agree: conversation doesn't *do* anything.

In considering the work of black and Jewish artists who engage conversation as a collaborative aesthetic and social form, *This Feeling Tone* asks what happens when we consider conversation not in the legalistic sense of "free speech" nor in the strictly utilitarian sense as (failed) political tactic, but rather as poetry, theater, sound, film, and performance. At the center of *This Feeling Tone* is a dynamic tension between what conversation *is* and what conversation *does*: its ontology and its performativity. Two thinkers are crucial to this project's investigation of this dialectic. The first is Erving Goffman who, in *Forms of Talk* (1981), offers an ostensibly familiar definition:

> conversation, restrictively defined, might be identified as the talk occurring when a small number of participants come together and settle into what they perceive to be a few moments cut off from (or carried on to the side of) instrumental tasks; a period of idling felt be an end in itself, during which everyone is accorded the right to talk as well as to listen and without reference to a fixed schedule. (Goffman 14)

Conversation—unlike dialogue, lecture, or sermon—is private, ineffectual, and seemingly outside time. And yet, as Goffman describes throughout *Forms of Talk,* conversation *does* so much: it encodes the social and linguistic conventions that shape interpersonal expression (19); it indexes, or points to, the affects and emotions that motivate speech (64); it dramatizes a "production process" in which conversationalists change their footing, embed and layer multiple forms of talk, and even index different addressees that aren't present. This notion of conversation unsettles the typical trajectory of mimesis. While we are used to thinking of, say, theatrical dialogue as the "symbolic" copy of original "real" conversation, in Goffman's view, conversation is neither "real" nor "symbolic" in any objective sense. Rather, conversation is a process whose meaning is measured by the affects, rituals, and genres of speech that are engaged within it. As an interlocuter in everyday speech, you're already playing a character; still, there is room for some agency within the structure. "Words are the great device for fetching speaker and hearer into the same focus of attention … [like] a fire that has been built," Goffman writes, "conversation can burn anything" (37).[20]

If conversation is a small but fiery social form, it is hardly apolitical. The second crucial theorist of conversation informing *This Feeling Tone* is Claudia Rankine, who, in her most recent book *Just Us: An American Conversation* (2020), takes up the dialectics of conversation in a distinctly political register. We might say that *Just Us* does for conversation what Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) does for lyric. In a series of personal essays and poems rife with allusions to contemporary art, media, and black life, Rankine offers conversation as both a mode of ethical relation and an aesthetic form. Much of the book picks away at those moments in one's life that prevent people from "stumbling into moments of real recognition" or the "complicated mess of a true conversation"—dinner parties, university hallways, airport queues

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listen to you." See also Alex V. Green's 2020 essay in *Jezebel* entitled "The Emptiness and Inertia of 'Having Conversations," where Green argues that the term always risks a kind of "manufactured endorsement" of the status quo, where "having conversations doesn't seem to be doing much other than generating contracts, draining energy, and stalling significant action" (Green).

[20] Goffman remained ambivalent about whether conversation merely reproduced or revolutionized social structures. See his 1982 lecture, "The Interaction Order," which circulates around this very question.

(Rankine 39). But Rankine never settles into any notion of the "real" or the "true," instead constantly interrogating and close reading these difficult conversational moments as if they were poems. This rigorous attention to everyday—and often offensive—speech produces an oscillation between hope and skepticism: "Are conversations pathways to the exchange of understandings?" Rankine asks, or "are conversations accommodations?" By "accommodation" she means not just a conciliation but also a structure: a room, a place, or a space where structures of power haunt every conversational utterance. Conversation is, thus for Rankine, an ethical space of relation: "our social work becomes our attempt to be in relation. Conversations should be redefined as such."

Inspired by Goffman and Rankine, one of the main claims of *This Feeling Tone* is that conversation is a collaborative form of world building: a space in which the structures, affects, powers, processes, and sounds that shape intercultural interaction come into dialectical tension. This sense of conversation, in fact, enacts a secondary definition of the Latinate verb *conversari*: "to pass one's life, dwell, abide, live somewhere, keep company with" ("Converse").[21] This spatial sense of conversation has important intra-cultural meaning in both Jewish and African diasporic traditions. In the Jewish context, conversation as emerged as the signal trope in Jewish literary culture that defined itself within and against a Christian hegemonic context. "Since modern Jewish literature developed as a consequence of the Enlightenment," writes Ruth Wisse, "conversation between Jews" became a literary trope in which Jewish modernization was rehearsed, withstood, and even internalized: an "internal platform from which [Jews] could scout out their surrounding" (Wisse 46). For Benjamin Harshav, Jewish textual culture is a concatenation of patterns of layered discourse eventually "absorbed by the language of conversation," one in which "dialogue within dialogue within dialogue was the name of the game" (Harshav 18–20). Even for Jewish diasporic writers who are no longer polylingual nor geographically colonized, a whole language of meta-communication dwells at the level of embodied interaction: the level of "how to behave in human interaction, what to say under what conditions, how to initiate dialogue, how to go on talking" (Harshav 91). In the African diasporic tradition, conversational structures were also a distinct form of intracommunal connection. It is the West African signifyin(g) practices of Esu, for instance, that offered the African diaspora forms of "conversation that speaks more accurately of Yoruba life" (Pelton 163), as well as forms of education—"schooling"—that taught generations of black people "how to have a conversation" in a colonized world (Mitchell-Kernan and Dundes 320–21). In Henry Louis Gates' formulation, this conversational tradition is constitutive of a signal trope—the "talking book"—of African American literary history (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 45). Perhaps we hear this tradition's legacy most vividly in Toni Morrison's eulogy for one the great conversationalists of the twentieth century, James Baldwin: "You gave me a language to dwell in, a gift so perfect it seems my own invention" (Morrison, *Life in His Language*).

What interests me across *This Feeling Tone* is how these six artists engaged the distinctions between these diasporic conversational traditions but also collaborated through an aesthetics of sound. *Fires in the Mirror* is, of course, a prime example of this aesthetic

[21] One of the clearest uses of this sense of the word in English, for instance, comes from English clergyman George Stanhope's 1705 *The Paraphrase and Comment on the Epistles and Gospels*. In it, Stanhope "paraphrases"—itself a cultural appropriation of Jewish interpretation--Galatians 3.18, which queries why God would have given the "law" to the Israelites: "the ceremonial law … was given to contain the Israelites in their duty … and so to correct their proneness to idolatry, which a long conversation in Egypt had disposed them to"(Stanhope 410). To describe enslavement (whether historical or rhetorical) as a kind of conversational dwelling today reads—at best—as euphemizing.

collaboration: it not only juxtaposes black and Jewish diasporic communities at the level of content, but also juxtaposes the aesthetics of African-diasporic "double-voicedness" with the form of the dialogical monologue constitutive of Tevye's exhortations.[22] But the artists examined in this study have vastly different relationships to blackness and Jewishness, and *This Feeling Tone* tracks how their uneven histories mark their conversational encounters and artistic collaborations. Throughout, I engage with the crucial differences between and within the Jewish and black diasporas, which have distinct oral and textual traditions that exist, at once, at the margins *and* at the center of hegemonic, white cultures—albeit unevenly. It is in this unevenness where the danger of such critical work is most pressingly felt. In one of his final interviews, Édouard Glissant was asked explicitly about the "analogy" between the black and Jewish diasporas:

> Outside of the similarity of suffering, I don't think they resemble each other very much…Beyond that, there's no similarity. When the Jews made their diaspora in the world, they always preserved their cultural instruments: the Torah, the Talmud, etc. The Africans had lost everything; they had nothing, not even a song. In jazz, black Americans had to recompose, through memory and through extraordinary suffering, the echo of what Africa had for them (8).

Across *This Feeling Tone*, I seek to echo and amplify the clarion call of a host of black, Jewish, and black-Jewish critics over the past four years who have deeply questioned the framework of "analogy" for solidarity work and literary investigation. "Beyond analogy," writes Keith Feldman, "lies entanglement."[23] My main goal is to suggest a poetics of relation—of entanglement—between the Jewish and African diasporas outside of a "similarity of suffering," one anchored in a material history of relationships, as well as the aesthetic relationship between written text and oral performance. For reasons I will clarify in the next section, I call this space of relation "this feeling tone."

Between these artists' incommensurable yet resonant aesthetics of sound are conversations both "real" and "symbolic," but also ones notedly queer and diasporic. "Not for nothing," write Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, "does the *OED* list 'communication' and 'conversation' as the primary meanings of *intercourse* … dialogue commits us to grappling with negativity, nonsovereignty, and social relation not only as abstract concepts but also as the substance and condition of our responses—and our responsibilities— to each other" (Berlant and Edelman ix). If we hear, as I do, these artists/activists' work as itself a form of theory, it largely anticipates a wealth of queer scholarship that critiques transcendent notions of rational, critical dialogue.[24] Moreover, the conversations between these Jewish and black artists and the artwork

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[22] The "kaleidoscopic" aesthetic of Sholem Aleichem's character stems from the literary representation of "monologues in a dialogue situation" (Harshav 103–07).

[23] Feldman is echoing the call from Paul Gilroy to move beyond reductive comparison: "… there might be something useful to be gained from setting these histories closer to each other not so as to compare them, but as precious resources from which we might learn something valuable about the way that modernity operates, about the scope and status of rational human conduct, about the claims of science, and perhaps most importantly about the ideologies of humanism with which these brutal histories can be shown to have been complicit" (Gilroy 217).

[24] I'm thinking here of Michael Warner's notion of "queer counterpublics," which "seek to "establish a world in which embodied sociability, affect, and play have a more defining role" (M. Warner 113) and Jack Halberstam's notion of "imaginative ethnography": "Conversation rather than mastery indeed seems to offer one very concrete

their collaborations produce refine the limited "real/symbolic" dichotomy to something closer to what Nadia Ellis describes as "the classic diasporic dialectic of being imagined and material" (Ellis 3). What we have in these artists' work is a sense of this dialectic, not as it manifests in the longing for an original homeland but as a conception of the self as constantly in dispersal.[25] And yet, because the artists featured in *This Feeling Tone* work within a context of US neoliberal containment and alongside traditions of appropriation, racism, and institutional violence, their relationships bear the mark of these different diasporic histories at the level of process and of product.[26] By highlighting not just the historical but also the strong aesthetic kinship between Black and Jewish traditions, *This Feeling Tone* offer a more nuanced answer to Rankine's question: conversation is both a "pathway"—a means to move across a stage, a way of working through difficulty—and also an "accommodation"—a room, a place, or a space where embodied voices haunt the walls of the house of difference.

Moving Beyond "Voice"

It's no coincidence that Smith and Kushner's conversation begins with a common feminist trope: "Our voices, our stories have been silenced long enough," says Jaime Lujan, Brava Women in the Arts board member, by way of introducing the two figures in 1996. To claim a voice within and beyond the many liberation movements that inform *This Feeling Tone*—civil rights, lesbian-feminism, gay rights, black radicalism, the movement against mass incarceration—was precisely to claim personhood and demand recognition as a political subject. As I'll show in my first chapter on Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde, disclosing the power of the poetic voice against various forms of silence has been a repeated theme among literary art works that have long been considered "polyvocal" and "dialogic."[27]

But the Bakhtinian approach to analyzing voice across literary works, so popular in at the turn of the twenty-first century, has itself reified how we think about the concept of voice,

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way of being in relation to another form of being and knowing without seeking to measure that life modality by the standards that are external to it" (Halberstam 12).

[25] For the African diasporic tradition, I here refer again to Glissant: "[Departure] is the moment when one consents not to be a single being and attempts to be many beings at the same time. In other words, every diaspora is the passage from unity to multiplicity" (5). In the Jewish tradition, I refer to Judith Butler's notion of an "ethics in dispersion:" "I'm trying to understand how the exilic—or more emphatically, the diasporic—is built into the idea of the Jewish (not analytically, but historically, that is, over time); in this sense, to "be" a Jew is to be departing from oneself, cast out into a world of the non-Jew, bound to make one's way ethically and politically precisely there within a world of irreversible heterogeneity" (Butler, *Parting Ways* 15)

[26] In *Theatrical Liberalism* (2013), Andrea Most analyzes a host of twentieth century Jewish artworks and cultural figures that embody a tension between a Jewish emphasis on obligations and a Protestant emphasis on rights. "Theatrical liberalism…combined salient features of Protestantism, liberalism, Judaic rituals and attitudes, and the inherent theatricality of a nation in formation…[it] emerged as the hybrid liberal and Jewish worldview" (Most 39–40). Not once does the term "neoliberalism" appear in her analysis. It is significant to me that, although they may not use the term, the artists of *This Feeling Tone* are largely contemporary with the rise of the neoliberal era. Throughout I want to explore how an African American worldview clashed with this Jewish worldview, and how that dialectic, in turn, clashed with rise of neoliberalism.

[27] The term "dialogism" stems from Bakhtin's *Discourse in the Novel*, first made available for English speaking audiences in 1981. Bakhtin is referring very explicitly to the novel, as opposed to epic (e.g., poetry). Poetry is clearly a straw man for him, for he is writing primarily against Russian symbolists. They, like the French symbolists before them, wrote in a particularly hermetic language in an attempt to take language back to an imagined purity of origin. Bakhtin's theories were nevertheless taken up across the humanities through the eighties and nineties, even in poetry studies.

eliding the fact of, and the affective power of, embodied voices. Across *This Feeling Tone,* I consider where the tropic and embodied notions of human voice meet at what the anthropologist Nicholas Harkness describes as the "phonosonic nexus." For Harkness, thinking of the voice as a "nexus"

> clarifies the relationship between literal understandings of "voice" (e.g., a laryngeal setting involving vocal cord adduction, a material locus of human sound production, an instantiation of a speaking or singing individual, etc.) and more tropic understandings of "voicing" (e.g., a metonym of political position and power, a metaphor for the uniqueness of an authentic self or collective identity, an expression of a typifiable persona, etc.). (Harkness 13–15)

This "nexus" is not just a theoretical duality: metaphorical and tropological thinking are crucial to the embodied practice of vocal production. As Kristin Linklater writes in her now standard acting manual *Freeing the Natural Voice* (1976):

> the anatomically accurate fact is that breath goes into and out of the lungs and that the lungs exist in the space between the collarbone and the bottom of the ribcage. But when the imagination extends the dwelling-place of breath to the pelvic floor or even to the legs and feet, the actual lungs respond with an expansion of their capacity. (Linklater 15)

Tropic understandings of voice cannot be dismissed as merely metaphorical for conceiving of voice as metaphorical is itself constitutive of vocal production. Each chapter of the dissertation historicizes how the concept of "voice" functions in material and symbolic ways across these six artists' works. The distinction between the "literal" and the "tropic" resonates with Smith's distinction between the "real" and "symbolic" aspects of "black-Jewish relations." *This Feeling Tone* attempts to challenge the cliché of "relations" and by going beyond the relationships between artists to consider the relational production and reception of a "voice." Vocalization is a sonic event that occurs between a body and the air, but it also necessarily engages with a vast metaphorical history that informs how a voice is produced and heard. Much of this history stems from the hegemonic cultures in which these artists' works are produced, but it also derives from their interaction with the diasporic Jewish and black vocal traditions.

Author Rich Cohen writes in a September 2018 op-ed in the *New York Times* that "there's not been much written about the [Jewish] voice" (Cohen). This is simply untrue! A lot of ink has been spilt on the subject. Studies of "Jewish voice" tend to separate the question of the "real" and the "symbolic." On the material side, you have many a linguist studying what exactly makes an American Jewish accent—its "melody, pitch, pause, and intonation"—similar or different from other American accents, specifically a "New York" regional accent.[28] But even more widely studied is the long tradition of "Jewish voice" as a symbol of religious and racial difference in a Western context. As Sander Gilman writes, from the Gospels to the present, the

[28] Michael Silverstein suggests that the work of defining a Jewish accent is difficult, especially when it comes to the past century, when the ideologies of "standardization," "de-ethnicization," and "speech therapy" preyed on the most "linguistically insecure" in American society (Silverstein 162). Within the past fifteen years, however, linguists have attempted sincerely to understand the prosody of Jewish American speech. See Sarah Bunin Benor's "Do American Jews Speak a 'Jewish Language'?: A Model of Jewish Linguistic Distinctiveness"; Bunin Benor,"Black and Jewish: Language and Multiple Strategies for Self-Presentation"; and Burdin, "Variation in Form and Function in Jewish English Intonation."

"Jew becomes the agent who uses corrupt language … [the voice] becomes a sign of one's difference, of the disease of being Jewish" (Gilman 20, 31). Against this history, Robert Alter hears the "Jewish voice" as a performative, transhistorical literary style. Reading the Kabbalah alongside Kafka, and Babel alongside Roth, Alter describes the "Jewish voice" as "a cluster of characteristic speech habits: a certain ironic tonality; a fondness for exuberant shuttling among disparate layers of diction in a language; a predisposition to turn written language into a quasi-oral performance, art into *shtick*" (Alter, "The Jewish Voice" 43). The distinctly literary "Jewish voice" is not always counterhegemonic, however. As Jennifer Glaser has shown in her reading of post-war Jewish American fiction, racial ventriloquism and transracial identification were also literary tactics for white, Jewish writers to "disavow their whiteness (and, with it, their white privilege)" (Glaser 4).[29]

What emerges across these studies of "Jewish voice," both material and tropological, is a desire to construct a narrative of continuity, whether defined by a slate of repeating linguistic patterns, a history of anti-Semitic demonization, a stylistic penchant for multi-register movement, or a tendency to sublimate one's own vocal difference into the voices of the Other. *This Feeling Tone* offers alternative narratives of "Jewish voice," turning to three white, Jewish artists who have vastly different relationships to Jewishness and distinctly non-normative Jewish voices. These artists grappled unevenly but openly with the processes by which whiteness situated them and colonized their senses, and they thought extensively about the possibilities and dangers both of perpetuating essentialisms *and* of speaking for or on behalf of other people. These questions of how racial privilege, ethnic heritage, and appropriation function in art are always already on the table for these artists—they are, in fact, a topic of conversation. Thus, the relationships between these artists provide case studies for thinking about how it wasn't so much ventriloquism ("speaking for") nor representation ("speaking on behalf of") but conversation ("speaking alongside" or "with") that afforded then new frameworks for thinking interracial relation. *This Feeling Tone* aims to offer a more holistic approach to the study of "Jewish voice" by bringing together the study of "real" material sound and its "symbolic" meaning. The result is a cultural history of conversation that challenges, wholesale, the reification of the phrase "Jewish voice" and the narratives of continuity or decline hidden behind it. It does this by engaging artists who celebrated the production of new, Jewish social identities.

In contrast, the material and tropic dimensions of voice have been crucial to studies of African American literature and culture. From the "talking book" trope of early slave narrative to Henry Louis Gates's theory of the "speakerly text," the "black voice" of African American culture has long been theorized as distinctly double, combining oral and textual traditions. "What distinguishes the black literary and musical tradition," as theorized in work by Alexander Weheliye, Brent Hayes Edwards, Nathaniel Mackey, and others,

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[29] Glaser's work extends a long tradition of scholarship that analyzes Jewish vocality through the semiotics of the face. In the now classic *Black Face / White Noise,* for instance, Michael Rogin described the voice not only as the site of appropriation but also as the site of assimilation for white Jews: Jackie Rabinowitz of *The Jazz Singer* found his American voice by putting on a black face. Black and Jewish cultural histories in a US context are so overdetermined by the legacies of racial ventriloquism and transracial identification that symbolic studies of the voice have prevailed: "I have favored a literary-critical model here," writes Adam Zachary Newton on the penultimate page of his Levinasian study *Facing Black and Jew, "*because I believe text yields a more reliable optic than performance" (167). But *This Feeling Tone* resists the hegemony of the "optic," resists the metaphorizing of a performed voice to a face, resists privileging the written, precisely because black and Jewish cultures entangle at the overlap between the written and the oral, the textual and the performed.

> is its challenge to an epistemological distinction between oral and written and to the idea of a teleological 'fall' from an originary oral presence, or "voice"**…** Black cultural practices are *phonographic* because, in reproducing themselves without writing, they emphasize the materiality of sound and therefore resist reduction to either side of the binary. (Biers 99)

The "phonography" of the "black voice" emerged in the wake of black studies' embrace of poststructuralism. But it is also a deeply political project—"fugitive," in Fred Moten's terms—insofar as it explicitly resists the racist and violent modes in which slavery persists in the lived experiences of the African diasporic peoples.[30]

Yet theories about "black voice" as inherently oppositional, dualistic, or performative have a centripetal force to them as well, which tends toward narratives of historical continuity and community. Exploring sound more generally, Anthony Reed writes,

> Ideas about black sound tend to be proxies for thinking about black community, enabling the idea of a coherent, singular slave culture [Douglass]; a notion of centrality to the nation built on the exclusion and enslavement of blackness [Du Bois]; and a set of practices indexed to alternative social structures whose relationship to nation is uncertain [Hurston]. (Reed 39)[31]

In extending this genealogy to avant-garde figures like Amiri Baraka and Albert Ayler, Reed also extends these theories of sound beyond the limits of authenticity, nationhood, and technique, and into a "media concept" that accounts for the interplay of "expression, text, experience, and embodiment" (201). One might be tempted to subsume the black artists of *This Feeling Tone* into Reed's genealogy, but it's important to remember that each of these artists have shifting and often conflicting relationships to theories of community, not only by virtue of their relationships to white institutions and Jewish interlocuters, but also because of their queerness. The work of Lorde, Smith, and Wolfe moves us into the media histories and performance cultures across late-twentieth-century forms both marginal and popular, which uniquely challenge patriarchal and heteronormative communal structures through poetry readings, sound recordings, radio broadcasts, public workshops, and landmark theatrical events.

Over the past ten years, the field of sound studies has undergone what we might call a "listening turn," and this scholarly shift has implications for how we might re-conceive, and perhaps do away with, these figurations of "Jewish voice" and "black voice," all in service of constructing a larger cultural history of late twentieth century cross-diasporic collaboration. At the center of many of these recent studies is the "acousmatic situation," moments in which a voice is heard separate from visual evidence of its source. This scenario of a sensory split—a recurrent motif across any history of recorded media, from the Hebrew Bible to Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* to NBC's "The Voice"—produces novel theories of voice and power. For instance, listening to an acousmatic voice is, for Nina Eidsheim, an act in which cultural value is

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[30] For the most recent summary of conceptions of "fugitive voice," see Feldman, "Fugitive Voice."

[31] To some extent preceding Henry Louis Gates' conception of signifyin(g), John Wideman wrote in 1977 that "the black voice in fiction" is defined not by its continuities but by its discontinuities. Reading Charles Chestnutt, Zora Neale Hurston, and Gayle Jones against Phyllis Wheatley, for instance, Wideman argues that "each [of these more contemporary authors] attacks the authority of the literary frame which mediates between black speech and reality," namely: white literary conventions (Wideman 562).

assigned. "Listening is akin to measuring," she writes (Eidsheim 18). But to call attention to how a voice iteratively becomes what it is heard as, is to historicize those power relations and the techniques by which cultural value is assigned. The acousmatic situation thus produces, for Eidsheim, at least three principles:

> Voice is not singular; it is collective.
> Voice is not innate; it is cultural.
> Voice's source is not the singer; it is the listener. (Eidsheim 9)

This "listening turn" in sound studies produces a kind of Goffman-esque inversion: any conception of Jewish or black vocalization becomes "Jewish" or "black," always already a performance. [32] The six artists featured in *This Feeling Tone*, I believe, understood and tarried with the cultural meaning of these principles. While many were deeply interested in interrogating the essentialisms that pervade embodied performance, some were interested in deploying strategic essentialisms in their work at the same time as they were challenging them. In navigating these questions of authenticity and performativity, the "listening turn" demands that we consider the vast oral traditions *and* aural traditions that inform the cultural work of these artists.

The "listening turn" also demands we develop historical accounts and scholarly methods for kinds of listening that go beyond "measuring." There are two thinkers in particular who guide the politics and ethics of listening of the present study. The first is the critic Josh Kun who, in his 2020 audio essay "Jewish Listening: A Reckoning," builds on the work of Gayle Wald and Edward Said to offer a set of guiding principles. "Jewish listening," he argues in the context of reckoning with a form of Jewish identity that colludes with the invisibility of the Palestinian Nakba, "must embrace the decolonial ear, which listens from the position of catastrophe." How, we might ask, does one "listen from the position of catastrophe" when one hasn't experienced catastrophe firsthand? For Kun, the model for this kind of listening is the echo:

> Any Jewish listening worth holding out for [is] a listening for echoes, a listening that recognizes that once the voice of the self leaves the throat and the mouth, and soars out over a landscape—deserts, canyons, hills—it will never be the same again. The echo of the voice is not the voice. The echo is the voice transformed. (Kun 40:30)

Kun's imagery attunes to *what* to listen for but *how* to listen. A second crucial inspiration for this work is the theorist Maurice O. Wallace, who also considers listening as both method and

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[32] The idea that both material and symbolic aspects of voice are in fact non-essential, collective, and performative has influenced a return across cultural studies to scenes of Jewish listening—the "effective audition" of Benjamin's storyteller, the "simply listening" Freud's analyst—and has also inspired new readings of classic, Jewish literary texts. But concomitant with the listening turn has also been a demand within black studies to resist the centrifugal forces of anti-essentialism. As Fred Moten states in 2017: "there was a certain moment in which the critique of authenticity within black studies … became so puritanical that any sentence of the type 'blackness is x" was against the law or against the rules … but … I'm interested in a kind of endless proliferation of sentences of the type that "blackness is x" recognizing that those sentences might come from anywhere … and might be animated by any number of motivations, which might take a meditative kind of form … these activities are crucial to any kind of resistance, intellectual activity, and it gives us a chance to think and talk, to be together, as we meditate, with some friends, and food, and wine, and the kids running around … outside the normative gaze of the white man." (*Fred Moten & Saidiya Hartman at Duke University | The Black Outdoors* 1:10:49)

material yet has different ethico-political concerns than Kun. In listening to a found tape recording of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "King in Rocky Mount" speech, for instance, Wallace theorizes what he calls "black audition," which is the name he gives "to an embodied mode of *listening-to* that is, at root, an enculturated *listening-for* … it is a searching listening, an aural looking- and waiting-for…" (Wallace 236). This kind of "black audition" is an embodied practice that King possessed at the podium, but it is also a kind of scholarly method, one that contends with the refusal of archival recording to reveal itself fully to the ear of the listener. In bringing these methods of "Jewish listening" and "black audition" to bear on texts and contexts more familiar to the field of performance studies, *This Feeling Tone* thus stages a conversation between black and Jewish oral, aural, performance, and archival traditions. The goal is to allow these artworks to resonate across the pages of the work, to inhabit their incommensurability and ethical fullness, and to highlight what cross-pollinates as well as what refuses to be deracinated.[33] I am also keen not to map any external theory of listening onto these works, for I'm interested in how these artists were themselves theorists of sound. In their hands, what emerges is a cultural history of sound that is as political as it synesthetic. Though many of the scenes that animate *This Feeling Tone* will be acousmatic in nature, these artists were not neglecting the visual. Indeed, collaboration—as both an aesthetic and social form—is for them a multisensory practice that often complicates normative notions of the able, perceiving body.

Working on My Tone

"You need to work on your tone." I'm not sure who said it, but I remember that phrase haunting me as I left a jam session at Ortliebs, the famed North Philadelphia jazz bar, in the winter of 2007. As an aspiring saxophonist, I spent the next five years of my life trying to figure out what that meant: to work on my tone. I read online that you had to buy the right software (for example, to slow down and loop Coltrane's opening note on his 1962 recording of "Soul Eyes"), which I did, and the right hardware (a vintage Mark VI, of course), which I didn't. Someone else told me to record myself, to play along with records, to record myself playing along with records. Or sometimes, when I was tired, I would just play standing right up against the wall, so I could get closer in touch with what people might be hearing (a practice that barely helped but gave me tinnitus, which I still have).

But things started changing for me when I met Ben Schachter in 2009, a saxophonist who taught at Temple University. First, he told me about the triangle of music. "Rhythm. Harmony. Melody." But tone sits at the center of the triangle, he said. A listener may not know a thing

[33] Resonance, too, has taken on vast rhetorical and ethical meaning in literary studies. In her 1997 essay "A Theory of Resonance," Wai Chee Dimock asks, "How does a literary text sound when it is read twenty years, two hundred years, or two thousand years after it was written?" (Dimock 1060). Dimock's question is rhetorical, and she is using resonance as an analogy for what she calls a literary criticism of "diachronic historicism." Writing with and against Williams and Greenblatt (and definitely against Bloom), she argues via the word "resonance" that literary texts themselves do not have stable ontologies, that they are non-entities overdetermined by authorial intention, institutional publication, or critical reception; and that any concept of the "literary" must consider that which resonates with readers past, present, and future. In her work *Seven Modes of Uncertainty*, Namwali Serpell uses the term to theorize the modes of ethical uncertainty that literature affords: "resonance is a musical and a scientific conceit for relation. It coordinates energies, intensities, and vibrations without restricting their direction, duration, limits, or degree … Resonance puts things into relation without presuming that they are derivative, causal, or isomorphic" (Serpell, *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* 26). Throughout *This Feeling Tone*, I engage the metaphorical resonance of literary works, but I'm also deeply interested in how the sound of embodied performance *itself* questions notions of stable ontology and fosters aesthetic, ethical, and affective uncertainty.

about Xenakis or could be Lovano himself: what hits any audience first is the tone. Then, he asked me what I wanted to sound like: a big, red rubber ball? Or an unlacquered plank of oak? Formerly feeling helpless, the choice was enabling, and as a writer, I could visualize each option. But he also taught me about "overtones." The theory was that when you play a note on the saxophone, it's not simply one note, but a collection of notes, or partials, all sounding together. He demonstrated this by opening the piano lid and playing into the soundboard. All the higher and lower partials of that note suddenly became distinguishable, lighting up like city lights seen from an airplane. The practice on the horn was more complicated: you had to finger a low note but produce—through a particular form of vulnerability, relaxation, throat control, and inner hearing—the higher overtones. And you had to do it every day. For a while. The point was that you could then choose to emphasize certain partials in the production of any note, crafting your own tone. "Beyond that," Schachter said, "you'll have to go see Lieb. He'll give you the full Joe Allard treatment."

Over the next year of practicing overtones, I learned that Joe Allard was one of Coltrane's teachers and Lieb was Dave Liebman, a renowned jazz educator and student of Allard himself. The lesson with Liebman began before I met him. He said he wanted to read my undergraduate thesis first. Embarrassed, I couched the email attachment with caveats. He made it clear that I would have to bring my full self, even my literary self, to this tone work. In our first lesson, he guided my hands to the muscles of my face, asking me if I could feel how tense they were. He had me lay on the ground in Yoga poses I had never done (but now swear by), placing books on my stomach and asking me to breathe with the diaphragm. He had me take apart the saxophone, playing the mouthpiece and the neck separately, trying to gain control of each. We played duo for what seemed like hours, him on drums and me on sax—and then we switched. I only paid him once. What started out as a series of lessons turned into a kind of apprenticeship. I drove him to New York, where once he told me about growing up in Brooklyn and gigging through the Catskills: the history of his Jewish life in music. I told him I regretted spending so much time reading in college instead of practicing. He asked me to think about what kind of musician I would be if I weren't reading. This is all true. Except when I used the words "reading" and "practicing," I said "shedding," short for "woodshedding," not yet knowing how deeply my language was engulfed in black speech, nor how Jewish my jazz education had become. Studying with Schachter and Liebman, I began to think about the saxophone as a kind of poem, one that I needed to take apart to study, to understand its relationship to my body, to the history of the music, and the history of myself. I call this process *working on my tone*.

The word "tone" thus has important personal and political meaning for me when I think about it in the context of my musical development. But what do we mean when we talk about an artwork's tone? Descriptions of tone in literary contexts tend to traffic in sonic metaphors. Most recently in their book *Tone* (2023), Sofia Samatar and Kate Zambreno describe literary tone as a kind of sonic haunting inherent in the literary work, an "absent presence…what writing has instead of timbre" (Samatar and Zambreno 21). For Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, tone isn't something that coheres in the artwork but in its reception. Invoking the German word for tuning an instrument—"Stimmung"—he argues that tone is a kind of attunement, a reading practice that lies between somewhere between deconstruction and cultural studies, one that "reclaims vitality and aesthetic immediacy" (Gumbrecht 12). Perhaps most helpful, however, are Sianne Ngai's numerous definitions of tone in *Ugly Feelings*. Tone, Ngai argues, is a feeling that exists between an art object and its perception, a feeling much more evasive than what I.A. Richards describes as "a speaker's attitude toward his listener" (Richards 175). For Ngai, tone "is a feeling

which is perceived rather than felt and whose nonfeltness is perceived … a kind of orderly disorder … a materially created semblance of feeling that nonetheless dissolves when one attempts to perform a microanalysis … tone is orderly noise" (Ngai 76–81).

What interests me about Ngai's definitions is not simply the sonic metaphor of noise, but also the kind of negativity that the feeling of tone induces: how "nonfeltness is perceived." This crucial positive space of negativity—of productive failure—is so central to diaspora studies, and specifically African diaspora studies. It is that space, for instance, that Nadia Ellis calls the "territory of the soul" or that kind of "diasporic consciousness" that is "at its most potent when it is, so to speak, unconsummated … that urgent sensation of a pull from elsewhere, when not fulfilled, constitutes diaspora culture at its most curious, eccentric, and I would argue, paradigmatic" (Ellis 2). Stephen Best calls this space the "disaffiliation that keeps us in relation" when he describes his experience as a queer academic, as well as his resistance to the trends of melancholic historicism reigning within black studies (Best, *None like Us* 4).[34] These important studies of queer, black, diasporic life are exactly that: intra-diasporic theorization. But what distinguishes the space I'm calling "this feeling tone" from these African diasporic formulations is that tone, in my formulation, is a distinctly cross-diasporic space anchored in the aesthetics and felt experience of sound without ever losing the particularity of its intra-diasporic meaning. As in *Fires* and the rest of the artwork and performance examined in the pages of this work, "tone" signifies that questions about sound are always questions of diaspora.

The phrase that names this space and gives this dissertation its title, *This Feeling Tone,* stems from Studs Terkel's *Division Street*, his 1967 oral history of class and racial inequality in Chicago. In it, he interviews a middle-aged black hospital worker whom he calls Lucy Jefferson. The printed interview includes Jefferson's winding meditations on living in poverty, where she matches a critique of structural racism ("you don't keep people in a certain category for hundreds of years and expect them to…") with humorous anecdotes about defying stereotypes of black ignorance ("I walk around with a book in my hand…I defied them in so many ways) (Terkel, *Division Street* 13–14). The phrase "feeling tone" first appears at the end of her section in the printed text, when she is speaking about her son, here named Melvin, attending the protests in Selma. She felt strongly that Melvin should not attend for fear that he was too young, but she refused to disallow him, because that would be to deny him a chance to "be a man." Then Terkel prints her famous phrase: "What counts is knowledge. And feeling. You see, there's such a thing as a feeling tone. One is friendly and one is hostile. And if you don't have this baby, you've had it. You're dead" (Terkel, *Division Street* 18).

It's an elliptical phrase—"feeling tone"—in this context. It seems to loosely represent empathy, a specifically familial form of shared feeling and understanding for her son and her perceived desire for him to fulfill a kind of gendered expectation. What interests me is how this word "tone" gives us a framing for thinking about cross-diasporic interaction, specifically in important writing of black and Jewish "relations." For instance, in his 1967 essay "Negroes are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White" (1967), Baldwin writes: "One does not wish, in short, to be told by an American Jew that his suffering is as great as the American Negro's suffering. It isn't, and one knows that it isn't from the very tone in which he assures you that it is" (Baldwin 427). Baldwin's example of tone is, arguably, what Jefferson describes as a "hostile." It's a tone of voice that betrays disconnection even when the content of one's speech

[34] In developing a Kafka-esque "aesthetics of the intransmissable," Best explores artworks that unsettle notions of blackness as "authenticity, tradition, and legitimacy" as well as notions of diaspora as merely "kinship, belonging, and dissemination" (Best, *None like Us* 22–23).

appeals to connection. But in a 1984 essay entitled "Between a Rock and a Hard Place," Barbara Smith focuses on those more "friendly" aspects of cross-diasporic encounter: "There are subliminal nuances of communication, shared fixes on reality, modes of expressing oneself, and ways of moving through the world that people from different groups sometimes recognize in each other … I think that Black and Jewish people sometimes share a similar 'feeling tone'" (Smith et al. 72).

Throughout *This Feeling Tone,* I am not interested in sorting the artworks created and performed between black and Jewish artists into categories of "friendly" or "hostile." What is of more interest to me is exploring how moments of failed affinity or moments of recognition both within the artworks and between the artists become occasions to explore the aestheticization of diasporic cultural identity in relation. Again, "feeling tone" in my formulation names a space in which the experiences of encountering an artwork and of encountering another person are inseparable from the embodied performance of sound. This formulation is, in fact, part of my desire to return to the recording of Studs Terkel's interview with Lucy Jefferson, whose name is in fact Lucille Dickerson. There is a danger, again, in pointing to a "fidelity" of sound recording, buttressing a sense of authenticity against the constructed print monologue. But when the textual print is experienced in relation with the recording—a critical practice that exhibits the ethics and aesthetics of "feeling tone"—new insights emerge. In the 1965 recording, we certainly get access to Dickerson's more incisive political opinions: she would rather drown herself and her own children, she says, than accept any charity or government support ("I said I'll take them to the lake and we'll all drown together") (Terkel and Dickerson 5:42). And in the moment when she speaks about "feeling tone" explicitly, Dickerson is not talking about her son going to Selma but about rejecting the patronizing advice of a black teacher who encouraged her to send her son away to boarding school. She thinks this advice is ridiculous:

> Lucille Dickerson: You know what I mean? Here's a boy … about nine years old … he hasn't done a damn thing **…** But she wants me to send him off to school … when I'm only making about $1.60 an hour. But these people are so busy … buying homes, buying cars, buying status **…** Let's face it. They haven't had the experience. You see, there's such thing [sic] as feeling tone. One is friendly. And one is hostile.
>
> Studs Terkel: Feeling tone …
>
> LD: Feeling tone. And if you don't have this, you just, baby you've had it … If you're going to work with *people,* you've got to have this feeling tone.

In the recording, it's not just "feeling tone" but "this feeling tone." This "this," to me, points to the recording's liveness: the intonation patterns of their phrases, the musicality of the vocal melodies, the emphases of Dickerson's outrage, the cackle of Terkel's laugh, the silence of his listening, the telephone ringing, the children playing in the background. One experiences the dialogism of this encounter, the phaticity of communication. The "feeling tone" that she describes is simultaneously performed, enacting the this-ness. And unlike in the printed version, the phrase "You're dead" is notedly absent. Nowhere does this phrase appear, in fact, over the two-hour interview. Why? It's a Terkelian textual amendment, one that allows him to translate the affective and sonic charge of Dickerson's "baby you've had it," which isn't about any "it" in particular but is rather an expression of a feeling of exasperation directly communicated by the

sound of her voice, as well as an immediate sense of connection with the person listening to her in that moment. As with most of Terkel's interviews, this conversation is about work: about being underpaid, but also about the labor of collaboration. The labor of working on tone.

Chapter Summaries

Across the three parts—and six chapters—that form the body of this work, I heighten the levels of polyphony that exist in any notion of collaboration, from lyric poems to monologue performances to choral musicals. Throughout, I ask what "relations" and "dialogue" meant to these artists, but I also try to be keenly attuned to how they sometimes implicitly—sometimes explicitly—resist the frame so perennial to this moment of American cultural history: the "black-Jewish dialogue." An interest in the signal terms of voice, listening, and rhythm persist throughout, but there is also a heightening of the volume of each of these terms, respectively, throughout each of the parts. Think of them less as keynote sounds that obscure difference than as tones: terms that diffuse by way of sonic analysis into various other terms and affects.

Part one draws on unpublished letters and unreleased recordings from various archives to explore the work of feminist poets Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich. The relationship between Rich and Lorde was, and still is, iconic within the world of radical feminism. Though their relationship was never sexual, it was never strictly professional either: they first met while working at City College of New York in 1968 as teachers and maintained a long and at times fraught friendship with each other until Lorde's death in 1992. Many scholars have focused on the political power of the open letters, private letters, and written poetry of these two figures. But in chapter one, "The Poetics of Conversation: Adrienne Rich's and Audre Lorde's Uses of Voice," I listen closely to a poetry reading they gave in 1981 at Hunter College billed as "Poets in Conversation." I argue that Lorde and Rich's live performances established a feminist counterpublic that challenged inherited notions of lyric and prophetic voice. Lorde and Rich are not usually considered "performance poets"; studies of poetry performance tend to elide poets who embrace a more sincere disposition to the vocal articulation of their written work. But conversation for these artists was as much a mode of poetic composition as it was a mode of collaboration, as well as a fraught poetic and literal stage in which to perform their differences publicly. Their differences manifest most noticeably, I claim, in the space between their embodied and poetic explorations of voice. Though Rich and Lorde had very distinct voices, both artists used shifting vocal registers to negotiate the dynamics of race, gender, and sexuality in ways that reflected tensions within Black, Jewish, and American culture. Rich, for her part, had a publication and performance career that began at least twenty years prior to Lorde's, and although 1981 is a signal year in Rich's turn toward Rich personally claiming her Jewish identity, I show how her poetic and performed voice bears the mark of this claiming in the context of longer personal, political, and poetic histories. Chapter two, "Audre Lorde, Sound Theorist: Register, Silence, Vibrato, Timbre," further develops the analysis of Lorde's own performance career. I argue that Lorde's sonic archive poses a challenge to male-dominated and heteronormative genealogies of black performance, as well as to current trends in poetry performance studies that risk reducing black sonic practices to a data point. Lorde engaged a series of sonic techniques (and anti-techniques) for resisting such capture, ones that aided her various modes of self-expression and diasporic belonging.

Part two moves to the work of Anna Deavere Smith and Studs Terkel. Though Terkel is at least a generation older than Smith, few know that they were contemporaries in the nineties.

Chapter three, "'Being In and Out of It': Smith's and Terkel's Conversational Praxes," offers a comparative study of their sonic practices. Like Lorde, Terkel grew up with immigrant parents who owned a boarding house, and it was this experience that he described as formative toward his love of verbal collaboration. But Terkel's career—which he began as an actor in radio plays—is also concomitant with the rise of oral history as a discipline, and he was decades ahead of the field in forging a theory of conversation that positioned the tape recorder as a stage prop and valorized improvisation and silence—what he called the "revelatory pause." The chapter begins with close listening to the Studs Terkel Archive—especially to interviews with black and with white Jewish artists—in order to formulate a theory of his listening technique. The second half of the chapter then turns to Smith, who came up with the idea for her verbatim plays after she was assigned a character from Terkel's anthology *Working* in acting school and thus claims Terkel as her "spiritual mentor" (*Anna Deavere Smith in Conversation with Studs Terkel* 50:41). While Terkel's voice was noted for its distinct inimitability ("Studs always sounded like Studs") (Wieder 109), Smith had the uncanny ability to sound like everyone else. But Smith, I argue, reframed Terkel's listening practices for the stage. In Smith's conversational praxis, Terkel's technique becomes a dramatic and political form: the fragments of her monologues converse with each other in the act of performance so as to stir public conversation about race in a US context. As we'll see, her work had mixed success. In chapter four, "Listening Against Capture: *House Arrest* and the Paradoxes of Tape," I explore how Smith's revision of Terkel's method eventually resulted in (what is widely thought of as) the first experiment in "headphone theater" during a 1998 production of her lesser known play *House Arrest*. The play first premiered at the Institute of Arts and Civic Dialogue, where multiple actors wore tape recorders in a live setting. Using archival footage and documents, I argue that bringing the tape recorder onstage had a double purpose: not only to test out the fungibility of Smith's method with a multiracial cast, but also to formalize the tension between fugitivity and capture that the play thematizes. These two chapters, in their largest ambit, aim to resituate Terkel and Smith in a longer trajectory of twentieth century performance. Shannon Jackson writes that "One way to resituate [the] two-pronged story of a late twentieth-century formation is to cast Performance Studies as the integration of theatrical and oral/rhetorical traditions" (Jackson, *Professing Performance* 10). Smith and Terkel's conversational aesthetics emblematize the fusion of these two traditions and highlight how each tradition intersects with crucial debates within contemporary black studies.

Part three turns to the choral uses of voice and cross-diasporic rhythms in a trio of plays that George C. Wolfe and Tony Kushner collaborated on between 1993-2006: *Angels in America* (1993), *Caroline, or Change* (2004), and *Mother Courage* (2006). Wolfe, one of the most important yet understudied American theatrical artists of the past forty years, grew up in Frankfort, Kentucky. Though he has described his upbringing as a distinctly black world "in and of itself," he often cites Jewish philanthropy—largely, the context of the southern Rosenwald schools—that inspired his interest in theater. The experience of creating black worlds inside white, Jewish institutions became a minor but noteworthy career pattern. Wolfe burst into the public eye after the success of his satire *The Colored Museum* was restaged at the Public Theater in 1986 (an institution that Wolfe would later lead for eleven years), and he first collaborated with Kushner when *Angels* came to Broadway in 1993. Chapter five, "When Brecht and Hurston Met: Diasporic Rhythms of *Angels in America,"* recenters Wolfe's influence as crucial to *Angels'* lasting development by moving through a host of archival materials held at the New York Public Library. In revising Brecht's and Zora Neale Hurston's modernist aesthetics for the postmodern era, I argue, Wolfe and Kushner employed various rhythmic structures—vocal,

musical, visual, and gestural—to dramatize distinct yet resonant histories of violence that haunt conversational encounters. Chapter six, "Haunting Integration: Light, Lyric and Music in *Caroline, or Change"* then moves to a musical that Kushner first developed with Bobby McFerrin at the San Francisco Opera in 1998 and then debuted in 2003 at the Public Theater, directed by Wolfe and with music written by Jewish-Italian composer Jeanine Tesori. Kushner, as a self-proclaimed "diasporan Jew, not a Zionist," was deeply indebted to the political work and open sexuality of poets like Lorde and Rich ("think of how much we owe, politically as well as culturally, to our poets"). Both he and Rich (and Wolfe) grew up in the south, broadly construed: Rich in Baltimore, and Kushner in Louisiana. But while Rich says that coming out as a lesbian helped her claim her Jewishness, Kushner claims the opposite: that his being raised Jewish prepared him to claim his sexuality. *Caroline* interrogates this earlier identification, dramatizing how Kushner's racial and religious formation as a white, southern Jew was inextricable from the emotional labor and societal oppression of a black maid. Kushner and Wolfe and Tesori's collaboration on *Caroline*, I argue, dramatized the incommensurabilites of black and Jewish "dialogue" that have haunted US culture since the 1960s, explicitly by experimenting and re-visioning the racist history of the "sung through" American musical. The play entertains, at various aesthetic levels, the idea that conversation is—like "change"—a fungible object whose meaning is measured by the affects that stick to it. An analysis of Kushner and Wolfe's last official collaboration, a production of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, threads throughout the two chapters. Kushner and Wolfe bring their hauntological aesthetics to bear on Brecht's concern with the roles that conversation plays in inspiring and thwarting both historical and personal change.

PART ONE AUDRE LORDE AND ADRIENNE RICH

Chapter 1: The Poetics of Conversation: Adrienne Rich's and Audre Lorde's Uses of Voice

> Adrienne Rich: We are always reading poetry that is inhabited by other people's voices. And by our own voices which are not really our own voices anymore . . .
>
> Audre Lorde: Or an older voice, an older self.
>
> Adrienne Rich: And then there is something that I call the "Poetry Voice," which is, you know . . . *that voice* . . . I think that the "Poetry Voice" for me is a white male voice . . . I don't think it's *the* "Poetry Voice," but it's something with capital letters that we've been taught to listen for.
>
> —Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde, "Poets in Conversation" (1981)[35]

On December 5, 1981, Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde gave a reading at Hunter College as a benefit for the Astraea Foundation, a then four-year-old philanthropic organization that supported female artists. The reading was advertised as "Poets in Conversation," and it began with Lorde clarifying how this event was to be different from other poetry readings: "This is really conversation with poems . . . rather than readings with conversation in between" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 1 of 2) (Side 1)* 7:18). Lorde's comment aptly described the loose reading order of the first half of the event: she and Rich traded back and forth, Lorde reading from *The Black Unicorn* (1978) and Rich from *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (1981), framing their poems with commentary but also allowing their poems to "speak" to each other. In the second half of the event, dedicated to sharing newer work in progress, Rich again clarified the uniqueness of the format: "[W]e are trying through a different kind of format . . . to change some of the mental sets with which people come into a poetry reading" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 2 of 2) (Side 1)* 15:34).

If one of the main "mental sets" of the mainstream poetry reading of the late twentieth century was that a poet reads a "sequence of voiced poems interspersed with a little bit of lecture" to a silent audience, then the framing of the event as a "conversation" was an attempt to disrupt this ritualized format and the kinds of consciousness that format typically affords (Wheeler). In reviewing the event, Black feminist writer and then WBAI radio host Donna Allegra described the poets' success in disrupting this ritual—how, in a room "filled largely by women from the feminist community," the two poets "didn't hold to the stand-and-read format, where the audience applauds and stays seated in place. These poets explored with us" (Allegra

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[35] Thank you to the Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency and the Adrienne Rich Literary Estate for permission to quote from unpublished personal correspondence and poems. "A Litany for Survival". Copyright © 1978 by Audre Lorde, "Sequelae". Copyright © 1978 by Audre Lorde, from *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* by Audre Lorde. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. The lines from "Sources". Copyright © 2016 by the Adrienne Rich Literary Trust. Copyright (c) 1986 by Adrienne Rich, the lines from "Hunger". Copyright © 2016 by the Adrienne Rich Literary Trust. Copyright (c) 1978 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., from *Collected Poems*: 1950--2012 by Adrienne Rich. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

13). Allegra's comments imply that the audience, too, felt like part of the conversation. In listening to the Astraea event recording—produced by the Lesbian Herstory Archives and housed in their online archives—we might ask: how did Rich and Lorde make the audience feel like part of the conversation?

As the comments in the epigraph suggest, Lorde and Rich's resistance to the normative poetry reading extended into its very sound. When Rich read the phrase "*that voice*" in the context of framing her poem "Sources," she performed what this stereotypical "Poetry Voice" sounded like to her: she spoke louder and moved from her conversational register to a comically elevated one, raising her vocal pitch on the word "voice" and extending the word's sibilance far enough to elicit uproarious laughter from the audience. The vocal event is not sustained long enough to suggest that Rich was imitating what Marit MacArthur calls "monotonous incantation," another perceived "Poetry Voice" so common to late twentieth-century poetry readings (MacArthur 44). But the meaning of Rich's vocal shift is clear: she was playing on the performativity of gender—or the construction of authoritative masculinity—in front of an audience primed for the deconstruction of gendered conventions. Her laughter and the subsequent laughter of the audience indicates that both she and they have some ironic distance from the trappings of "Poetry Voice." Departing from Lorde's comment about hearing one's past self, Rich went on to narrate a version of what feminist sound studies scholars today have called "nonconsensual listening": how she had been taught to "listen for" this particular sound of poetic delivery as a form of gendered control (Lentjes et al. 424). In this moment, Rich used her embodied voice to index a dominant style of speaking, to mediate the stylistic and affective distance between herself and that (perceived "white male") poetic style, as well as to bridge the distance between herself, Lorde, and her audience.

This chapter closely listens to a few other moments at the Astraea event in which Rich and Lorde engaged both poetic and embodied notions of speaking and listening to negotiate gendered, sexual, racial, and ethnic identity in front of a public audience, using what I call a "poetics of conversation." Rich and Lorde are two of the most recognized lesbian feminists of the latter half of the twentieth century, and there's no paucity of criticism on the "dialogism" of their poetry.[36] But these Bakhtinian readings often elide the fact of, and the affective power of, their embodied voices. Though there are several recordings of Rich and Lorde reading poems and essays together, the Astraea event is the only recorded example of them attempting to work out publicly—to perform—what they were discussing privately about the meaning of the poetry reading. In what follows, I pay particular attention to the modes of address within their poems but also the multiple registers in which they performed their poems aloud. Using unpublished letters and previously unstudied recordings from the archives, I argue that Lorde and Rich's live performance—and its afterlife as recorded sound—established a feminist, queer counterpublic that challenged inherited notions of lyric and prophetic voice.

For scholars of Jewish American women's literature and culture, the Astraea recording is of some historical importance: it is the first time that Rich spoke openly about her Jewish identity at a public reading, and it documents the only extant draft of "Sources"—the oft-cited companion poem to her essay "Split at the Root"—that differs substantially from its eventual

[36] Citing Bakhtinian dialogical theory, Mary Strine argues that Rich utilized polyvocality as "re-visionist" strategy, employing the voice of the spokeswoman, making public the private dialogue one has with oneself, and dramatizing the variegated social fabric (Strine 30–35). Mae Henderson reads Lorde's thematic engagement with the "other in ourselves" as heteroglossic (Henderson 350).

publication.[37] But the "poetics of conversation" that Rich and Lorde perform also offers, I argue, an aesthetic and ethical alternative to narratives of interracial relation as typically told by scholars of Jewish American literature. Prior to at least 1998, the scholarly field of "Black-Jewish relations" focused on literatures of the 1960s and was arguably a "story told by Jewish scholars" about how this particular form of relation "provides the key to America's multicultural future (and past)" (Rubinstein 400).Though Keith Feldman has powerfully argued that the field continues to "domesticate" global conceptions of race into a US-centric "liberal pluralist ethnic relations paradigm," the past twenty years has seen the field expand widely to include modernist texts, women's literature, Caribbean contexts, and work by and about mixed-race Jews (K. P. Feldman 11).[38] What a close listening of the 1981 Astraea event recording offers us is a chance to return to a crucial moment in the feminist movement when these two poets engaged in "conversation" but with a critical ear for the all-too-quick metaphorization of that term. In resisting the flattening of conversation into any power-free notion of free speech or historical cliché about the failures of "black-Jewish dialogue," the recording invites questions not just about what was said but how it sounded: the very material of performance.

"An Intimacy Rigged with Terrors"

By the time of the 1981 Astraea event, the relationship between Rich and Lorde had become iconic in the world of radical feminism, though the event represented a midpoint in their nearly twenty-five years of friendship. When Lorde and Rich met at City College of New York in 1968, Rich had quit her job at Columbia to teach in the SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) program, while Lorde was working as a librarian, soon to become a teacher in the program herself.[39] Rich would later describe this time as mutually supportive: "For most of those years, we exchanged drafts of poems, criticized and helped to sustain each other's work" (Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* 101). In the early 1970s, they began to share the stage, most famously when Rich accepted the National Book Award for *Diving into the Wreck* in 1974 on behalf of Lorde, Alice Walker, and herself as an act of solidarity and protest against a white, patriarchal institution.[40] Soon they appeared together in various forms and forums, including public readings, anthologies, feminist periodicals, academic panels, and even the 1977 recorded album *A Sign / I Was Not Alone* (along with Joan Larkin and Honor Moore). The 1970s also saw an increasing aesthetic resonance between their work, specifically around the thematics of

[37] Brooke Lober has described the essay "Split at the Root" as Rich's first "extended meditation on Jewishness," but the Astraea recording makes clear that the drafting of "Sources" preceded the drafting of "Split at the Root" (Lober 663).

[38] For Caribbean contexts, see Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). For modernist and feminist contexts, see Lori Harrison-Kahan, *The White Negress: Literature, Minstrelsy, and the Black-Jewish Imaginary* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011). For mixed-race analysis, see Eli Bromberg, "'A Little More Jewish, Please': Black and Jewish Secularity and Invisibility in Fran Ross's Oreo," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 38, no. 1 (2019): 23; and Rebecca Pierce, "Jews of Color and the Policing of White Space," *Jewish Currents*, May 29, 2020, jewishcurrents.org/jews-of-color-and-the-policing-of-white-space.

[39] The SEEK program provided "students not only with free tuition and free books, but also a stipend that addressed the material conditions of students' complicated lives beyond the classroom" (Savonick 14).

[40] For the most thorough and recent history of the event, see Hilary Holladay, "When Adrienne Rich Refused the National Book Award." *Literary Hub* (blog), November 23, 2020, lithub.com/when-adrienne-rich-refused-the-national-book-award/.

silence, lesbian desire, bodily disability, and bearing witness.[41] Even though Rich would move to Montague, Massachusetts in 1978 with her partner, the writer Michelle Cliff, her relationship with Lorde grew more intimate. They were both in interracial relationships, and frequently the letters between them were addressed both to each other and to each other's partners.

Yet it was an "intimacy rigged with terrors," as Rich would suggest in "Hunger," a poem written and dedicated to Lorde in 1974 (Rich, *Collected Poems* 451). As tensions were on the rise between white, black, and Jewish women in the feminist movement more generally, Rich became white feminism's most vocal critic about the movement's stance on race and white privilege, a position Lorde deeply influenced (De Veaux 187). The tension between the two emerged poignantly after Lorde resigned as poetry editor from the feminist periodical *Chrysalis* magazine in early 1979 and Rich refused to disavow relationships with white editors that Lorde found objectionable (Holladay 322; De Veaux 238).[42] Their letters from the late 1970s bear traces of these tensions. On November 22, 1979, for example, Rich responded to a particularly difficult letter from Lorde to express how "there's a kind of pain I feel when you become impatient with me because I cannot and will not become your voice, your surrogate, in all this" (Rich, *Letter to Audre Lorde*). But their relationship continued to grow with and beyond these tensions, and the Astraea event capped perhaps their busiest and most collaborative year.[43]

In his 2018 book *Black Power, Jewish Politics*, historian Mark Dollinger argues against the well-worn historical claim that the black and Jewish political alliance fell apart by the end of the 1960s. Both groups, he says, *did* fall apart—in the sense that they left behind a politics of cooperation and pluralism—but the influence of the Black Power movement also allowed both communities to grow into concomitant, albeit different, forms of "identity politics."[44] For Dollinger, the animating question of the Jewish turn toward "identity politics" was: "Is it good for the Jews?" (Podhoretz). As is typical of "Black-Jewish relations" scholarship that centers on the pages of *Commentary* and the halls of the Religious Action Center, women are largely absent from Dollinger's story, especially queer feminist writers.[45] This elision risks a confusion of

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[41] There is a minor critical history of Lorde and Rich's relationship buried in reviews of feminist magazines between the 1970s and 80s. See Judith McDaniel's review of Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language* in *Sinister Wisdom 7*, where McDaniel reads Rich's poem "Hunger" as a kind of allegory of their relationship's political meaning (McDaniel). In a 1983 article, Cathy Carruthers distinguishes between Rich and Lorde's poetry on the basis of their reliance on different mythic system, but argues that their work, along with that of Olga Broumas and Judy Grahn, constitute a new, eschatological turn in lesbian poetry (Carruthers 294). Linda Alcoff's 1988 essay "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism" famously places Rich and Lorde on two different sides of cultural feminism, positioning Rich as the essentialist and Lorde as the anti-essentialist (Linda Alcoff). Linda Garber's *Identity Poetics* (2001) powerfully debunked Alcoff's dichotomy, considering Rich and Lorde distinctly while still arguing that they share a deep concern with the aestheticization of silence (L. Garber 139–42).

[42] Lorde had long been frustrated with the disorganization at *Chrysalis*, especially with Kristen Grimsted. But after repeatedly undermining her editorial decisions in ways she believed to be silencing writers of color and herself, *Chrysalis* became emblematic for her—along with June Jordan and Pat Parker—of the racism intrinsic to white, liberal institutions (Strongman 51; De Veaux 258).

[43] On March 7–9, they traveled to St. Croix for a conference organized by Gloria Joseph (De Veaux 285–89); on May 9, 1981, they both read at the Arlington Street Church in Boston to celebrate the publication of *The Lesbian Poetry Anthology* (Warrock 25); they gave keynote speeches in June at the National Women's Studies Association; and they both read at the Women's Experimental Theater in New York City, albeit at different times (Coss et al.).

[44] Black Power, Dollinger concludes, "proved quite good for the Jews" in that it offered various Jewish communities a model for pursuing a political platform based on their own "ethnic particularity" (Dollinger 140).

[45] In *Black Power*, Dollinger does give us a history of Judge Justine Wise Polier's activism with AJCongress (32), and he acknowledges that Jewish opposition to affirmative action was largely blinkered by its elision of Jewish

terms. The "identity politics" of the 1960s is not the same kind of "identity politics" circulating in the radical lesbian feminist movements of the 1970s and '80s.[46] Dollinger is right to claim that a more "intersectional" approach toward coalition building served as a "bonding agent for communities of color," but post-60s feminism was also defined by various forms of intraracial conflict and cross-cultural contact between Jewish and black lesbian feminists as well (Dollinger 185). The years between 1979 and 1984 were particularly tense, as evidenced by the publication of Judy Simmons's "Minority" (1979), a poem that directly compared black and Jewish oppression; a series of heated workshops among Black, Jewish, and Jewish women of color at the Northeastern Women's Studies Association meeting in 1981; June Jordan's fiery condemnation of Rich's silence about Palestinian oppression in *WomaNews* in 1982; and a tense exchange between Alice Walker and Letty Cottin Pogrebin in *Ms.* magazine that same year. [47]

One important text documenting these interracial conversations was *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (1984) by Minnie Bruce Pratt, Barbara Smith, and Ellie Bulkin. The animating question of this text—in which three lesbian women writers meditate on the history of the two titular "-isms" in relation to their own lives—is not "Is it good for the Jews?" but "Who am I?" This latter question was one of Lorde's and Rich's central, poetic questions; their relationship was at least partially defined by the public, private, and poetic interrogation of their different answers to that question. As Claudia Rankine recently put it, "Lorde never stopped saying to [Rich]: 'Your particular concerns might not be my particular concerns,' and they built a friendship around that dialogue, and performed it in public for the rest of us" ("Poet Claudia Rankine's Book 'Just Us' Seeks Out 'True Conversation' About Race" 15:30). Their fame, however, tended to cover up the numerous differences between them, especially during the 1980s, when Rich began to identify publicly as a secular Jew and Lorde with the transnational black diaspora. As Rich explains in the 1996 film about Lorde's life, *A Litany for Survival*: "We were seen as this duo, a white woman and a Black woman, who were friends, who were both lesbians, who were apparently getting along quite well . . . we really had to struggle against that kind of reification" (*A Litany for Survival* 52:24).

How did they struggle against that kind of "reification"?[48] Marion Rust argues that they

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women at all (67). But his own analysis suffers from such elision: Dollinger only offers two pages on feminism in the 1970s (129–31).

[46] Most famously articulated in the 1977 Combahee River Collective Statement, the "identity politics" of Black lesbian feminists in the late 1970s largely resisted separatism and offered a theoretical and practical tool for organizing and thinking beyond the logic of a shared, common oppression. Lorde and Rich were a generation older than lesbian feminist groups like the Combahee Collective and Di Vilde Chayes, and yet they influenced these groups: Lorde's "politics of difference" helped shape the future of intersectional thinking (Turner 567–69), and Rich's emerging "politics of location" modeled what it was like for a white Jewish lesbian woman to name—and aestheticize—her own particularities (Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location").

[47] Simmons poem features the lines: "mine is not a People of the Book/taxed / but acknowledged; their distinctiveness is / not yet a dignity; their Holocaust is lower case" (Simmons 93).

[48] The term "reification" bears the mark of Rich's interest in Marxist thinking in the late 1980s early '90s, but it helpfully describes the numerous ways in which a complex set of social relations and identitarian affiliations that existed within and between the two poets were made into an understandable, even sellable commodity for public consumption. Such reification took many forms, perhaps most often through the tokenization of Lorde, where her inclusion in feminist spaces was perceived as a way for white women to check the box of diversity on their attendance lists. Moreover, Rich often perceived her name as being used as a way to legitimize Lorde's career and fought openly against such legitimization by association (Rust 96). The term also helpfully moves between abstract and the concrete, as well as individualist and structural, critiques of political economy. Anita Chari writes, "The concept of reification . . . refers to the very process of becoming material and 'thingly' . . . Reification, [Lukács]

resisted it through the "open letter," a form of intimate publicity that foregrounded anger between them as a productive force against racism.[49] SaraEllen Strongman suggests that the personal letters clarify the difficult affective work that went into maintaining a specifically "non-romantic" interracial relationship (Strongman).[50] And Danica Savonick claims that both poets sought to redistribute power into the hands of students through literary language, though their pedagogies were crucially distinct (Savonick 57, 94). But Rich and Lorde were also thinking about how the poetry reading tended to reify their differences, as this undated letter from Rich—probably from 1978—suggests: "We've talked, in the past, about poetry readings, audience responses, knee-jerk applause and standing ovations and that kind of thing, and the uneasiness it has given each of us . . . I wonder . . . whether you have any further thoughts on all that" (Rich, *Letter to Audre Lorde*).[51] Because the correspondence in Rich's archive is closed to the public until 2050, it is not clear whether or how Lorde responded. Yet the recording of the Astraea event suggests that the poetry reading—not unlike their open letters, the private letters, and their pedagogical styles—was another crucial site for resisting the reification of their identities into iconic celebrities, as well as the reification of "conversation" into meaningless political cliché or poetic trope.

"Real Conversation"

The December 1981 Astraea event coincided with a year of cultural fascination with social and aesthetic forms of "conversation." Director Louis Malle's *My Dinner with Andre* served up casual talk between friends as its main course; *Bomb* magazine debuted with the explicit aim of foregrounding conversations between artists; and Erving Goffman published *Forms of Talk*, a sociolinguist study of the rituals and interactional patterns undergirding everyday speech. In the first chapter of Goffman's text, he defines conversation loosely as "an equivalent of talk or spoken encounter" (Goffman 14). But there are some types of "talk" and "spoken encounter" that aren't conversational, like public lectures: "When talk comes from the podium, what does the hearing is an audience, not a set of fellow conversationalists" (137). For Goffman, being in conversation means to be part of an immediate linguistic encounter and to participate in what is being said. The podium, it seems, gets in the way of these conversational dynamics. Did the podium get in the way at the Astraea event? Yes and no. Beyond the question-

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argued, is above all an unengaged, spectatorial stance that individuals take toward the social world and toward their own practices" (Chari 5). The movement between abstract and concrete, individual and structural notions of voice are what I'm most interested in: if de-reification is to make visible the social processes by which commodities form, it also means to hear the social processes at work behind the "thingification" of conversation.

[49] Marion Rust, "Making Emends: Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Anne Bradstreet," *American Literature* 88, no. 1 (2016): 94–95.

[50] One crucial quote from Lorde's November 1979 letter to Rich is "What are the demands and pitfalls of an open and close and direct relationship between a black woman and white woman who are not lovers?" (Lorde, *Letter to Adrienne Rich*).

[51] I date this letter to late 1978 as it refers to *The Black Unicorn* (1978) as Lorde's latest book of poems and to Lorde's cancer operation "last year," which may refer to Lorde's surgery in November 1977. More than a decade later, in a letter dated December 18, 1990, Rich wrote to Lorde that the "poetry reading is not just a communal sharing of art but an act of teaching. . . . Does that mean that poetry is reduced to pedagogy? Of course not. What we are 'teaching' is not information but a different kind of knowledge, sensual, dark and erotic as you said in 'Poetry Is Not A Luxury'" (Rich, *Letter to Audre Lorde*). Rich was constantly resisting the claim that the politicalness of her poetry was "didactic." Both she and Lorde were practicing teachers, who thought deeply about teaching as an embodied, transformative, and dangerous experience. The poetry reading was thus, for Rich, a form of teaching in this more nuanced understanding.

and-answer session, there is no direct spoken interaction between the poets and the audience. But as Donna Allegra suggested in her review of the event, there were crucial *affective* connections forged, and Lorde and Rich used a conversational pattern I call "shifting the frame" to mediate the affective distance between themselves and their audiences.

An example of this pattern occured early in the event, when Lorde says: "We of course, both Adrienne and myself, are doing this for ourselves . . . and we're doing it also in public because we believe that . . . what happens in real conversation, as opposed to the false patterns sometimes that we indulge in . . . [has] application beyond our own work."[52] In distinguishing between the "real conversation" at the Astraea event and "false patterns," Lorde pointed to how the poetry reading enacted a public version of what she elsewhere calls the "intimacy of scrutiny," or the collaborative process of closely examining difference and shared feeling (Lorde, "Poet as Teacher—Human as Poet—Teacher as Human" 183). This framing was Lorde's particular variation on a perennial theme of the feminist movement: the braiding of the personal and the political. Suggesting to the audience that what they were witnessing was both very intimate and very public was one rhetorical way in which Lorde shifts the frame around her own speech.[53] But then Rich reframed Lorde's comments by calling attention to the optics of the event:

> As I stand here . . . the podiums, podii . . . are rather distant from each other . . . and there's . . . a kind of statement that they're making, because this is a public occasion, and . . . it feels important for me to identity here a kind of "setup" that I feel the need to struggle against as a white woman in my life, which has to do with letting our relationships with women of color stand in for a kind of day to day work . . . there is a kind of agenda . . . of subtle racism, that would like us to substitute personal relationships for difficult political work . . . (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 1 of 2) (Side 1)* 14:24)

Here, Rich elicited raucous laughter from the crowd in grappling with how to pluralize the word "podium," but the linguistic difficulty is emblematic of the event's difficulty: she called attention to how the framing of the event risked reifying their relationship by turning the audience's attention toward how the present was staged, not just visually, but racially. This moment—one among many—when the poets framed how the audience should perceive their conversation, is what linguistic anthropologists call "metapragmatic": it regiments how other utterances should be received and understood. This meta-conversation about "conversation"—in which one poet will make a comment about what their conversation is doing and the other will reframe it—is another crucial example of shifting the frame.[54] While for Goffman the podium inhibits

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[52] Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit* (tape 1 of 2, side 1), 7:18, herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/exhibits/show/audre-lorde/item/52.

[53] This sort of statement that is immediately qualified reflects a rhetorical technique Lorde often used in her prosaic works, one that Lester Olson refers to as "shifting subjectivities." Olson sees this happening in her 1981 NWSA speech on "the uses of anger," where Lorde "articulates a shift in the second person of an address, wherein the auditors or readers occupy one kind of role initially and then, drawing on what is remembered or learned from that position, are repositioned subsequently into a different role that is harder for them to recognize or occupy, but that might possess some transforming power" (Olson, "Anger Among Allies" 296).

[54] This happens again when Lorde dramatically shifts the framing of the event, calling attention to the embodied presence of the sign language interpreter, Susan Freundlich. Rich, then, begins telling a story about reading Chinese

conversation, for Rich and Lorde the podium became a topic of it.

Conversation was a signal term for Rich and Lorde's poetics at the turn of the 1980s, one that emerged, for example, in an interview of Lorde conducted by Rich in 1979 but later published in *Signs in 1981, shortly* before the Astraea event. In it, Lorde described how she hears Rich's voice while she writes, and this conversation about voice leads to a particular tense interaction, a moment Marion Rust calls the "one place in the published interview where Rich gets angry" (Rust 111).[55] When Rich questioned the perception of herself as a symbolic "white voice," the threat of the reification seemed to come not from outside their relationship but from within it:

> Audre Lorde: Adrienne, in my journals I have a lot of pieces of conversations that I'm having with you in my head. I'll be having a conversation with you and I'll put it in my journal because stereotypically or symbolically these conversations occur in a space of black woman/white woman, where it's beyond Adrienne and Audre, almost as if we're two voices.
>
> AR: You mean the conversations you have in your head and your journal, or the conversations we're having on this earth? (Lorde and Rich, "An Interview with Audre Lorde" 731)

Lorde then recalled an earlier moment when Rich questioned her perceptions and Rich became defensive, saying, "I've had great resistance to some of your perceptions. They can be very painful to me" (732-733). Attempting to face this wave of anger, defensiveness, or guilt, Rich said the key questions for her now are: "How do I use this? What do I do about it?" Lorde echoes with a quote from her poem "Need": "How much of this pain / can I use?"

I want to attend to how the question of "voice" ("almost as if we're two voices") inaugurated a heated moment of disagreement between them, while the question of poetry's "use" afforded a resolution to the conflict without reifying those differences. A similar dynamic emerges at the Astraea event: Lorde and Rich performed their poems with very distinct voices and performance styles but consistently returned to the question of poetry's "use." This shift between "voice" and "use" had at least three purposes, I believe: to politicize apolitical notions of conversation, to thwart monological conventions of the normative poetry reading, and to resist the reception of their voices into any singular notion of "white," "black," "Jewish," or "poetry" voice. In what follows, I examine how the poets explored the metaphor and material of the voice in the public performance of their poetry. Though I consider their performances separately, this mutual dance—between their different uses of voice and their contentions over poetry's use—underlies their poetics of conversation.

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ideograms at Audre Lorde's kitchen table. Though the anecdote problematically elides Chinese with deafness through the category of the nonverbal, part of the affective power of the moment stems from shifting the frame: how Rich enfolds a scene from Audre Lorde's kitchen into the context of the public poetry reading.

[55] The letters between Rich and Lorde reveal that, beyond this interview, the published interview was itself generic reification of the difficult and painful process of conversation and publication. Lorde writes in her November 1979 letter: "One of the reasons it was so hard was because in the spring [of 1979], you had said to me that you wanted to write something about my work. The next thing I knew it was an interview. So what it felt like was, when it came down to it, you did what all the other white girls do, stick a mic in my face and say talk" (Lorde, *Letter to Adrienne Rich*).

"Conversation-ed Out"

The first poem Lorde read at the Astraea event is "A Litany for Survival." She framed the poem as useful in the sense that it inflected her struggle with cancer, an example of how she can "slant into that wall of fear and come back with something" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 2 of 2) (Side 1)* 22:34). Lorde then used her embodied voice to dramatize this particular use of poetry. As I will argue I more detail in the next chapter, Lorde had numerous vocal techniques for performing her poetry aloud, and the Astraea recording makes them memorably audible. "Litany" begins with a littoral image ("For those of us who live at the shoreline"), and she read these lines in her unadorned, matter-of-fact register: a mode of delivery that sounds much like a slower version of her conversational speaking voice. But in the second stanza, she began to switch between different registers to communicate—sonically—her present engagement with a past fear:

> For those of us
> who were imprinted with fear
> like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
> learning to be afraid with our mother's milk (Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* 255)

On the word "fear" in the second line and again "afraid" in the third, Lorde invokes what I call her incantatory, chromatic register: over a gradual decreasing pitch across the line, the frequency oscillates between descending and rising, yet that rise is slightly lower in pitch than the previous word ("fear" is slightly higher than "faint line"). With her shift in vocal register, Lorde infused into this line an affective intensity that sonically communicates the visual image of fear being imprinted on one's forehead. If one of the "uses" of poetry is to "slant into" fear, she used shifts in vocal register to sonically perform such "slanting."

Lorde's biographer Alexis De Veaux writes that the popularity of "Litany" in the late 1970s and '80s stemmed from how the poet "shifted to a more intimate voice, replacing the pronouns 'you' and 'your' with 'we' and 'our'" (De Veaux 206). In De Veaux's perceptive analysis lies an important tension: while "Litany" marks a move from the second to the first person, it also marks a move from the singular to the plural. How does a poem become more "intimate" as it becomes more collective? This question goes to the heart of the history of lyric poetry, a genre often contested on the grounds of shifting modes of address (Jackson and Prins 3). The "anthem"-like quality of Lorde's "Litany" challenged both high cultural norms and solipsistic conventions of lyric voice, drawing her audience intersubjectively into the roles of speaker and addressee. But Lorde also had performative means of merging intimacy and publicity. Having confessionally framed the poem around her experience of cancer and then heard the applause of her performance risk a unitary celebration of *her*, she directly asked the audience at the Astraea event to stop clapping because "it feels not part of our conversation or the kind of thread that I'm trying to follow through, or that we're trying to follow through between us" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 2 of 2) (Side 1)* 26:06). Lorde often attempted to control the applause from her audience, but it was a way to encourage the audience to engage affectively with what they were hearing: to turn them into active listeners rather than mere passive audience members who simply clap at what pleases them. Notice also how the conversational format of the evening is metaphorized as a kind of

cloth—"our conversation or the kind of thread…"—one that is interwoven between the audience's clapping and the performers' speech. By moving between the multiple registers of her voice and calling attention to the hands of her hearers, Lorde crafted a conversational poetics that sought a social and embodied immediacy with her listening audience, not a transcendent identification that is typical of a readerly encounter with lyric.

Lorde also performed "Sequelae," her next poem at the Astraea reading, in multiple registers, but with different effects. "Sequelae" is a more unsettling poem than "Litany": if the listener is to feel inspired by "Litany"—as if they too are part of the "we"—"Sequelae" situates the listener at the threshold of the past and the present, the demotic and the otherworldly. The poem begins with a prophetic and sexual image ("Because a burning sword notches both of my doorposts"), which Lorde read mostly in her unadorned register—as if this shuttling between the biblical, the erotic, and the domestic is an everyday occurrence. But when the stanza moves into its most surreal content, her voice dropped into a slow incantation in which each tone on the last word of each line decreases by a half-step in a chromatic voice leading:

> while I battle the shapes of you
> wearing old ghosts of me
> hating you for being
> black and not woman
> hating you for being white
> and not me (Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* 249)

In the final stanza of the poem, Lorde recapitulates but inverts this language ("I battle old ghosts of you / wearing shapes of me") and, like the poem's opening, tinges the prophetic with the erotic:

> growing dark secrets
> out from between her thighs
> and night comes into me like a fever
> my hands grip a flaming sword that screams (249)

Though Lorde's early poem "Coal" is her most explicit riff on the prophet Isaiah, her mixing of biblically inflected language with eroticism in "Sequelae" reminds us that female sexuality always lies at the root of prophetic poetry.[56] At the poem's most violent and erotic moments—as when she responds to police brutality in "Power" or erotic desire in "Meet"—Lorde reads not just in the incantatory register but also with a pronounced vibrato. In this reading of "Sequelae" at the Astraea event, her pitch wavers on words like "thighs" and "me," at once emphasizing not only the connection between voice and body but also the instability of any stable sense of self and other.

Lorde initially framed "Sequelae" at the event as a Du Boisian investigation into her multiple selves, "knowing that much of me is both Black and white" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea*

[56] Throughout Isaiah, for instance, the act of giving birth is metaphorized for God's speaking voice ("I have been silent a very long time . . . like a woman in labor I now shriek" [Isaiah 42:14]). Idols should also be smashed at a distance comparable to the one kept from the menstruant woman ("You shall scatter them like a woman in her uncleanness" [Isaiah 30:22]).

Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 1 of 2) (Side 1) 27:20). The dissolution of any stable speaker and addressee *and* the shift in register dramatized this warring of two selves. Yet while "double consciousness" is the framework for the poem before Lorde reads it, "conversation" becomes the crucial analytic after she reads it: "[I]it really gets to me still, the voice and the power . . . the questions that I came to in that poem . . . the poem itself . . . feels almost conversation-ed out, it's as if that conversation has gone over and over . . . and yet, by the same token, the way my heart is beating as I read it, tells me that it is a process that happened [and] as I said, it can happen again" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 1 of 2) (Side 2)* 1:44). Conversation was not just a format for the poetry reading but an embodied practice of speaking and listening to oneself: a mode of reading aloud *that makes your heart beat*. To listen to Lorde perform at the Astraea event, I argue, is to take seriously the idea that she is having a conversation with herself through the dramatic alteration of pitch. But this conversation was never completely solipsistic. Rich replied to this comment about the documentary uses of poetry with "it's never over," and Lorde countered with hesitant disagreement: her current poetic interests, she says, are "different, but on some level, they are not" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 1 of 2) (Side 2)* 2:36). This interaction between Rich and Lorde embedded a private conversation that Lorde had been having with herself through her poetry into the present conversation between Rich and Lorde, but not in a way that flattened the difference into sameness or offered immediate consent to another's reframing. For these poets, at this moment in 1981, conversation was a polyvocal poetic form for inextricable from its role as a social form for exploring difference and disagreement publicly.

"That Voice"

As the epigraph to this chapter attests, Rich also used the multiple registers of her voice to explore the "poetics of conversation," most notably in the second half of the event when she read preliminary drafts from her poem "Sources."[57] It is worth noting, however, that the dominant vocal register that Rich used to speak about "Sources" is not the same as the one in which she read the poem. Like Lorde, Rich typically read her poems with a slower speed than her conversational speaking voice, frequently punctuated by pauses; unlike Lorde, Rich usually read her poems in a single—what Marit MacArthur might call "formal"—style, even if she is well known to include various experimental forms of address throughout her poetic oeuvre.[58] But to listen to Rich perform "Sources" at the 1981 Astraea is not just to consider the relation between Lorde and Rich's speaking and performing styles but also to historicize Rich's voice over the arc of her nearly sixty years performing her poetry out loud for live audiences.

When it was eventually published in 1984, "Sources" was one of Rich's longest free verse poems with over 350 lines separated into eighteen different sections. It continues a long poetic conversation Rich had been having with herself since at least 1955 about the origins and

[57] In the first half of the event, Rich reads three poems from *A Wild Patience*: "Transit"; Self-Hatred and "Particularity" (both from a larger poem entitled "Turning the Wheel)"; and "For Memory."

[58] MacArthur and colleagues write that in a study of over one hundred poets' performance styles, "[w]e would expect poets who read in a more Formal style to have predictable rhythm and speak relatively slowly, with fairly regular pauses" "(MacArthur, Zellou, et al. 28). For a recent investigation into forms of address in Rich's work, see Talia Shalev, "Adrienne Rich's 'Collaborations': Re-vision as Durational Address," *Women's Studies* 46, no. 7 (2017): 646–62.

the lived experience of her Jewishness.[59] But, more overtly than any other poem to date, "Sources" explores Rich's relationship to her Jewish father's assimilation, her former Jewish husband's suicide, her experiences growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust, and her evolving views on Zionism. At the Astraea event, Rich directly connected the "question of voice in this poem" to her upbringing in Baltimore, where she was compelled to mask certain parts of her identity, including her vocal identity:

> My father was a Jew, my mother was not and I didn't know what to do with that, I was raised as a Christian. But all of this being part of the struggle against amnesia, the struggle to reclaim memory, the struggle to reclaim strands of the past which had been denied me, in part, in the effort to make me into that achieving young, white, middle class American Christian woman that I was supposed to be, without a southern accent preferably. . . . I think that this poem ["Sources"] bears the marks of a lot of struggle with all of that.[60] (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 2 of 2) (Side 1)* 27:17)

What becomes perceptible in this conversational (and confessional) framing of "Sources" is a value Rich shares with Lorde: the use of poetry to decolonize and reclaim one's perceptions. Yet the conversation never lets that shared value reify into sameness: the conditions that made the work of decolonization difficult for Rich—namely, her father's assimilation and a hegemonic Christian culture—were much different than Lorde's.

It is well known that, unlike Lorde, Rich was strongly influenced in her early years by a white masculine tradition within American and British poetry, long before she became an icon of the lesbian feminist movement.[61] Biographer Hilary Holladay writes that Rich's background as a skilled pianist gave her a comfort onstage from her early career and that after watching Dylan Thomas perform at Harvard as an undergraduate, she cultivated both an "incantatory" and a "melodic voice"—affectations that would mark her many public readings to come (Holladay 87). But what do the adjectives "incantatory" and "melodic" sound like? The first available recording of Rich reading aloud is a 1951 recording from a reading she gave at Harvard on the occasion of winning the Yale Younger Poets Prize for her first book, *A Change of World* (1951). In the

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[59] Rich's earliest collected poem dealing with Jewish themes is "The Jewish New Year" (1955) and her 1960 poem "Readings of History" (1960) is where she described herself for the first time, in the fifth section titled "The Mirror," as "Split at the root, neither Gentile nor Jew, / Yankee nor Rebel." Zohar Weiman-Kelman has also persuasively reread Rich's 1968 translations of the Yiddish poet Kadya Malodowsky through queer temporality theory, arguing that both Rich and Malodowsky questioned normative notions of Jewish continuity and belonging (Weiman-Kelman).

[60] Rich's later essay "Split at the Root" (1982) describes in even more detail—beyond the suppression of a southern accent—how her father's internalized self-hatred of his Jewishness was mapped onto her voice:I am in a play-reading at school, of *The Merchant of Venice*. . . . I am the only Jewish girl in the class and I am playing Portia. As always, I read my part aloud for my father the night before, and he tells me to convey, with my voice, more scorn and contempt with the word "Jew": "Therefore, Jew . . ." I have to say the word out [*sic*], and say it loudly. I was encouraged to pretend to be a non-Jewish child acting a non-Jewish character who has to speak the word "Jew" emphatically (Rich, "Split at the Root" 70).

[61] Auden's introduction to *A Change of World* (1951) is usually cited as the most overt link to this tradition; see Aidan Wasley's *The Age of Auden: Postwar Poetry and the American Scene* (2011) for an insightful analysis of how Auden comes to stand in for the poetic tradition itself in Rich's work (Wasley 147). If Auden famously said, in his rejection of utilitarian theories of art, that "poetry does nothing," the Astraea event was a strong riposte to this modernist sentiment on the axes of politics and performance.

recording of her poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" at this 1951 event, her reading voice sounds uncannily like that "Poetry Voice" she parodied thirty years later at the Astraea event. The first stanza ("Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen, / Bright topaz denizens of a world of green") thematically riffs on Blakean imagery, but the register she used indexes the declamatory, Thomasian style (Rich, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"). The dactyls and the iambs oscillate from the beginning to the ends of each line, and her bravado moved with them—each stress goes up in pitch, followed by a lengthy pronunciation of the final word with a subsequent fall in pitch. Thus, the "Poetry Voice" that she claimed she had been taught to "listen for" at the Astraea event in 1981 is one she also had a deep history of performing.

"Sources," as performed at the 1981 Astraea event, frames the question of Jewishness as never separate from other aspects of her identity, including her southern vocal identity and her embeddedness in the culture of a perceived, masculine "Poet Voice." But how did "Sources" sound when she performed a draft of it in conversation with Lorde in 1981? The first section of the poem begins with a speaker returning to a Vermont landscape she had not visited in "sixteen years," as the first line reports. She encounters a series of names she sees printed on the houses, remembers a dead fox she once saw, and then further meditates on the scenery:

> Clark, Pierce, Stone. Gossier. No names of mine.
> The vixen I met at twilight on Route 5
> south of Lake Willoughby: long dead. She was an omen.
> to me, surviving, herding her cubs
> in the silvery bend of the road
> in nineteen sixty five.
> Shapes of things: so much the same
> they feel like eternal forms: the house and barn
> on the rise above May Pond; the brow of Pisgah (Rich, *Collected Poems* 573)

The lines are swirling with personal and historical memory: the "vixen" recalls her 1968 poem "Abnegation," in which the fox first appears as a metaphor for the Scottish Covenanters who settled in New England in the late seventeenth century, self-proclaimed "chosen people" in "the New Israel" of early America. Rich "re-visions" the fox in "Sources," for it now represents an "omen" of having to mother her own children after her husband's suicide in 1970, and it becomes a metaphor later in the poem for Jews who strategize in the face of antisemitism.[62] The reference to "May Pond" also invokes her personal relationship with Lorde, as Rich would often invite Lorde and her partner Frances Clayton to stay in the Vermont summer house that she used to share with her former husband.[63] But Rich's embodied performance at the Astraea event also

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[62] As Talia Shalev writes, "re-vision" has become a "keyword" in Rich criticism (Shalev 647). The original use of "re-vision" stems from Rich's influential 1971 essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision," where she defines it as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction." On the latter point, see section 5: "my kin / the Jews of Vicksburg or Birmingham / whose lives must have been strategies no less / than the vixen's on Route 5" (Rich, *Collected Poems* 576). At the Astraea event, she reads "Atlanta" instead of "Birmingham," the former city being the original settling place of her Hungarian grandfather, Samuel Reich (Holladay 11).

[63] In a letter from August 15, 1979, she described how Lorde's visits established a "profound continuity" for her with the Vermont landscape, especially after her husband's suicide (Rich, *Letter to Audre Lorde*). And on August 2, 1981, Rich wrote to Lorde, after a short visit in Vermont one evening, that she and her partner, Michelle Cliff,

sounds deeply personal in this initial section, starkly contrasting not only with the "Poetry Voice" she imitates in the confessional framing of the poem but also with Lorde's multiregister, vibrato laden performance at the same event. The monotone delivery, the slow speaking rate, and the extended pauses—especially between "Willoughby" and "long dead"—vocally convey both distance and contemplation. If anything, the Astraea recording suggests how much less affected—or more conversational—Rich's voice had become since that earlier 1951 recording, although the Astraea reading voice is no less performative or affecting. Rich's reading voice at Astraea was much closer in pitch and timbre to the voice she used to converse with Lorde on stage.

"Sources," as critic Mary Strine has suggested, may represent a shift away from the "confrontational emphasis . . . of [Rich's] earlier work," but as the poem becomes more conversational in theme and form, the speaker's voice also becomes much *less* passive (Strine 33). The voice of section 2 of "Sources" asserts itself directly ("I refuse to become a seeker for cures") even as it becomes more introspective ("Old things, diffuse, unnamed, lie strong across my heart") (Rich, *Collected Poems* 573). And in section 3, the speaker's voice fragments under the pressure of this inwardness, yielding a conversational typography—of italics and midline caesura—that reflects what Rich called, in a 1976 interview with Elly Bulkin, the "lesbian rhythms" of contemporary poetics.[64] A nineteenth-century theory of poetry as "utterance overheard" has long reified Hegelian theories of lyric that emphasize solitude and internally consistent forms of subjectivity (Jackson and Prins 456). But in "Sources," a poeticized overhearing causes subjectivity and history to break open:

> *From where?* the voice asks coldly
> This is the voice in cold morning air
> that pierces dreams. *From where does your strength come?*
>
> Old things . . .
> *From where does your strength*
> *come, you Southern Jew?*
> *split at the root, raised in a castle of air?*
>
> Yes. I have expected this. I have known for years
> the question was coming. *From where* (Rich, *Collected Poems* 574)

Who's speaking here? Is it that "older voice, older self" that Lorde suggested necessarily haunts poetry? Is it the voice of Psalm 121, in which the speaker "looks up at the mountains" and asks

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"drove home like wildfire with one stop at Fairlee Diner—I almost immediately went into my study & started rereading old poems abt VT—then started writing a new one—it is very long & strange & scares me—but I know, I KNOW it is saying the stuff I have to say—May Pond is in it—when there's a first draft I'll send you a copy" (Rich, *Letter to Audre Lorde*). Attached to the letter is a postcard from the Shelbourne Museum in Vermont, which features a painting titled *The Garden of Eden* by Erastus Salisbury Field depicting an interpolation of the biblical scene with New England foliage and landscape: an aesthetic akin to the opening stanza of "Sources."

[64] Poems with lesbian rhythms are, for Rich, "[t]hese long-line poems, very open, very loose, yet very dynamically charged . . . where the poem interrupts itself, where there are two voices against each other in the poem or maybe three or the poet's own voice against her voice, which echoes the kind of splitting and fragmentation women have lived in, the sense of being almost a battleground for different parts of the self. This is something I haven't seen before in poetry" (Bulkin, "(Part 2)" 55).

"From where will my help come?" (Alter, *The Hebrew Bible* 292). In either reading, the voice is challenging the speaker to listen more actively. Being a more active listener does not necessarily mean talking back to this voice—she never responds to "*From where?*" with "*from here*." Instead, listening actively means hearing the very sound, even the temperature, of that voice. Rich frames how the voice should be heard and felt, situating the utterance with a dialogue tag ("the voice asks coldly"), describing its effect on atmospheric conditions ("This is the voice in cold morning air"), and reflecting on its power to cause a pause-filled, inward turn ("Yes. I have expected this"). The phrase "From where" repeats four more times over the course of the section, until the next section, in which the question changes slightly:

> With whom do you believe your lot is cast?
> *From where does your strength come?*
>
> I think somehow, somewhere
> every poem of mine must repeat those questions
>
> which are not the same. There is a whom, a where
> that is not chosen that is given and sometimes falsely given
>
> in the beginning we grasp whatever we can
> to survive. (Rich, *Collected Poems* 575)

The "question of voice" in this poem has now become two questions that point in two different directions. To invoke a cliché of diaspora studies: while the question of "*From where*" points backward toward roots, the question of "*With whom*" looks toward routes. The effect of repeating this question "*From where?*" until it splits is the dramatization of the speaker's transformation from a passive observer into an active listener, one that hears not only the difference between the questions but also the layers of history that map, as she describes it earlier at the Astraea event, a complex "geography of soul" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 1 of 2) (Side 2)* 5:05).

Rich's poeticization of listening resists the reification of identity into any unitary, "falsely given" sense of self, but she also used her embodied voice to explore this aesthetic and ethical territory when performing this part of "Sources" at the Astraea event. In voicing that first "*From where?*" Rich elevated the pitch on the last stressed syllable of the iamb, just as she did when she first described "*that voice*" of the white male poets. That is, Rich read the italicized voice with the same pitch pattern and declamatory style of that "Poetry Voice" she so feared would possess her in the writing of this poem. She also aspirated "wh" at the beginning of the word "where" so that it sounds like "hwhere," signifying a lingering southernness in her embodied voice, one that she used selectively throughout the Astraea event and the rest of her performance career.[65] In both evoking the bravado of the archetypical white male poet and temporarily emphasizing the southern accent that she was so often encouraged to suppress—in reading her poem in at least

[65] As noted in *The Atlas of North American English*, "In the middle of the twentieth century, the distinction between /hw/ and /w/ in *whale* vs. *wail*," for instance, "was maintained by most American speakers." But by the end of the twentieth century, "the distinction is made only by a scattering of speakers, mainly concentrated in southern states" (Labov et al. 50).When Rich performs "For Memory" earlier that night at the event—a poem that features the lines "and form whom? To what?"—she doesn't aspirate the first syllables of those two words.

two different vocal registers—Rich acoustically performed the split nature of her identity that her poem famously explores. In the performance of “Sources,” then, Rich’s voice resonates with the multiregister performance style of Lorde, though Rich’s registers sound very different than Lorde’s.

The question of diaspora—both the dispersion of peoples and the dispersion of the self—was an important note of thematic overlap between the poetics of Lorde and Rich that emerges at this event. The very term diaspora functions as a shifting signifier throughout the final 1983 version of “Sources,” indexing the Puritans who escaped from England (Section IX), Native Americans who were forced from their land (Section XII), and Jews who were forced to the camps or left for Israel (Section XXI). But in the unfinished draft she reads at the Astraea event, Rich is working out precisely the relationship between continuity, belonging, and privilege that define her Jewish American diasporic life:

> It's an old fashioned, an outrageous thing
> to believe one has a destiny
>
> --a thought often peculiar to those who possess privilege—
>
> Often one of the most destructive manias of
> privilege, but also a sustaining thought for
>
> those who know themselves a historical people
> However despised or undermined
>
> Who know they are not merely the sum
> of damages done to them:
>
> who have kept beyond violence
> the knowledge
>
> arranged in patterns like kente-cloth
> unexpected as in batik
>
> of being a connective link
> in a long, continuous way
>
> of ordering weather, hunger, death, desire
> and the nearness of chaos, always (Rich, *Collected Poems*)

Rich qualifies this stanza by saying: “Well, that's all very well and maybe true, but I feel as if it's a tremendous sort of effort to intellectualize and to distance what I was getting too close to” (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, “Conversation with Poems,” (Tape 2 of 2) (Side 2)* 7:24). What was she getting too close to? The draft version describes "destiny"--what she in the final version later distinguishes from "faith"—via the metaphor of cloth, and she re-visions its definition as kind of historical knowledge passed down through the generations. This is not the kind of weaving that lives on the wall after one is dead, as it is in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers." Instead, it is one that is worn in the present. The metaphor of cloth signifies not just temporally

but spatially, revealing how close this material really was, how sonic and textual entanglement can feel. It's not clear what Lorde was wearing to the Astraea event, but as video from their speech in St. Croix from the same year corroborates, Lorde was well known to perform publicly in dyed fabrics ("batik") and kente cloth. In the final 1983 version, Rich explicitly adds in references to the Jewish Passover to further emphasize the coexistence—the typographically delineated and thus incommensurable coexistence--of Black and Jewish diasporic life:

> have kept beyond violence the knowledge
> arranged in patterns like kente-cloth
>
> unexpected as in batik
> recurrent as bitter herbs and unleavened bread (Rich, *Collected Poems*)

The "long, continuous way" of intergenerational knowledge was, in the moment of performance, signifying the "profound continuity," as she described it a the letter from 1979, that Lorde's friendship served in remediating her relationship to her past, of bringing this Jewish silence to speech.[66]

After Rich finished reading from "Sources," Lorde said she wishes she could "keep listening," and Rich launched into a description of the particular use of the poem: "As you said, [a poem can be] like the shard in the earth with the inscription and [I] pull it out again . . . when I needed contact with some power from myself that I had temporarily lost track of: No. [Sources] isn't that, and this poem, as it exists, could never be that for me" (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Benefit, "Conversation with Poems," (Tape 2 of 2) (Side 2)* 11:32). As she goes on to explain, the use of poetry Rich wanted to attend to in the reading of a draft of "Sources" were the provisional and the unpublished, the kind that is never finished, perhaps not even read in public or ever published. Lorde jumped in to disagree: "It's useful not just to you as a record for you, it's useful to all of us to in that sense, not just in this dialogue, but as a work." Rich effectively said, "Well, not quite." In the *Signs* interview, we saw how the conversation about Rich's "white voice" inaugurated a heated moment of disagreement between them after which a shift toward thinking about poetry's "use" was a way to move the conversation forward without resolving in agreement. But in the Astraea event recording, one can hear how the two—in conversing about poetry's uses and in using multiple registers of their own voices—explored the acoustic and

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[66]See footnote 28 for more on the 1979 letter. The prevailing scholarly sentiment—as Rich's son Pablo Conrad corroborated for me—is that a version of "Sources" that differs substantially from the final publication in 1983 doesn't exit. But I believe the Astraea recording constitutes just that, and not just in this section that juxtaposes imagery of the Jewish and black diaspora. Like many Jewish feminist poets of the 70s and 80s, Rich was exploring Jewish identity by writing through Holocaust imagery. Rich's performance at the Astraea event of what will become Section XVI of "Sources," prefacing her reading with the confession that it was "very frightening to me to write, because it said something that I hadn't realized that I felt:" The draft reads as a stronger critique of Judaism, specifically in that it focuses on the sexism within the tradition while also eliding European anti-Semitism with misogyny. The final 1983 revision explores more deeply that "acute and more personal ground," burying the critique of old-world patriarchy under the realpolitik of Israel, directly connecting the speaker's identification with the mass death of Holocaust victims to the death of her own father. It's also worth mentioning that the imagery of Jews turning to smoke, more than any other lines she reads at the Astraea event that evening, approaches the graphic nature of Lorde's poetry, especially the latter's reading of "Power." In that sense, Rich's poem affectively gets closer to Lorde's poetry at the same time that it goes into the particularity of Rich's own emotions around confronting her notion of Jewish belonging as being constituted by mass death.

affective space of disagreement without flattening their differences. Though Rich wasn't sure of it at the time, the existence of the recording forty years later suggests that Lorde was at least partially correct: the reading is useful "not just in this dialogue, but as a work." The recording documents the genesis of one of Rich's most conversational poems to date, but also the aesthetic and social labor that is conversation.

Prophetic Voice

"No other kind of language in [Rich's] poems can do as much as conversation," writes critic Nick Halpern in a study of the prophetic voice of Rich's poetry. "Conversation can be valued so intensely [for her] because it is, apart from everything else, a way of being useful" (Halpern 220). But what happens when "conversation" itself becomes abstracted from particularities of experience, histories of power, and the materiality of embodied performance? Studies of African American and white, Jewish-American culture that take seriously these questions often tell a history of appropriation. And rightly so. As Jennifer Glaser has shown in her reading of postwar Jewish American fiction (following the influential work of Michael Rogin on Hollywood film), racial ventriloquism and transracial identification were literary tactics for Jewish writers to "disavow their whiteness (and, with it, their white privilege)" (Glaser 4). At least since 1955, the history of Rich's engagement with blackness begins with this appropriative history.[67] But by the time of the Astraea event in 1981, Rich was thinking extensively about the possibilities and dangers of speaking for or on behalf of other women, and her relationship with Lorde was crucial to re-visioning the legacy of blackness in her work.[68] In that same 1979 letter in which she "refused" to become Lorde's "voice," Rich also says that she "cannot afford ever to stop asking [her]self, How am I using Audre's blackness?" (Rich, *Letter to Audre Lorde*). Because these questions of how racial privilege and appropriation function in poetry are always on the table for Rich and Lorde—they are a *frequent* topic of conversation—the Astraea event provides a case study for thinking about how it wasn't ventriloquism ("speaking for"), nor representation ("speaking on behalf of"), but conversation ("speaking alongside" or "with") that afforded them a framework for publicly resisting the reification of their identities, their voices, and their relationship.

Rich's essay "Split at the Root" makes it clear that the Black civil rights movement in general and James Baldwin's writing in specific urged her to investigate the silenced Jewishness in her own life. And Lorde in turn invoked Jewish experience to explore her own relationship to racial formation, both domestically and abroad. Any reader of even the first fifty pages of Alexis

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[67] Rich herself noted that her 1955 poem "The Diamond Cutters" had "[drawn], quite ignorantly, on the long tradition of domination . . . the enforced and exploited labor of actual Africans in actual diamond mines" (Rich, *The Fact of a Doorframe* 329). As late as 1971, in the peroration of her famous essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision," she testifies that she dreamed that she "was asked to read [her] poetry at a mass women's meeting, but when [she] began to read, what came out were the lyrics of a blues song" (Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 48). By the late 1970s, Rich was owning this appropriative legacy: in a footnote to the essay's reprinting in 1979, she writes "When I dreamed that dream, was I wholly ignorant of the tradition of Bessie Smith and other women's blues lyrics which transcended victimization to sing of resistance and independence?" (Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* 48).

[68] In "When We Dead Awaken" (1971), for example, she condemns more appropriative, patriarchal notions of speaking "for," whereas in "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" (1975) she praises the ability to speak for those "who . . . are less conscious of what they are living through" (Rich, *On Lies*, 181). See Lorde's "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface" for a critique of representative notions of "speaking for" other women.

De Veaux's biography knows that Lorde was surrounded by Jews, both lovers and leftists. In her early poetry and in her biomythography, *Zami*, Lorde recognizes that both white Jews and black people are the object of white ire, but in wildly uneven ways.[69] In her essay "Notes from a Trip to Russia" (1976), Lorde uses continental attitudes toward European Jews as an index for European attitudes toward American racism. As she began to travel to Germany more often in the eighties, Lorde translated her anti-racist politics to a German audience by speaking about Jewishness.[70] As one of the century's foremost thinkers on the relationship among gender, sexuality, and diasporic identity, as well as an international activist who understood the difference between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, Lorde was a sympathetic ear for Rich as the latter struggled to decolonize her own perceptions and think through her relationship to Jewishness in the early 1980s.[71] Because Lorde was a powerful interlocutor and a sympathetic, yet critical, listener, the 1981 conversation between Rich and Lorde becomes another diasporic space in which Rich publicly claims her Jewish identity through the reading of "Sources."

Listening to Lorde and Rich negotiate the meaning of a poem through embodied conversation suggests that the "prophetic" is a crucial analytic by which to interpret their performance practice. In the Jewish biblical tradition, prophetic poetry is crucially "fictive": a literary and emotional technology for approximating what God's voice would sound like *if* we could hear it (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* 141). While the psalms and prophetic prose of the biblical texts emphasized the relationship between God and an individual, prophetic poetry historically emphasized the triad of god-prophet-people: it is deeply connected to the historic experience of speaking to a live audience (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* 140). In the African American poetic tradition, it is not (just) the voice of God but the silenced voice of enslaved people that poetic language often mediates (Jones 3). Both Lorde and Rich have frequently been thought of as "prophetic poets," though the application of this term focuses on the monitory function of their work and tends to obscure how embodied performance lies at the center of both

[69] In chapter 8 of *Zami*, Lorde tells a story of how her landlord committed suicide ostensibly because he had learned he had to rent to Black people. In a sudden juxtaposition at the end of the paragraph, Lorde writes, "He had been Jewish; I was Black. That made us both fair game for the cruel curiosity of my pre-adolescent classmates" (Lorde, *Zami, a New Spelling of My Name* 59).

[70] In several essays and speeches, Jews function as an exception to the incommensurability of Black and white experience. See the essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 118) and her lecture in Dahlem on May 31, 1984 (Lorde et al. 102). In *Warrior Poet*, De Veaux writes that after her first trips to Germany Lorde left feeling committed to helping non-Jewish women and German Jewish lesbians play a role in the battle against antisemitism (De Veaux 345), and her poem "This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps" is her only poetic attempt to think through the memorialization of Jewish death in the German context. Perhaps the most telling evidence, however, about her thoughts about the Holocaust appear in diary entry from February 1, 1981: "I am thinking of Anne Frank . . . her father kept more than 60% of her diary secret until after his death—all the parts about her conflicts with her mother and her becoming a woman—her sexuality which he said was too private. I wonder if it embarrassed him too much—why should her womanhood be so much more private than her death at the hands of German butchers?" (Lorde, *Journal 24 (1981)*).

[71] The distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism was a particularly fraught one in the early 80s, especially between black and Jewish feminists. In her most recent book, Erica Edwards describes one of these "painful exchanges," when Lorde—along with a host of other black and Jewish feminists—defended Rich from June Jordan's public attack (E. R. Edwards, *The Other Side of Terror* 198). See the letter "Black Women / Jewish Women: Openings for Dialogue" for the primary source (Lorde, *Black Women / Jewish Women: Openings for Dialogue*).

ancient and contemporary prophetic poetry.[72] Listening to Lorde's and Rich's recorded voices requires that we pay attention to how the hearing and speaking of written words construct another level of "fictive" meaning, one created between the page and the stage: another kind of "feeling tone." This performative notion of "prophecy" sets their work both with and against a more political prophetic tradition, both in the black and Jewish traditions, which doesn't emphasize poetic language per se but instead social justice. Cornel West defines the black prophetic tradition most clearly as "an infectious and invigorating way of life and struggle. Its telling signs are ethical witness (including maybe martyrdom for some), moral consistency, and political activism" (West 215). Lorde and Rich's performance history reminds us of the performative aspect of West's definition, that the very speaking of certain words is meant to inspire and effect the change that the content of the utterance promises.

It is not only the speaking of the words but also their afterlife as recorded sound that constitute what I would describe as Lorde and Rich's queer, feminist counterpublic. Against transcendent notions of lyric and Habermasian rational-critical "dialogue," queer counterpublics have a prophetic function in that they seek to "establish a world in which embodied sociability, affect, and play have a more defining role" (M. Warner 122). The Astraea recording documents Lorde and Rich speaking to a very specific public, but because it also exists as an aural object available on the internet, it "commits itself in principle to the possible participation of any stranger" (M. Warner 113). The poetics of conversation continue to resonate through this counterpublic with every critical listening: conversation unfolds in Donna Allegra's review, it replays over the feminist airwaves in the 1980s, it is restaged at a 2012 marathon reading of Lorde's and Rich's work at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and it (hopefully) resounds in the very words of this essay.[73] By continuing to listen with an emergent counterpublic, we de-reify how we think about conversation as an aesthetic and social form, especially as that form appears in the field of Jewish American literature. The Astraea event is not a typical case study for the history of "black-Jewish relations," and not just because Lorde and Rich do not talk about their relationship using that framework. Unlike in rote dialogues emblematizing "black-Jewish relations," for Lorde and Rich the question of method—how to have a conversation—is never hidden behind the question of value—whom that conversation serves and what it disguises. Rich and Lorde never shied away from exploring what Rebecca Pierce has recently called "the sorts of things that . . . make these [black and Jewish] relationships hard": bodily disability, colonization, police brutality, white supremacy, and Christian hegemony ("You People"). These two poets

[72] For Lorde and the monitory aspects of prophecy, see Flávia Santos de Araújo, "'Blessed within My Selves': The Prophetic Visions of Our Lorde," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies* 20 (2019): 8–31. In the continental English literary tradition, the Romantic Age marked a turn when the source of the prophetic utterance was no longer external (from God) but internal, within the psyche. Thus the romantic prophetic turn was an inward one, one that humanized the prophetic mode. Coleridge famously distinguished between poetry and prophecy by suggesting that while poetry was aimed at pleasure, it would be "not less irrational than strange to assert that pleasure and not truth was the immediate object of the prophet" (Miron 137). Certainly, for Lorde and Rich, there was no distinction between pleasure and truth. Moreover, their politics deeply questioned the separation of the external and the internal. Collective forces—like ideology, capitalism, sexism—take on an almost supernatural quality in their poetry and haunt both the psyche and the body.

[73] To hear a version of the Astraea event replayed over the airwaves, see Donna Allegra, producer, *The Velvet Sledgehammer* [production reel of Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde in conversation], Pacifica Radio, Los Angeles, 1982, avplayer.lib.berkeley.edu/Pacifica/991035425189706532. For information about the marathon reading event, see Harriet Staff, "Audre Lorde & Adrienne Rich Marathon Reading by Harriet Staff," Poetry Foundation, February 1, 2023, www.poetryfoundation.org/. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet-books/2012/11/audre-lorde-adrienne-rich-marathon-reading.

used embodied performance to resist the reification of "conversation" into cliché by poeticizing it, dramatizing its very everydayness and yet lifting that everydayness into a crucial fictive realm through the performance of polyvocal poems. As a result, the conversation served as a performative space for documenting not only how structures of power affect diasporic life at the level of the senses but also how poetry functions as a method of reorienting the senses and a mode of prophesying worlds otherwise. And by virtue of it being recorded by the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the afterlife of the Astraea recording offers us a crucial tool by which to de-reify the constant banalization of the term "conversation" into a disembodied and mythologized notion of free speech in our own time. The recording invites us to embrace Rich's call to "re-vision" the past and to "re-sound" it: "the act of [listening] back, to [hear] with fresh [ears], to enter an old [recording] from a new critical direction."[74] What would it mean to hear forward? What would it mean to enter every conversation we have with another person with this level of poetic aliveness?

[74] See note 65 above for Rich's original passage in which she defines "re-vision."

Chapter 2: Audre Lorde, Sound Theorist: Register, Silence, Vibrato, Timbre

> "And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation…"
>
> - *Sister Outsider* (1984)

> "And of course I am afraid—you can hear it in my voice, or not—because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation..."
>
> - MLA Conference Recording (1977)[75]

On December 28th, 1977, just one month after she had undergone experimental breast cancer surgery, Audre Lorde delivered her now famous speech entitled "The Transformation of Silence into Language in Action" at the Modern Language Association meeting in Chicago. As Lorde's biographer Alexis De Veaux notes, the speech contained a host of "truisms" that soon became "Lorde-isms" for the feminist movement at large (De Veaux 193). A refrain like "your silence will not protect you" has since echoed beyond the feminist movement, across the generations, and onto the streets. Those echoes were heard at least as recently as summer 2020, when "silence is violence" became an anthem for Black Lives Matter activists in the wake of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd's murder.

What is less known—and what the epigraphs make clear—is that the publication history of Lorde's speech silences some of her own words. This is not to suggest the insidiousness of the publication process: Lorde may herself have made cuts and edits.[76] Nor is this to argue for fidelity, about the primacy of the original recording over its textual copy. Lorde was known to extemporize—to change, add, or delete—words from the page on the fly, suggesting that each performance of her work was not just an interpretation but also itself another draft.[77] Instead, to notice a difference between the recording and a textual version of this essay is to create space for both the medium and the message of the speech: Audre Lorde's voice. What did it sound like? How did her speaking voice differ from when she read her poetry aloud? In what ways did the public performance of her poetry shape its meaning? And how did her voice bear the mark of her own personal experience and larger, social and aesthetic histories?

Both during and after her lifetime, critics and friends lauded Lorde for the pluralism of her written, poetic voice. In a 1992 tribute, Boston Globe writer Renee Graham highlighted the musicality of Lorde's writing: she could "weep like Billie Holiday, chuckle like Dizzy Gillespie, or bark bad like John Coltrane" (Graham 33). In a posthumous dedication, longtime friend Adrienne Rich portrayed Lorde's written voice in visual terms:

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[75] All quotations from the recordings and unpublished writings of Audre Lorde are used by permission of the Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency. All quotations from *The Collected Poems Of Audre Lorde By* Audre Lorde are used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

[76] Lorde's 1977 notes in fact most closely resemble the *Sister Outsider* version edited by Nancy Bereano (Lorde 2.0.020).

[77] When asked about why she substituted words on the fly, Lorde attributed this extemporaneity both to her poor eyesight (she grew up nearly blind for the first 5 years of her life) and to the unique phenomenology of the vocalizing mouth: "It is different to read out of your mouth than it is to read with your eyes" (Lorde *Dream* 233).

> She had throughout her life, a certain kind of—almost you would say—prophetic voice—visionary voice, some-times [sic] looking at the whole landscape and describing what she sees. And then there would be this very intimate voice of speaking to a person, an individual person—lots and lots of poetry like that. (Joseph 56)

Academic criticism has followed suit in describing the symbolic registers of Lorde's voice as "heteroglossic" (Henderson 348) and indicative of a "multi-generic" soul aesthetic (Lordi 55). But what all these descriptions of the polyphony of Lorde's voice have in common is that they tend to overlook the relationship between her poetry and her embodied speaking voice. Lorde is hardly an understudied figure, so what—as Ashon Crawley asks of scholarship on James Baldwin—"of the materiality of sound…what of the blue note, the flatted fifth?" (Crawley 16).[78]

Part of this critical silence stems from what Meta DuEwa Jones calls the "script centered focus of the conventional archival records": though many are now available online, most recordings of Lorde's poetic performances lie unexplored among Lorde's "papers" at Spelman college (Jones 4).[79] Lorde is also a famously difficult poet to categorize in almost every context, a "both/and/neither" figure, as Linda Garber puts it: she was deeply imbricated within both white and black lesbian circles, American and diasporic geographies, institutional and communal learning spaces (L. Garber 99). Because she evades normative genealogies of black performance, there's been no analysis of the breadth nor the "breath"—the "synaesthetic interaction of voice, body, and text"—of Lorde's poetry readings (Grobe 224).

But the critical silence around Lorde's vocal praxis also stems from an implicit methodological debate about how to represent black sound, one that I'd like to make explicit. Situated in one corner of the ever-growing, interdisciplinary field of sound studies, poetry performance studies has moved beyond the legatees of white modernism that cohere around theories like Frost's "oversound" and Olson's "projective verse." In doing so, some scholars have embraced digital humanistic methods. Marit MacArthur, for instance, chooses one or two recordings from over a hundred poets' oeuvres and uses software to track and compare differences in vocal production. MacArthur's stated aim is not comprehensiveness but precision, as she seeks to do away with "strings of adjectives" that are "of limited value in explaining how poets use their voices in distinct ways from one another when they read a poem" (MacArthur, Zellou, et al. 9). She instead offers a series of "prosodic measures," like "speaking rate" and "average pause length" and so on, often graphing pitch patterns and rhythmic data. This approach can lead to fascinating cross-cultural claims: in the so-called "poet voice" of academic readings, for instance, MacArthur hears the haunting of the academy "by the expressivist style of the beat and black arts movement" (MacArthur 60). But this turn toward the quantitative has itself been haunted by the field of black sound studies, which, at least since Fred Moten's *In the Break* (2003), remains skeptical of the logics of capture that anchor formalist methods. The tendency to reduce black sonic practices to graphic visualization, for Maurice O. Wallace, recalls modernist scientific experiments that aimed to make black sound "a property of the photograph" (Wallace 214). Theorizing the "fugitive voice" of black sound is indeed personal work for Anthony Reed, who says that that he undertook "intense study of music theory and

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[78] The closest extant analysis of Lorde's speaking voice is Alice Walker's 1995 piece "Audre's Voice," where she describes it as "rich and firm and true" (Walker 240).

[79] Many thanks to archivist Holly Smith at Spelman College for her generosity in helping access materials for this article—a generosity I only hope to return in calling attention to the materials she deftly curates.

performance," only to realize "that analyzing black experimental sound production with Western musicology obscures more than it reveals" (Reed 7).[80] As scholars continue to dismantle and refigure the historically ocularcentric house of the senses, there remains significant disagreement over the tools by which to do it, especially when it comes to black sound.

These two methods—what Nina Sun Eidsheim has dubbed respectively the "measurable" and the "symbolic" approaches to studies of sound—are not the same (Eidsheim 16). Beyond the politics of fugitivity, there's the difference in scale between "distant" and "close" listening. To some extent mirroring the methodological debate in literary studies, the former uses computers to help critics "correct for critical subjectivity" and "find features that [recordings] have in common in ways that our brains alone cannot" (Best and Marcus 17), while the latter seeks out the luminous "details" that function as "portals" into unheard histories and possible futures (Vazquez, *Listening in Detail* 21).[81] And though there's mutual interest in the "materiality" of sound, the two methods have different conceptions of that term's meaning. In a recent collaboration with MacArthur, for instance, Howard Rambsy II describes the need to "control for" different factors in analyzing "101 Black Women Poets": "For Jayne Cortez…we only found one recording online without musical accompaniment…[which], unfortunately, makes it nearly impossible to separately analyze the pitch and timing of a voice" (Rambsy). But "noise" and "music"—not just "pitch" and "timing"— are the very material of black sound studies, which calls attention to the archive, the bodies, and the contexts of a performance. These two methods don't necessarily need each other. But any study of Lorde's sonic archive needs both—their differences, and the consequences of those differences, laid bare. Perhaps unsurprisingly, what has remained buried underneath this implicit debate about methodology is a longitudinal history of black female poetic performance, one that doesn't render a poet like Lorde simply an object of analysis or as a useful citation, but instead as a producer of sonic knowledge in her own right.

But Lorde spoke about her own vocal praxis and how it changed over time. In the posthumously released 1995 film *A Litany for Survival*, for instance, Lorde describes the role her embodied voice played across the arc of her career and how the cancer affected it:

> I always counted on my voice being able to breathe my poetry back, to hear it in a certain way, and the hearing would connect inside of me with the feeling, and that's part of the structure and technique. And I don't have that because I hear differently now. (1:21:00)

Though she resisted the label of "theory" in feminist and literary contexts, Lorde here theorizes a feedback loop between vocalization, audition, and affect, suggesting that the bodily experience of hearing and speaking are interwoven and always changing. Following Daphne Brooks' claim that "Black women have long been, themselves, fugitive thinkers, critics, and theorists of sound" (D. Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution* 5), I argue that Lorde was herself a theorist of the "structure and technique" of her embodied voice and a prescient theorist of how sound, affect, and embodiment function in the context of poetic performance. Lorde developed a series of

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[80] Invoking Stephen Best's analysis of the "fugacity of voice" in 19th century law (Best, *The Fugitive's Properties* 19), Martha Feldman argues that "fugitive voice"—even blackness—occupies the critical space of negativity once held by modernism (M. Feldman 12).

[81] Recent formulations of "machine-aided close listening" (Mustazza) and "slow-listening" (MacArthur, Rambsy II, et al.) have attempted to bridge this gap.

techniques for vocally communicating her work over a nearly twenty-year career of performing her poetry aloud: shifting vocal registers, demanding silence from her audience, singing with vibrato, and performing with a collective "timbre." But technique is not the only story here: a longitudinal study of Lorde's performance praxis offers a window into the personal and structural forces that shaped the production and reception of her voice. In what follows, I employ a variety of methods—musical analysis, digital visualization, and prose description—to close listen through Lorde's sonic archive, careful to call attention to the incalculable sonic "excess" that any single critical methodology risks foreclosing upon (Reed 31).

1970s: The "Unadorned" and the "Incantatory" Registers

One consistent trope in Lorde's early poems was to feature a singular speaker who hears multiple voices. Often these voices stem from her ancestors or from past lovers; just as often, however, multiple voices come from inside the self. In the poem "Bloodbirth" from her second volume *Cables to Rage* (1970), the speaker hears a pained inner voice attempting to get out: "That which is inside of me screaming/ beating about for exit or entry/ names the wind, wanting winds' voice/ wanting winds' power" (Lorde, *The Collected Poems* 35). The poem is from one vantage an attempt to communicate the experience of giving birth as inseparable from the experience of writing a poem:

> and I am trying to tell this
> without art or embellishment
> with bits of me flying out in all directions
> screams memories old pieces of flesh (35)

In these lines, Lorde at once defamiliarizes birth with war-like language and yet fashions a speaker in search of an unadorned voice to describe that experience.[82] But finding the vocal style in which to communicate the act of giving birth is also difficult for this speaker because a single voice is always multiple and multigenerational: "the beginning machinery of myself/ outlining recalling/ my father's business—what I must be/ about—my own business/ minding." The poem closes by making the tensions between self and other a matter of language, where the splitting of the self is also the variable conjugations of a verb: "the true face of me/ lying exposed and together/ my children your children their children/ bent on our conjugating business." These lines emphasize a longstanding theme of Lorde's work: that the "I" of a poem is a shared and polyvocal form of subjectivity, across generations and conjugations, across "my" and "your" and "their children."

When Lorde read "Bloodbirth" on the 1972 WGBH radio program "The Poet Speaks," host Herbert Kenney noted that she is always very conscious of her own children in her poetry (Lorde, *The Poet Speaks* 50:00). But the recording, in juxtaposing the conversational framing with a poetic recitation, takes us with and beyond her autobiography and toward a sense of her vocal technique: how her embodied poetic voice compares to her everyday speaking voice. There are some similarities: the variability of pitch substitutes for punctuation, making the poetry sound at times like expressive, conversational speech. But "conversational" isn't quite right the right

[82] Though not yet speaking or writing openly about her lesbianism, Lorde's poetic descriptions of birth and voice echo across lesbian poetry anthologies in poems like Susan Griffin's "I Am A Woman Running" (Bulkin and Larkin 18) and Jan Clausen's "A Sense of Reality" (49).

term. Though it may be the overarching aesthetic of black female poetic performance during the late sixties—from the "conversational gestures" of (post-1967) Gwendolyn Brooks (Allison 102), to the conversational framing of Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni's readings (Hoffman 184)—Lorde doesn't sound like these other poets at the levels of diction and speed. Though her work is layered with "vernacular textures" (Gates and Smith 554), she almost never reads her poetry in African-American Vernacular English and recites at a much slower speaking rate than when she frames the poem.[83] In distancing herself from the Hurstonian "will to adorn", one might be tempted to hear her using "white voice" (Hurston, "Characterstics of Negro Expression" 299). Lorde did read primarily to majority white audiences throughout the 1970s, and her non-vernacular, slow style may have reflected this general addressee. But in reading in this "unadorned" style while directly—even militantly—asserting her blackness in the framing and content of her poetry, Lorde was also confounding socially constructed categories of experience by exposing how, as Nina Eidsheim writes, "a culturally derived system of race renders a given vibrational field...[as] 'in tune' with expected correlations between skin color and vocal timbre" (Eidsheim 4). Though she was deeply influenced, and even published by, figures like Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorde's unremittingly sincere use of this "unadorned" register refused the legacies of both Hughes' "non-expressive monotone" (Jones 40) and Brooks' "slurs, scoops, and 'wanh-wanhs' (18). In doing so, she opened new sonic space for what a black, female poet could sound like in the early 70s.

By the mid-70s, Lorde regularly employed another distinct register: the "incantatory." An early use of it occurs at a 1974 reading at San Francisco State University, when Lorde shared the stage with Etheridge Knight. It's the earliest audio and video recording of "Blackstudies," a long poem that concludes her then recent *New York Head Shop and Museum* (1974). As many scholars have noted, this poem grew out of Lorde's now open lesbianism and her staunch support for a Black studies department at John Jay College. The poem also attests to what Sheila Hassel Hughes calls Lorde's prophetically "double-edged" voice: how, as a public poet and professor, Lorde spoke both out of an institutional context but also against it (Hughes 141). This immanent critique comes to a head at the 1974 reading: though SFSU was the first college in the country to have a Black Studies department, Lorde looks out among the crowd before reading the poem and says, "I wish there were more black people here to hear it" (*Audre Lorde at SFSU* 8:19). The very sound of Lorde's voice also does this double work: in one moment of the poem, Lorde translates her fear of rejection by having students wait outside her office door while she sits inside contemplating her next move. As in "Bloodbirth" the elision of the inner and outer realms provokes a meditation on the question of voice:

> While I sit choosing the voice
> in which my children hear my prayers
> above the wind
> they will follow the black roads out of my hands (Lorde, *The Collected Poems* 154)

In connecting voice to skin, Lorde introduces another longstanding theory of voice in her work: because of its embodied enunciation and its embeddedness in the social world, a voice is always already racialized. Angela Bowen has described the mythologically charged poetic voice in these

[83] In a study of over 100 poetry readings, Marit MacArthur has described the average poetry reading rate as 134 WPM and Lorde's recitation as comparatively slower than many of her other African American female contemporaries (Macarthur et al 54). But the data is based off a single recording: Lorde's final reading in 1992.

lines of the poem as “persuasively incantatory,” but the recording of the SFSU performance also reveals how the term "incantatory" also indexes her developing vocal technique (Bowen 122). Lorde begins reading the first two lines of this stanza in her typical “unadorned” style, the affect matter-of-fact, the pitches and the pauses irregular. But as she moves into the third line of this stanza, a new pattern emerges: a gradual descending pitch across the entire line (12:02). Marit MacArthur calls this “monotonous incantation,” or the typical “poet voice” of the latter half of the twentieth century. She suggests that the sustained use of the register is a way that poets “avoid affective development,” and that when hearing it, “we feel that we are listening to any poem, not just this one” (MacArthur 48). But Lorde’s reading of this line is anything but monotonous, the affect definitively not flat. It’s as if Lorde, with her shift in vocal register, infuses into this line an affective intensity that sonically communicates the visual image of her students following the “black roads out” of her hands, the “erotic” energy of providing spiritual guidance for them. The voice of the lyric “I,” as in “Bloodbirth,” is one among many. Yet, unlike in “Bloodbirth,” the speaker can change her voice depending on the addressee and the effect she wishes to produce. Lorde dips into this “incantatory” register to perform the act of choosing a voice that her poem thematically evokes.

Lorde experimented with the mixing of the “unadorned” and “incantatory” registers throughout the 1970s, but with varying effects. Most often, as in the 1974 reading of “Blackstudies,” she will begin reading a poem in the “unadorned” register and then dip into the “incantatory” in moments of heightened emotion or eroticism, usually around the pronoun “I.” For instance, when reading her poem “Meet” on *A Sign I Was Not Alone,* an album that she recorded with Adrienne Rich, Joan Larkin, and Honor Moore in November of 1977, Lorde reads primarily in her “unadorned” register, only invoking the “incantatory” to emphasize overtly erotic lines like “I will be black light as you lie against me/ I will be heavy as August over your hair” (Lorde, *A Sign* 6:13). In her reading of the persona poem “Hanging Fire,” however, Lorde deviates from her normal practice and reads the entire poem in the “incantatory” register. The poem lists off the worries of a young black woman, most likely Lorde’s daughter, to whom she dedicates the poem. After repeatedly listening to its musicality, I sat down at the piano and played along with the recording. Here are the first five lines I transcribed, separated by syllable:

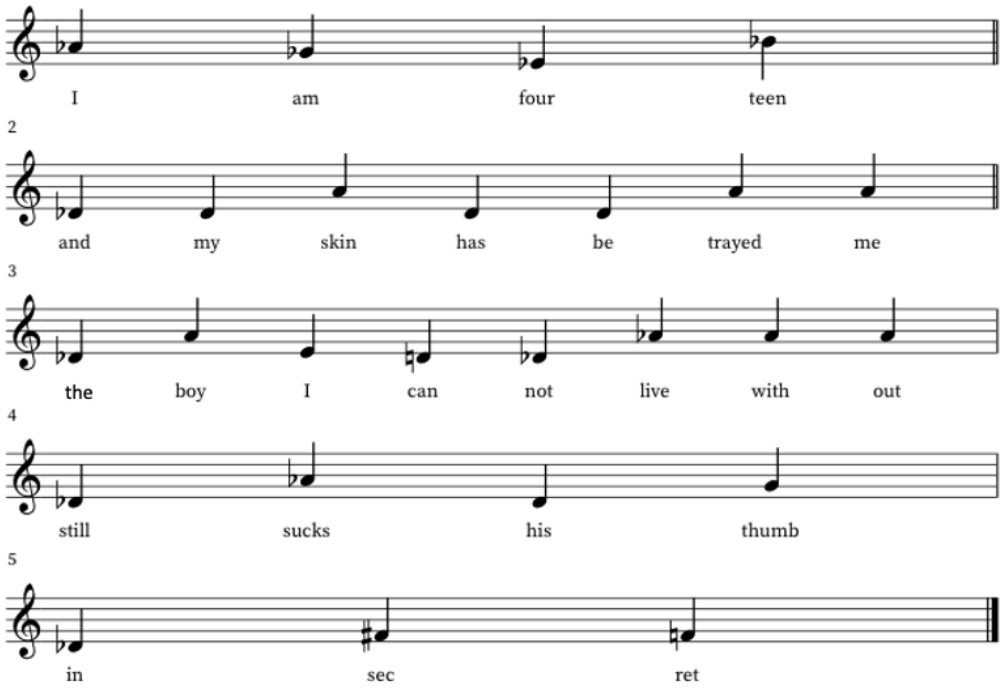

Figure 2.1. A transcription of “Hanging Fire”

The transcription risks “herding/hearding” her voice into Western musical structures and therefore obviates its intonation and rhythm (Reed 3). But as a document of my own embodied listening, it made me notice how non-melismatic her reading was: each syllable gets its own pitch, again distinguishing her from other Black Arts poets and soul singers who use multiple pitches on a single syllable. The evenly patterned rhythm of her reading (here indicated by quarter notes), the tritone jumps between the syllables, and the chromatically decreasing pitch at the end of each line (from Bb-A-Ab-G and both F# and F natural in the last line) together reflect the constant shifting of blaming, complaining, and conditional thinking of the young speaker’s self (Lorde, *A Sign* 3:35). Yet the use of a sustained, “incantatory” register here reflects not just the speaker’s tone of voice but also the performer—the mother’s—ironic detachment from that self. Thus, the “incantatory" was used for both ironic and sincere orientations toward the poetic word, a vocal technique for representing not just the multiple layers of herself, but also representing the experience of listening to another, multilayered person.

If, as Emily Lordi has suggested, generic polyphony is a way that Lorde’s poetry is thematically resonant with the soul aesthetic of Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone (Lordi, “Souls Intact: The Soul Performances of Audre Lorde, Aretha Franklin, and Nina Simone” 59), thinking of her embodied voice as similarly multiple is another way to understand her connection—and her departure—from these contemporaries. What made Lorde's performance praxis unique from her contemporaries and forebears was not the aesthetics of switching and at times sustaining different registers, but the very sound of those registers: the distinction between the slow, "unadorned" style and the chromatic rise and fall of the "incantatory" distinguish her from the white, lesbian poets she performed with often during the 70s but also from many of her black, female contemporaries. What made her a prescient theorist of sound, however, was how she merged this aesthetics of switching registers with her philosophy of difference: the idea that a self that composed of many overlapping identity markers had an acoustic analog in the multiple,

overlapping registers of the voice. But the polyvocal use of pitch was not Lorde's only tool for performing this philosophy of difference.

1980s: "Filled Air" and the Sound of Diaspora

As this article's epigraphs attest, the word "silence" in relation to Lorde's written voice often means the opposite of speaking, the covering over of self-knowledge, or the inability to tolerate difference. Yet when we consider the term in relation to Lorde's performance praxis of the 1980s, it takes on a more positive connotation. For instance, when Lorde appeared on Judy Simmons's radio show "On The Real Side" in 1979, the silence that follows the reading of her poem "From the House of Yemanja" is an intentionally crafted space:

> Judy Simmons: I'm not rushing to fill in the silent space which reverberates after all after you finish each poem. In radio there is this cardinal rule that there must be no dead air.
>
> Audre Lorde: Oh no.
>
> JS: …but the pause between what you read and the next words spoken is not dead air.
>
> AL: It's not dead, it's filled. (Lorde and Simmons 47:05)

Whether she "shifted subjectivities" (Olson, "Anger" 296) or played the "feminist kill joy" (Ahmed, "Happy Objects" 38–39), Lorde had numerous ways of rhetorically manipulating an audience's perception of what they were hearing during readings. Demanding "filled air" from her audiences—a technique that may stem from her experience on the radio but that she then develops most expressively in her live poetry readings—became a critical move for how Lorde mediated the personal and political onstage in the 1980s.

The request and the effect of "filled air" first becomes perceptible in the recording of Lorde's December 1981 reading at Hunter College for the Astraea Foundation. The reading—given jointly with Adrienne Rich—was billed as "Poets in Conversation," and it was radically unlike the other "Goings on About Town" that week in New York City ("Goings on About Town: Poetry Readings" 17). Rich and Lorde were attempting to explore their differences through public conversation and perform them through the different reading styles. For instance, after having just read "A Litany for Survival"—the poem that became an anthem for women of all identities in the feminist movement—Lorde spoke directly to the audience:

> Now, may I ask you, and I hope you agree Adrienne, to hold the applause, there is something going on here, and it really, it feels not a part of it, it feels not part of our conversation or the kind of thread that I'm trying to follow through, or that we're trying to follow through between us. (Lorde and Rich, *Astraea Tape 1* 26:06)

Controlling the applause became, in the early 80s, a way that she attempted not only to interrupt the rituals of the poetry reading but also to mediate—not unlike the radio itself—the distance between spoken word and a listening audience. It was a counterintuitive move in that Lorde was engaging the audience precisely by asking them to not clap, but it called attention to the role of

an audience member's body in what was happening affectively onstage between, and even within, these two poets. In reviewing the Astraea event, Black feminist writer and then WBAI radio host Donna Allegra described the how the poets, in a room "filled largely by women from the feminist community…didn't hold to the stand-and-read format, where the audience applauds and stays seated in place. These poets explored with us" (Allegra 13). By the end of decade, Lorde would proactively state her request to the audience, as she does in a recording from the 1988 National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Conference:

> I want to talk to you a little bit about why I say don't clap. You know, that gesture, the touching of palm upon palm. It's a way of getting it off, a way of getting it out. And what I want you to do is to hold it inside until it moves you inexorably out of this room toward the work you've got to do. (Lorde and Rich 23:34)

The affective power of poetry, for Lorde, lies in its capacity to create a space in which the feeling evoked by the poet can be transduced to the audience, and then stored, like potential energy, for future use. In that sense, the demand for her audience not to clap is also a political challenge to what Erica Edwards has called the "charismatic scenario" of African-American cultural production (Edwards, ix). The "filled air" is not a call for "passive silence" but a "radical silence" that thwarts that idea that political power lies solely within her hands, even if her presence represents a radical departure from the heteronormative masculinity that typically defines charismatic black leadership (117).

The 1980s also marks a vocal shift in Lorde's performance praxis, as she experimented with vocal vibrato. We can hear this again at the 1981 Astraea even in her reading of "Sequalae," a poem she describes—with the Du Boisian language of "double consciousness"—as exploring the psychological effects of whiteness on the construction of herself (Lorde and Rich *Astraea Tape 1* 26:44). Critics have provided numerous compelling readings of the lesbian eroticism and unconventional syntax of the poem, but the recorded performance of "Sequelae" in 1981 gives us different knowledge—both emotional and acoustic knowledge—into how her poetics are inseparable from her virtuosic use of register and vibrato. Lorde begins reading the first, prophetic lines of "Sequelae" in the "unadorned" register:

> Because a burning sword notches both of my doorposts
> because I am standing between
> my burned hands in the ashprint of two different houses
> midnight finds weave a filigree of disorder (Lorde, *The Collected Poems* 249)

Once she arrives at the word "I" in the second line, she raises her pitch dramatically, plateaus, falls, then rises again to "standing"—invoking the chromatic, "incantatory" register. Across her recorded performance history after the mid-1970s, the word "I"—especially in erotic contexts—will provoke the use of this register, but here it's only a fleeting indication, an acoustic pointing analogous to the bidirectional pointing of the *apo koinou* of the word "between."[84] The first

[84] *Apo koinou* occurs when single words or phrases are shared by two syntactic units, as when "between" functions as a preposition to describe where the speaker is "standing" (verb), but also where "midnight finds" (subject) "weave" (verb). Following the work of Amitai Ami-rav, Lexi Rudnitsky has persuasively argued that the "syntactic

stanza of "Sequelae" follows an increasingly small and surreal set of domestic images, as if a camera is moving rapidly from "doorposts" to "keyholes," and the initial use of the "unadorned" register in these first lines is again an attempt to make the nightmare of racism *sound* like what it is: an everyday experience. It's only as the imagery becomes more sonic that the register shifts: at the line break of "voiceless morning/ voiceless kitchens," the "incantatory" register becomes dominant, as if to counter the thematic voicelessness with her embodied voice. At its most heightened moment, when the synesthetic imagery becomes a full-on "carnival of memories," Lorde's voice begins to quaver. Within a few seconds, the tape quality becomes noisy and then soon cuts out before the end of the poem. Unsure of my ears, I used MacArthur's software "Drift" to see what Lorde's voice looks like:

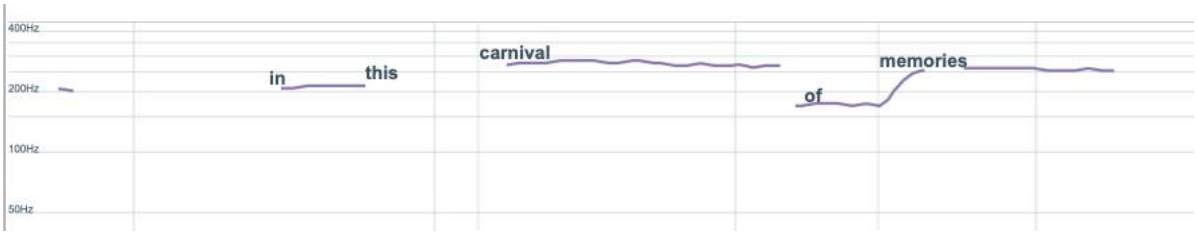

Figure 2.2. "Sequelae" in "Drift"

My hunch at a subtle vibrato was confirmed by the rapid fluctuations in pitch in the diagram. But Lorde's vibrato was much more than just pitches on a graph. This performance of "Sequelae" marks the virtuosic shifting between the "unadorned" and "incantatory" registers—a way of acoustically dramatizing the two, Du Boisian "warring selves" inside of her—but also the development of that "incantatory" register into a vibrato that will acoustically define her affiliation with queer, diasporic blackness by the end of the 1980s.

Around the turn of the decade Lorde was already writing about the relationship between sound and diaspora, especially in the opening chapters of *Zami* (1982): "Once *home* [sic] was a far way off, a place I had never been to but knew well out of my mother's mouth" (13). A later chapter entitled "How I Became a Poet" develops this very connection between what the ear hears and the heart knows:

> But out of my mother's mouth a world of comment came cascading when she felt at ease her in her element full of picaresque constructions and surreal scenes.
>
> We were never dressed too lightly but rather "in next kin to nothing." *Neck skin to nothing?* Impassable and impossible distances were measured by the distance "from Hog to Kick 'em Jenny." *Hog? Kick 'em Jenny*? Who knew until I was sane and grown a poet with a mouthful of stars, that these were two little reefs in the Grenadines, between Grenada and Carriacou (32).

One of the central themes of Lorde's "biomythography" is the desire to craft a sense of home that derives not just from the misunderstandings of her "mother's mouth" but from an embodied connection to other women. It's in Lorde's poetry readings that she attempts to perform what an erotic connection to this diasporic, embodied sense of "home" sounds like. While only a fleeting

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ambiguity here and elsewhere in the poem produces multiple semantic possibilities and thereby plays out Lorde's theory of difference" (482).

ornament in “Sequelae,” the vibrato sustains for longer durations when she reads the erotic poem "Meet," again at the Astraea event, especially in its penultimate stanza:

> Taste my milk in the ditches of Chile and Ougadougou
> in Tema's bright port while the priestess of Larteh
> protects us
> in the high meat stalls of Palmyra and Abmoey-Calavi
> now you are my child and my mother
> we have always been sisters in pain. (Lorde, *The Collected Poems* 257)

Like the references to African mythology across *The Black Unicorn*, the references to African locales in "Sequelae" frame Lorde's personal and political struggle within "larger context of an ancient past with a continuing vibrant culture" (Garber 114). But it’s not just the intertextuality that does this diasporic work: in these lines, the poem’s title is homophonic with both Semitic and African “meat stalls,” the sound of the words thematically binding Lorde's voice to this the shades of Jewish and African diaspora currently on the stage—between Rich and Lorde—with erotic and sonic connection on the page. And unlike in her 1977 reading of “Meet” on *A Sign I Was Not Alone*, the pronunciation of this homophone with vibrato acoustically enacts the vibrant, diasporic eroticism of the poem. If vibrato is "a vocal stylistic trait that is closely associated with genre and the individual singer," Lorde's use of it again both signifies her attachment and departure from a black vocal tradition (Eidsheim 170). Though used with similar "economy and intention," it doesn't sound like Billie Holiday's quiet power, and it’s also not the "silky vibrato" of Sarah Vaughn (Brooks 419). There's an aching resonance to Lorde's voice in these moments, something akin to Nina Simone's fast “deep thrumming under [a] cracked surface” (Dobie 232). And when used in the context of her erotic poetry, it not only carries on the queer tradition of Ma Rainey's “Prove it On Me Blues,” but signifies on Rainey's signature vibrato to lift that queer tradition into a diasporic context (Davis 39). While the homophonic nature of language—the distance between what she heard and what her mother intended—caused her not only confusion but diasporic dislocation as a child, Lorde uses vibrato to vocally emphasize the connection between the past and present, the local and the global.

By the end of the decade, Lorde always combined the demand for “filled air” with the performance of entire lines with a sustained vibrato, effectively singing them. This near flight into song had a preacherly tenor: Lorde was haunted by MLK’s death for years, and she even claimed at reading at Harvard in 1982 that "the ghost of Malcolm X’s voice spoke through her mouth to a new generation of Black people” (DeVeaux 302). But it's in her 1988 NWSA performance of her performance of “Call,” the last poem of *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986), that we can hear what this poetics of possession sounds like. Lorde began "Call," she says, as a meditation on the "Holy Ghost," that silenced and feminized member of the trinity Ashon Crawley describes as central to "Blackpentacostal" glossolalia (207). In reading the final stanza of "Call," however, Lorde merges the thematic of "speaking of tongues" with the use of a sustained vibrato, acoustically dramatizing how the "Holy Ghost" is overtaken by "Aido Hwedo," the androgynous, Yoruban rainbow serpent:

> We are learning by heart
> what has never been taught
> you are my given fire-tongued

Oya Seboulisa Mawu Afrekete
and now we are mourning our sisters
loss to the false hush of sorrow
two hardness hatchets and childbirth
and we are shouting
Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer
Assata Shakur and Yaa Asantewa
my mother and Winnie Mandela are singing
in my throat
the Holy Ghost linguist
one iron silence broken
Aido Hwedo is coming

Aido Hwedo is coming

Aido Hwedo is coming (Lorde and Rich, *Reading Their Work* 54:30)

The very title of the poem invokes Gwendolyn Brooks oft-cited claim "to write poems that will somehow successfuly 'call'…all black people" (G. Brooks 183). And in this final stanza, Lorde is invoking the West African tradition of "nommo"—of conjuring "through naming" (Davis 128): an attempt to bring forth supernatural beings like the rainbow serpent "Aido Hwedo" into the material world but also an attempt—through her vibrato-laden reading—to conjure a spiritual collective and lift her living "sisters in arms" into a new world. For Maurice O. Wallace, Martin Luther King's vibrato arguably channeled the fugitive voice of the enslaved (214), but Lorde's vibrato aimed to bind past and present beyond a Christian-American context, to color the poetics of possession with a definitively female and diasporic valence. By performing in a sustained incantatory vibrato and challenging what the audience should do with their bodies, Lorde created a kind of "sonic atmosphere," an acoustic space in which the voice is turned into a "social force" because of the intermingling of affect and acoustic vibration (Eisenlohr 116). In the "filled air" after her performance, she again urges the audience to go out and *use* the emotional energy that her voice may have conjured within them.

III. Late 1980s and 1990s: Communalism and Racial Timbre

Though many archival recordings document Lorde's performance praxis in interracial settings, it's important to remember that there was a "seismic shift in [Lorde's] primary audiences during the mid 1980s," as she increasingly focused on issues within the black community and among women in the international black diaspora (Olson, "Sisterhood" 111). While the use of a sustained vibrato parallels this shift, her poetry and her performance praxis continued to change in these contexts as well.

One poem that dramatizes this shift is "Need: A Chorale for Black Women Voices." I use "dramatize" deliberately: the poem was drafted after a black actress named Patricia Cowan was murdered with a hammer by a male playwright who auditioned Cowan for his play entitled "Hammer" in May 1978 in Highland Park, Michigan. The terror and irony of this story didn't escape Lorde: she stapled a small article of the murder into her journal in May of 1978 and began drafting lyrics in the voice of the perpetrator and the victim (Lorde, *Journal 16*). In 1979, she

included the voice of Bobbie Jean Graham, a victim of one of the twelve Roxbury murders. In re-writing scenes of violence from the perspective of the victims, Lorde took the "conversation poem" that was popular among lesbian poets like Joan Larkin and Pat Parker and combined it with an issue pressing within the black community: intra-racial violence against the bodies of black women.[85] Though Lorde had already experimented with literally including multiple speakers in her most political and violent poems, "Need" takes this form of polyvocality to an extreme: Lorde stages the voices of the victims as speaking from beyond the grave, where they ask questions of their murderers, ventriloquize the voice of a black male perpetrator, and eventually trade lines with an implied author "Poet" as if the work were a "chorale" in the musical sense. In lining out the voices of victimized black women into speaking roles, Lorde transfigured the dramatic context of Patricia Cowan's murder into a dramatic form, where the stanzas can be read as speaking parts for collective readers. Concurrent with performative gestures of lesbian feminist and Black Arts poetics, Lorde wrote in the preface to a 1990 reissue of "Need" that the poem is made for public use to "open dialogue between and among Black women and Black men," but also that "alterations in the text since the poem was originally published are a result of hearing the poem read aloud several times by groups of women" (Lorde, *Need* 3). How are changes in the poem between 1978 and 1990 connected to the communal contexts of its performance?

Though there are no recordings of "Need" in which audience members participate directly in the reading of the poem, there are at least two audio-visual recordings from the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Spelman archive that exhibit how Lorde attempted to foster community through the public reading of a polyvocal poem. The first is a 1989 recording entitled "Women's Poetry Reading Trinidad," where Lorde reads from an earlier version of "Need" published in *Chosen Poems* (1982). In a May 19th, 1989 entry in her journal that year, Lorde writes that this Trinidad reading contributed to her "growing awareness of what being African-Caribbean-American means in a group context" (Lorde, *Journal 35 (1989-1990)*). The 1990 republication of "Need" arguably reflects the "group context" in which she read the poem. In framing the poem in 1989, she reminds the audience that the issue of intra-racial violence is anything but solved. And the very soundscape of the performance sonically supports this claim: sirens and car horns blare, accompanying the violence that the poetic language figures.[86] One crucial difference between the edition she read in Trinidad in 1989 and the 1990 edition to come a year later, is her repeated use of wider spacing between certain words. Alexis Pauline Gumbs describes these spaces as Lorde's technique for making "the brokenness of the contemporary world visible"(Gumbs 173), but the Trinidad reading makes this brokenness audible. Thus, one way to understand her use of increased caesura in the 1990 version of "Need" is that it visually signifies all the other sound that filled the performance spaces in which she read this poem. Lorde also makes several extemporal decisions when performing the poem in Trinidad, most notably in the first stanza in she substitutes the word "blood" for "death" (Lorde 10:47). Though perhaps improvised it is not an insubstantial edit: she included it in the poem's 1990 republication a year later, and it also primes the audience's ears for how the word thematically intensifies via repetition, signifying not just senseless bloodshed but also racial kinship and menstruation. With the increased spacing in the 1990 edition, the word "blood" literally falls

[85] See Larkin's "Poem for Female Voices" in (Bulkin and Larkin 53) and Pat Parker's "Dialogue" (Parker 59) and "Movement in Black" (95).

[86] At one point, Lorde stops speaking says, "I hope [the sirens are] not going to another man or woman" (Lorde 8:30).

down the edges of the opening stanza of Part 2, offering one of the most violent images in all of Lorde's oeuvre:

> Dead Black women haunt the black maled streets
> Paying out cities' secret and familiar tithe of blood
> burn blood beat blood cut blood
> seven-year-old child rape-victim blood
> of a sodomized grandmother blood
> of the hands of my brother
> as women were meant to bleed
> but not this useless blood
> each month a memorial
> to my unspoken sisters fallen
> red drops upon asphalt. (Lorde, *Need* 9)

When Lorde reads this poem out loud in Trinidad in 1989, she uses the "incantatory" register as consistent with moments of thematic intensity, but she also reads what will become the pauses within and between the lines in the 1990 republication, shaking her whole body on every "blood." With sweat pouring down her forehead, itself signifying the labor necessary to perform in this register for an extended duration, Lorde's embodied vocalization mediates not just between the ancestors and the poet but between the voices of the dead women and the audience, pleading with them directly about this senseless violence. This aesthetic is crucially not confessional: it's not (just) about conjuring the breath pattern of a previous personal emotion (Grobe 224) but an attempt to mimic the gasping for breath of the victims (Jones 110). From this incredible 1989 performance, the term "filled air" takes on new meaning: the increased spacing in the 1990 republication signifies not just the noisy soundscape of the reading but also the pause filled plea in which she read this poem in front of a live, primarily black audience.

In another audio-visual recording dated February 12,1992 and entitled "Reading and Workshop on Black Domestic Violence," Lorde holds the newer, 1990 publication of "Need" in what looks like a greeting card store. Though Lorde would hold another workshop on domestic violence at Columbia University later that year, this February reading was a more intimate and intra-racially diverse setting: women and men across the generations participate and numerous accents sound. "This is not a performance," she tells them at the beginning of the reading, encouraging the audience to hear "Need" as a prompt for addressing violence within their own communities (Lorde, *Reading and Workshop* 8:20). But of course, this reading *is* a performance, just one in which she wishes the political power of her words to derive not just from her own polyvocal voice but from letting other people speak. The increased polyvocality of the 1990 edition—especially in the fourth section, where the "Poet" and "All" the victims trade lines—reflects the workshop context: following her reading, she cedes the floor to the audience, demonstrating her skill as a public facilitator. Lorde was integrating into her poetry readings the theatrical practice of the post-show dialogue that Charlotte Canning has described as part and parcel of feminist theatrical culture, encouraging—especially men—to take what they heard at the reading and "use" it (Canning 176). The poem "Need," then, served as a kind of rehearsal tool, demonstrating ways that Black women and men *could* speak to each other, one that then plays out in the post-reading conversation and hopefully in their lives. Lorde may have also ceded airtime because of the changing nature of her own voice. One of the main themes of

"Need," especially when the voice of Bobby Jean Graham speaks, is to testify how the marks of violence are preserved on the body as memory: "But I still died/ of a lacerated liver/ and a man's heel/ imprinted upon my chest." Though Graham's body bears the mark of the male violence as traumatic memory, Lorde's own voice was becoming an audible marker of her illness.

Nowhere is the connection between Lorde's changing embodied voice and communalism more apparent than in her final reading. On September 20, 1992, just weeks before her death that November, Lorde read several recent poems from what would become *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance* in the living room of Dagmar Schultz and Ika Hügel-Marshall in Schöneberg, Berlin. The first poem she reads is "Echoes," a poem she began drafting in August 1982 but bears the mark of the rich synesthesia and the variable spacing of her later work. Like "Bloodbirth," the poem attempts to formally enact the experience it describes:

> There is a timbre of voice
> that comes from not being heard
> and knowing you are not being
> heard noticed only
> by others not heard
> for the same reason.

The phrase "not being heard" echoes down the edge of the poem like a canyon wall, the line break sounding back "not being" in the following line and "not heard" in the fifth. Later in the poem, the experience of hearing an echo is again formalized into the oscillation of images across the line break. But what makes "Echoes" unique is how it serves as another treatise on vocality. When Lorde reads this poem aloud in 1992, just weeks before her death, she describes how this poem is part of the larger thematic of the collection—that our observations of things can be so dramatically affected by where we are standing (Lorde et al. 251). The opening stanza offers "timbre" as vocal analogue to this kind of parallax. In suggesting that timbre is not so much volitional as it is socially constituted, Lorde was far ahead of her time in positing a notion of "racial timbre:" how timbre is not simply "everything except pitch and loudness" (Eidsheim 6) but an embodied practice shaped by histories of listening and vocalization (32). Unlike in "Blackstudies," where a racialized speaker must "choose the voice" in which they speak, here shared oppression of "not being heard" is what constitutes a collective timbre. With this theory of timbre anchored at its top, the prophetic voice of the rest of this poem—which speaks in the first person and characteristically between the erotic and the murderous—echoes with a collective tenor.

In watching Lorde perform "Echoes" at her last poetry reading in September of 1992 surrounded by friends, just weeks before her death from cancer, there is a bleak determinism to this understanding of the voice as socially constituted, because the society that does the constituting was deeply racist and profited from illness.[87] When she reads the line "I am listening/ in that fine space/ between desire and always/ the grave stillness/ before choice," her voice sustains on the word "I"—resonant and full of all the multiplicity we are used to associating with her bestowal of the first-person speaker. But when it reaches for the word

[87] As De Veaux notes, Lorde experienced racism and dangerous working conditions first-hand while working at Keystone Electronics in 1952. In order "to increase her weekly bonuses, she began cheating on her count by hiding handfuls of crystal [of carbon tetrachloride] in her socks, chewing them up and spitting them into the toilet" (De Veaux 40-41).

"grave," goes up in pitch and lets out a treble, ghostly and haunting. Audre Lorde's voice, stricken from cancer and yet pushing against those restrictions, registers not only the communal struggle of the Black women she speaks on behalf of but also as someone suffering from disease. But Lorde's poetry—and its public performance—confronted that bleakness, that oppressive determinism, with the power of female collectivity, of acknowledging shared suffering, and of mobilizing the multiple voices of the self. At the end of the reading Lorde apologizes to her protégé May Ayim for the performance:

> Audre Lorde: I'm so really, really, pleased to be doing this. I am sorry my voice is not better today, but I hope you could hear it, and I hope you could hear the love with which I share these.
>
> May Ayim: It was wonderful, Audre.
> AL: I am sorry it didn't come across better.
> MA: It was fine. We know your voice and where it didn't carry the way you wanted, I hear. (Lorde, *Dream* 263)

As this exchange makes clear—especially with May Ayim, a poet who would tragically take her own life in a few years to come—Lorde's poetic exploration of voice was a felt experience for her audience. That May Ayim's hearing somehow filled in for where Lorde's voice did not fully register was a powerful statement of care, but it was also a way of enacting the vocal parallax that Lorde's poem metaphorically explores: the idea that the timbre of voice is socially constituted and shared is literally played out in the dialogue between Lorde and Ayim. Poems like "Echoes" and the republication of "Need" were not just textual experiments for exploring individual biography or collective history but were—in their live performance—interpersonal tactics for fostering community.

IV. A New Genealogy

> "What you hear in my voice is fury, not suffering. Anger, not moral authority. There is a difference."
> - *Sister Outsider* (1984)

Having written incisively about "The Uses of Anger," the uselessness of guilt, and the politics of "self-care," Lorde's essays and written poetry are often cited in studies of affect. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* for instance, Sarah Ahmed describes a powerful scene of racial formation from *Zami* in which the young narrator, Audre, encounters the hate of a white woman on a train. The narrator assumes it was a cockroach that made the white woman recoil, but then realized it was not a roach but herself. For Ahmed, this scene typifies how emotion doesn't signify internal states but rather refigures social space: in this case, creating a "border that is transformed into an object [the roach] as an intensification of feeling," emphasizing the "apartness of the white body" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 54) and the history of those subjected to racial hatred (59). But the affective power of Lorde's writing doesn't just figure spatially but also temporally. Lorde went beyond the "naming of various practices and experiences as racism" and into "imagining a different kind of world" (175).

In the preceding pages, I have tried to give an account of how Lorde's vocal praxis was its "own form of affective technology" (Brooks 17). The voice was both metaphor and material for Lorde: it was both a poetic subject for exploration but also an embodied means of conveying meaning upon her written poetry. Lorde's audiences changed over time and so did her voice, and she developed a series of increasingly communal techniques for performing her work aloud: the use of shifting registers to dramatize her multiple selves; the request for audience silence to challenge the "charismatic scenario"; a haunting vibrato to express her increasing affiliation with the pan-African diaspora; and a desire to engage various black communities in the public performance of her work. But to listen through her archive is also to remember that Lorde was not just a technician but also a prescient theorist of sound who understood hearing and speaking as socially constructed, embodied experiences. This is why, I think, she had to insist repeatedly on what "anger" sounded like in her voice. A media history of Lorde's recorded performances suggests not that any phenomenological experience of emotion has any specific sound, but to understand more clearly a history of how certain affects "stick" to certain sounds, or how the meaning of sound and affect gets made over and over again (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 4). The "transformation of silence into language and action" was a theory of self-revelation for Lorde, but it was also an "act"—an embodied vocal praxis that sought to continually refigure social space and imagine worlds otherwise.

In his seminal *Soundworks* (2020), Anthony Reed offers a genealogy of black sound—through Douglass, Du Bois, and Hurston—that participated in these worldmaking poetics:

> Ideas about black sound tend to be proxies for thinking about black community, enabling the idea of a coherent, singular slave culture [Douglass]; a notion of centrality to the nation built on the exclusion and enslavement of blackness [Du Bois]; and a set of practices indexed to alternative social structures whose relationship to nation is uncertain [Hurston] (Reed 39).

In extending this genealogy to avant-garde figures like Amiri Baraka and Albert Ayler, Reed also extends these theories of sound beyond the limits of authenticity, nationhood, and technique and into a "media concept" that accounts for the interplay of "expression, text, experience, and embodiment" (201). One might be tempted to immediately subsume Lorde's performance practice into this genealogy, but it's important to remember that Lorde's position among the history of the black performance—and especially the Black Arts movement—was always fraught because she questioned its default heterosexuality and worshipping of male mastery: you'd never find a Coltrane poem in her oeuvre. Situating Lorde's sonic "texts" within and against this genealogy of black sound moves us into the media histories and performance cultures in late 20th century feminisms, ones that uniquely challenged patriarchal and heteronormative communal structures through poetry readings, sound recordings, radio broadcasts, and public workshops. Unlike her predecessor Angelina Weld Grimké or even her distant mentor Langston Hughes, both of whom never revealed their sexuality, Lorde wanted everyone to hear the many shades of her voice: "We [Hughes, Grimké, and herself] were lost to each other. Well, I don't want that to happen. If there's anyone [to hear] the sound of my voice I want them to know who I am" (Abod 23:55-25:40). What Lorde offers this tradition of black soundwork is a poetics of queer embodiment: how she made questions of gender, sexuality, race, inseparable from the question of sound.

PART TWO ANNA DEAVERE SMITH AND STUDS TERKEL

Tape Head: The Ears of *Fires in the Mirror*

Anna Deavere Smith writes plays about riots. But do her plays cause them? That was a pressing question on April 30, 1992, when the Public Theater decided to the delay the first preview of *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights and Other Identities* (Tillet). The play offers testimony from riots that rocked the city the previous summer, and the night of the debut was the penultimate day of the Los Angeles riots that had erupted after the acquittal of four officers who nearly murdered Rodney King. But when Smith took the stage the following evening, it wasn't the next *Ubu Roi*: no windows were shattered, no stores were looted, and more to the point, no audience members were up in arms.

The play became an instant sensation: playwright Damon Wright described it as a "seance with history" and activist Florence Kennedy just couldn't get over how there were no tickets left (Wright; *The Flo Kennedy Show Episode 141*).[88] *Fires* was such a hit that in the third week of the show's run, the *Times* gave Smith a center page spread in the Op-Ed section entitled "Identities: Four Voices." The piece was undoubtedly promotional, but it also attempted to translate visually what Smith attempted vocally in her theatrical practice, what she describes in *Fires'* headnote as the creation of "one-woman shows based on...interviews" about "controversial events." The Op-Ed layers the words of three black cultural figures (George C. Wolfe, Ntozake Shange, and Angela Davis) and one white one (Robert Sherman) on top of a face (Figure 3.1). The splitting of the face vertically into half black and half white reflects the binaristic racial logic of the 1990s—one that Smith explicitly challenged by including Korean and Latinx voices into her subsequent and most famous play, *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*. The chunked words of each speaker bridge the racial (and facial) divide, blocking out the eyes and the mouth, suggesting that such speech has the potential to change what is available to our senses and thus, as Dorinne Kondo has argued, change what makes "common sense" (Kondo 131).

Fires is one of the most important artworks concerning "black-Jewish relations" in the nineties, but the rhetoric of listening and the complex mediascape underlying it are what make it a reflection in particular of the relationship between Anna Deavere Smith and Studs Terkel. Even the form of the Op-Ed implies a connection: the first time the *Times* ran a section entitled "Four Voices," Studs Terkel was one of them (Terkel 224). We might say that the piece's logic of juxtaposition itself borrows from Terkel; the many books he published over the course of his long career, from the 1950s to his death in 2008, are—like Smith's plays—assemblages of (ostensibly verbatim, but as I'll show, multiply mediated) interviews. Indeed, Smith's description of her own listening technique as "being in it, and out of it, at the same time" harken back to Terkel's Brechtian formulations about his own methods of interviewing with the tape recorder (*Letters* 22). Though critics and interviewers have at times cursorily acknowledged the relationship between Smith and Terkel, few have recognized that the two, while at least a generation apart in age, were contemporaries in the nineties, that Smith has described Terkel as her "spiritual mentor," and that more than once, they sat down together to talk about the

[88] Like Smith's most famous play, *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992, Fires* went on to become canonical: taught in secondary schools, imitated in graduate student master's theses, and restaged as recently as 2019 at the Signature Theater. It was clear by the end of 1992 that Smith was producing, at the very least, incredibly timely work. Though it was the thirteenth verbatim play she had composed, it was her first mainstream breakthrough, and many praised what they saw as the heralding of a new form of acting technique altogether: she's "a great shaman," declared performance studies scholar Richard Schechner (Schechner 64).

THE NEW YORK TIMES **OP-ED** SUNDAY, MAY 24, 1992

Defining Identity: Four Voices

The following are excerpts from "Fires In the Mirror," which I am performing through June 28 at the Joseph Papp Public Theater, and is part of a series for the stage called "On the Road: A Search for American Character." I interview people with varied points of view, often about controversial events, and create one-woman shows based on those interviews.

The focus of "Fires In the Mirror" is the rioting in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn last August. I portray people in both the Lubavitcher and black communities.

But the show also addresses a larger issue, which is one of our greatest current challenges — particularly urgent after the riots in South-Central Los Angeles: expanding our vocabularies with regard to race identity and negotiating our differences.

— ANNA DEAVERE SMITH

George C. Wolfe

101 Dalmatians

I went to a totally white high school. I went to a private black grade school.

I think the most superficial aspects of me are assimilated. But the core. The core. I mean I grew up on a one-block street that was black. My grandmother lived on that street. My cousins lived around the corner. I went to this black, black, private black grade school where I was extraordinary. Everybody there was extraordinary. You were told you were extraordinary.

It was very clear that I could not go to see "101 Dalmatians" at the Capital Theater because it was segregated. And at the same time I was treated like I was the most extraordinary creature that had been born.

So I'm on my street, at my house, at my school, and I was very spoiled too. So I was treated like I was this special, special creature. And then I would go beyond a certain point. I was treated like I was insignificant.

Nobody was hosing me down or calling me nigger. It was just that I was insignificant. So it was very clear of where my extraordinariness lived. You know what I mean, that I was extraordinary as long as I was black.

George C. Wolfe is writer and director of "Jelly's Last Jam," currently at the Virginia Theater.

Robert Sherman

Lousy Language

There sort of is a soup of bias, prejudice, racism and discrimination. I think bias really does relate to feelings that can go in a direction, positive or negative, although we usually use bias to mean a negative. What it means usually is negative attitudes that can lead to negative behaviors: biased acts, biased incidents or biased crimes.

Racism is hatred based on race. Discrimination refers to acts against somebody. So the words actually tangle up. I think in part because vocabulary follows general awareness.

I think you know the Eskimos have 70 words for snow. We probably have 70 different kinds of bias, prejudice, racism and discrimination, but it's not in our mind-set to be clear about it. So I think that we have sort of a lousy language on the subject, and that is a reflection of our unwillingness to deal with it honestly and to sort it out. I think we have a very, very bad language.

Robert Sherman is director of the community relations institute of the New York City Commission on Human Rights.

Ntozake Shange

The Desert

Identity is, in a way, a psychic sense of place. It's a way of knowing I'm not a rock or that tree. I'm this other living creature over here.

And it's a way of knowing that no matter where I put myself, I am not necessarily what's around me. I become separate from that even though I'm a part of that. And it's being able to make those differentiations clearly that lets us have an identity.

And what's inside our identity is everything that's ever happened to us. Everything that's ever happened to us, as well as our responses to it.

Sometimes if we are in trance states or if we're alone someplace in the desert, we begin to feel as if we are a part of the desert, which we are right at that minute. But we are not the desert, we are part of the desert.

And when we go home we take with us that part of the desert that the desert gave us. But we're still not the desert. It's an important differentiation to make because you don't know what you're giving if you don't know what you have. And you don't know what you're taking if you don't know what's yours and what's somebody else's.

Ntozake Shange is a playwright and poet.

Angela Davis

Rope

Race, of course, for many years of our history as African-Americans in this country was synonymous with the community. We upheld the race. We were race women and race men. Billie Holiday referred to herself as a race woman, for example.

If in 1970, when I was in jail, someone would have told me, in 1991, a black man who said his hero, one of his heroes, was Malcolm X, would be elected to the Supreme Court, I would have celebrated. And I don't think it would have been possible at that time to convince me that I would have been absolutely opposed, opposed to a black candidate.

I have no problems with aligning myself politically against Clarence Thomas, in a real passionate way. But at the same time I can talk about the racism that led to those hearings, and at the same time, Mike Tyson. I don't think it would have been possible to convince me that things would have so absolutely shifted that someone would evoke the specter of lynching on television and that the notion of lynching would be used to violate our history!

I would therefore think that race has become an increasingly obsolete way of constructing community because it is based on unchangeable, immutable biological facts in a very pseudo-scientific way. And what I'm interested in is communities that aren't static in that way. And this is what I'm working on, in terms of my political practice right now, is that we have to find ways of coming together in a different way.

I'm not suggesting that we do not anchor ourselves in our communities. But I think, to use a metaphor, the rope attached to that anchor should be large enough to allow us to move into other communities.

I think it's a really exciting moment.

Angela Davis is professor of the history of consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Figure 3.1. "OP-ED" from Sunday May 24, 1992. Courtesy of The New York Times.

relationship between their work.[89] On one of those occasions, Smith says to Terkel directly: "It's like I'm doing what you do, except I act out the people" (*Anna Deavere Smith in Conversation with Studs Terkel* 10:08). But what exactly does Terkel "do"? And what does it mean to say that Smith "acts out the people"?

In what follows, I discuss the biographical, literary, dramatic, and rhetorical connections between their work. In chapter three, I argue that Smith not only "acts out the people" but embodies Terkel's conversational praxis more broadly: his comparativist and digressive penchant, his theory of revelatory speech, his practice of vulnerable listening, and his ambivalent embrace of literal and voiced "recording." Though Terkel's anthological literary forms tend to disguise the dramaturgy and recording technology constitutive of the ethnographic encounter, Smith's performances, I claim, foreground these forms of social and technological mediation, making them more perceptible through embodied, monologue performance. Terkel's relational critique of conversation thus became, in Smith's work, a relational critique of cultural, and specifically national, identity. Smith is often credited with popularizing, if not inventing, what today is widely known as "verbatim theater." What is less known is that her reframing of Terkel's conversational praxes for the stage resulted in another theatrical innovation in the late 1990s known today as "headphone theater." In chapter four, I closely observe a recording of *House Arrest* that Smith staged at the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue (IACD) in 1998, when actors wore tape recorders in a live setting. *House Arrest* concerns the role of "the media" in the American presidency from Thomas Jefferson to William Jefferson Clinton, the final version of which begins and ends with Terkel's character. The IACD version of *House Arrest*, I suggest, theatricalized the paradoxes at the heart of Terkel's conversational praxis as well as those at the heart of American society at the time.

[89] *Fires in the* Mirror debuted the same month as the publication as Terkel's book *Race: How Blacks and Whites Feel about the American Obsession*, which was similarly celebrated for its timeliness but also criticized for its focus on the black/white binary. In reviewing the 2019 restaging of *Fires* at the Public Theater, Ben Brantley reminds us that at the time of Smith's first appearance, "critics and theatergoers scrambled for a label to define the type of show few of them had ever seen before: was this a slice of oral history, an animated version of the kinds of books that the writer Studs Terkel regularly assembled on Americans at work and in crisis?" (Brantley). In interviewing Smith in 1993, Philip Zimbardo asked the audience rhetorically by way of introduction, "What do you get if you mix equal parts Margaret Mead, Studs Terkel, and Lily Tomlin?" (Smith and Zimbardo 6:00). In connecting Haruki Murakami and Smith through an aesthetic modality of oral history, Naomi Matsuoka suggests, casually but correctly, that they were both influenced by Terkel (Matsuoka 305).

Chapter 3: "Being In and Out of It": Smith and Terkel's Conversational Praxes

In October of 2000, Anna Deavere Smith performed Studs Terkel in front of Studs Terkel to celebrate the publication of her memoir *Talk to Me*: *Travels in Media and Politics* (Figure 3.2.).[90] These meta-performances are exemplary in both senses. They provide *an example of* Smith's acting technique, how she attempts to inhabit a character by repeating their recorded speech verbatim. And they *stand out* from Smith's normal productions: Smith had been performing Terkel for at least four years by that point, but rarely can we witness a person featured in one of Smith's plays witnessing themselves being performed.

Her first performance that night is entitled "A Defining Moment in American History" (*Anna Deavere Smith in Conversation with Studs Terkel* 12:00). Smith had asked Terkel if he could pinpoint such a moment. He said "no":

> Defining moment in American history
> I don't think there's one
> you can't say Hiroshima.
> That's a big moment.
> I don't think there's any one.
> I can't pick out any one.
> It's a combination of many.
> I can't think of any one moment I'd say is the defining moment.
> But the gradual slippage—(Smith, *Talk to Me* 42)

Smith as Terkel then characteristically digresses with a hilarious yet touching bit about getting on a train at the Atlanta airport. He hears a voice on the intercom chiding a couple for getting on late, one that sounds like a human voice imitating a robot:

> See in the old days you had robots!
> the robots imitated humans.
> Now you have humans, imitating robots!
> So you got this voice
> on this train
> "Concourse One
> Dallas-
> Fort Worth Concourse Two
> Omaha
> Lincoln" (43)

[90] The first edition of her memoir is subtitled "Listening Between the Lines." There appears to be no substantive changes to the editions outside of the subtitle change.

Figure 3.2. Anna Deavere Smith and Studs Terkel at the Chicago Public Library, October 2000.

He wonders, "Where is the human voice?" and his plea is soon answered by the giggle of a baby sitting next to him on the train. The story and staging ends when Smith as Terkel brings it back around, suggesting that this story isn't so much a digression as it is a dramatization of an ethical and political point:

> There ain't no defining moment
> for me.
> All moments are defining and add up.
> There's an accretion of movements that leads to where we are now
> when trivia becomes news.
> When more and more, less and less, awareness
> of pain of the other. (45)

Terkel apparently repeated this story about the Atlanta train often.[91] Yet when Smith performs the story as it was told to her in a past conversation *in the context of a current conversation*—when she imitates Terkel imitating a human imitating a robot—she highlights a central paradox in both their oeuvres: though they both claim to strive for the "vox humana," their work is shot through with various forms of mediation, both social and technological. In this moment of performance but also across her work more generally, Smith "acts out" Terkel's conversational praxis, a process that involves embodying and making more perceptible some of his most characteristic conversational traits.

[91] It highlights his oft repeated nostalgia, especially in *Working*, for a time before machines took over. StoryCorps interviewed Terkel in 2005 and he told the same story, which became a viral cartoon in 2010.

Terkel's Conversational Praxis

One of those traits is his comparative impulse, and Smith is not the first to notice it. Nora Ephron notes in her 1977 review of his first memoir *Talking to Myself* that it's in this text—as opposed to his previous anthologies—that we finally get access to *his* voice: "Terkel's voice, and better than that, Terkel's head, are far too restless to sit still for long on any point. His mind darts, he is reminded of something else, he charges off after it" (Ephron). By "voice" Ephron means his literary style. But by listening to his recorded interviews, we can hear how the content of his speech is not simply a random digression toward personal memory, as Ephron suggests, but an intentional turn to toward historical memory: the constant desire to bring two disparate, often incommensurable historical subjects, into conversation.[92]

For instance, in a 1977 interview with Toni Morrison on the occasion of the publication of *Song of Solomon*, Morrison speaks about her character Macon Dead, who shares this name with both his father and his son. Terkel, prepared as ever, plays a recording he made of a conversation with a formerly enslaved man who, after escaping slavery, gave himself the name Emmanuel Dunn and all his family that name as well: "this man is like Macon and Milkman Dead's ancestor… creating himself" after having only ever been called 'boy'" (Morrison and Terkel 27:30). Morrison, unsurprised but impressed, describes the recording as "incredible." In other interviews, however, Terkel's constant desire to compare is not as well received. In a 1967 interview with the novelist Richard Elman about his novel *The Fifth Day of the Elul*, the conversation is punctuated by Terkel's attempts to compare the story of the Holocaust in the novel to other forms of oppression, as when he links the poverty of black American ghettos to the ghettos of Europe, or compares the victims of the Holocaust to those of Hiroshima. In each case, Elman is careful to remind Terkel that we need to stay with the specific context, at one point bursting into frustration: "it's a sterile excitation to make comparison...face up to the horror!" Terkel still insists, at the end, that "there are parallels, even though they're different." Terkel's comparative impulse can seem like a blinkered ethos: like many Marxist ethnographers before him, he was a great generalist, searching for that common thread that makes human suffering universal.[93] Yet Terkel's penchant for comparison—and the way that it manifests through what Benjamin Harshav calls "associative digression"—is also a distinctly Jewish speech characteristic of Yiddish and post-Yiddish "translogical discourse" (Harshav 100). Given that Elman's response traffics in the narrative of traumatic sublimity and the incomparability of Jewish victimhood, we can see a crucial cross-diasporic and intra-diasporic critical thrust to Terkel's demand to compare, one that is neither "sterile" nor completely flattening. If every

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[92] I hesitate to call this desire "midrashic" outright. In his critique of Leslie Fielder's mythopoetic criticism, Robert Alter wittily writes that Fielder "clearly shares with the medieval Midrash an indifference to historical perspectives which allows him to speak of the varied literary productions of far-flung times and places as one eternal system, and he is thoroughly midrashic in his readiness to establish through the merest hint of association a 'real' connection between things" (Alter, "Jewish Dreams and Jewish Nightmares" 21). Terkel often exhibited the latter impulse, but not an "indifference to historical perspectives." We might also position Terkel within what Jonathan Boyarin describes a Midrashic Jewish ethnography: "This midrashic, dialogic play of interpretations within the bounds of an implicit ethical framework is a model for a kind of 'Jewish ethnography' which would not only be the ethnography of Jews. This approach I am proposing is Jewish not only in content but in form" (Boyarin 25). The implicit ethical framework is what I call, in chapter four, "listening against capture."

[93] Although he wasn't explicitly interested in documenting disappearing Jewish lives, Terkel's ethnographic method was arguably an extension of the secular Jewish impulse of *kinos* inspired by a wave of ethnographic research among Jewish communities before and after WWII.

theory of conversation is also a theory of voice, we can think of Terkel's conversational praxis as a manner of speaking characterized by an ethically complex penchant for comparison.

Any theory of conversation, for Terkel, is also a theory of listening. In an interview in 1970 with radio host Elsa Knight Thompson, Terkel talks about "bringing his tools" to interviews, by which he means familiarizing himself with the interviewee's material beforehand.[94] This preparation, however, is never out of tune with the "improvisational" aspects of the interview:

> I think [interviewing] is listening to what the person says and sometimes, oh sure, I took notes in the book and I think I remember the book, but often the interviewee says something and it puts me on another track. So it's conversation rather than interviewing. It turns out to be that, really. (Thompson and Terkel 1:30)

For Terkel, there is a normative dramaturgy to the interview, one where the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee answers in turn. But "conversation" offers a different dramaturgy, one where the two parties can extemporize. Conversation is a speech genre made possible by a kind of listening defined by its "vulnerability"—a characteristic Terkel credits to the singing of Billie Holiday: "because [Holiday] is vulnerable, she affects me and makes me aware of my mortality and vulnerability. So too in talking to someone" (4:32). Terkel's conversational practice is thus largely an attempt to reproduce this listening experience in his interviewees:

> Terkel: Unfortunately, too often, because the questions are laid out, the person who laid out the questions isn't really listening to what the person is saying.
>
> Elsa Knight Thompson: No, they're waiting to answer, ask the next question.
>
> Studs Terkel: Of course... something quite revelatory might happen. Something I call the revelatory phrase. It might be a pause... But even that, even that pause, I might say, "Now wait a minute. You just paused. Now you said something. Now why did you pause?" and so [the interviewee] says, "I didn't want to." "What was it that made you pause?" All of a sudden, this silence is revelatory too. You and I are talking right now. The microphone is, is merely a medium, it's a means. But we can talk across, as we are talking across the mic, without the microphone. We're having a cup of coffee, say, or a drink and we're talking. This is the only possible way to [interview]. How can a person reveal himself? I'm talking about revealing his thoughts, not invading privacy but revealing his thoughts that he wants to or sometimes doesn't want to reveal, but at times I find a person says to me, "You know, I didn't think that I felt that way. 'Til I just said it." (3:00)

Terkel calls attention to the conditions of their interaction ("You and I are talking right now"), and in doing so, he describes and performs a meta-listening: hearing one's own self speak.[95] As

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[94] He was well known for knowing an artist or cultural figure's body of work before an interview, and you can even hear him paging through his copy of *Song of Solomon* in the 1977 interview with Toni Morrison.

[95] It is this capacity to listen to oneself that, for French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau, separates human memory against recording technology. "The principal difference between the brain and the phonograph," Guyau writes, is "that the metal disk of Edison's still rather primitive machine remains deaf to itself" (Kittler 32). Memory, for

Charles Briggs writes, even by the late 1980s, ethnographers, oral historians, and sociologists had little to no working methodology about the interview process. They did not see it as a context-dependent and co-constitutive cultural production, and often edited the words "yes" and "uh-huh" out of transcripts (Briggs 14). But these moments of conversational speech are key for Terkel. And through this meta-lingual attention emerges a "negative aesthetic"—negative in the sense that a voice's relationship to meaning is defined not by what is spoken but by what is not ("this silence is revelatory"). This attentive listening produces, ideally, a new kind of self-awareness in the interviewee ("I didn't think I felt that way. 'Til I just said it.").[96] The conversational interview is thus theatrical for Terkel in the Aristotelian sense in that it evokes the cathartic expression of feeling and the revelation of an inner self.[97] Revelation is made possible by a comparative mode of speaking and vulnerable listening that cohabit in a conversation.

If Terkel consistently valorizes the role of speaking and listening for its Aristotelian possibilities, his relationship to mediation is more ambivalent, and more Brechtian. For all his

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Guyau, is not an impression but an *awareness* of impressions and the *ability* to forge connections between impressions in the mind. Friedrich Kittler builds on Guyau by arguing that the gramophone is a metaphor for the psychoanalyst, who serves as the memorial function of the analytic setting (88). In that scenario, it is the analyst's ability to "simply listen" without listening to himself that allows for the first rule psychoanalysis—free-association—to continue.

[96] This most notably happens in his 1962 interview with James Baldwin. Terkel adumbrates the story Baldwin had just told him about an African dancer who lived in Paris for years and found great difficulty in returning to the home country:

> Terkel: And loneliness again...this is obviously a key aspect of life that's on your mind, Jim...The theme of loneliness--there's loneliness in the Parisian dancer, the Senegalese Parisian, returning to her home country. Did you find this kind of loneliness when you were in Paris and you came back to America? Here was a wholly different problem.
>
> Baldwin: yes, in a way I did. I never thought about it that way before. In a way I certainly did. I came back. I came I came back in a certain way you never come back, and I had to build a whole new life. (Baldwin and Terkel 1962 21:03)

Again, you can hear how casual the conversations are—the coughing, often the lighting of cigarettes and cigars, the use of the nickname—but it's also this ability for him to bring out something in the interviewee that he/she didn't know about themselves that he prizes as his most treasured listening technique.

[97] We might just as easily describe this as therapeutic in the Freudian tradition. Building off of Freud's idea of listening as "floating attention" (*Freischwebende Aufmerksamkeit*). Theodor Reik, a pupil of Freud's, developed a concept of listening with a "third ear" (Reik) which meant "focusing less on what is being said than on the movement and modulations of the voice as it speaks" (Lagaay 55). Psychiatrist Robert Langs wrote in *The Listening Process* (1978) that "both the patient and the therapist are engaged in the listening process," and that "if you learn how to listen, everything else will follow" (Langs 10–11). Developing on the work of psychologist Peter Wilburg, sound scholar Charles Hirschkind also emphasizes that the analysand is involved in the listening process. He describes Freud's notion of listening as having therapeutic capacities, a kind of "maieutic listening" that "establishes the conditions of intersubjectivity…enabling the reorganization of psychic elements within the analysand" (Hirschkind 22). Psychiatrist alman Akhtar has created a four-fold typology of listening in psychoanalysis—objective, subjective, empathetic, and intersubjective—modes that always overlap and correspond to the positionality of the analyst, but complement other more non-verbal notions such as listening to silence, actions, or even refusing to listen (Akhtar). What was "simply listening" for Freud has indeed become a rather technical mode for knowing and bettering the self. But as Hannah Zeavin notes in her study of teletherapy, what was formally thought of as a dyadic relationship between analyst and analysand has always been a triadic relationship between "patient, clinician, and mediating frame." By frame she means not just listening practices or technological media per se, but also the very setting of the therapeutic situation: "The frame or setting is an open enough concept that it is now being called a 'device' by some therapists, in keeping with the move toward technologically mediated therapy" (Zeavin 7).

rhetorical dismissal of the microphone ("the microphone is, is merely a medium, it's a means"), he maintained more than just a working relationship with recording technology:

> The Uher or Sony, spool, or cassette, is constantly with me now. Where do I leave off and the machine takes over? Would it be different had I used a pencil or a ballpoint pen? Would this in any way diminish my sense of being outside? I think not... I am, despite what appears to be a passion for life, attached to a mechanical device... It is that feeling of something beyond detachment. Being there and not there, simultaneously. (Terkel, *Talking to Myself* 8)

The tape recorder was, for Terkel, admittedly both a thing and the relation between things—the object that stood in the way of human connection also made the very form of his literary work possible. In theory, this meant that the Terkel's fraught relationship to the tape recorder was an allegory for a modern factory worker's resistance to the alienation of his labor. In practice, this meant that the tape recorder served as a dramaturgical prop in Terkel's interviews, one that helped him craft an ethos of inexpertise, what Gustavus Stadler has elsewhere described as a "strategic naiveté" (Stadler 236). Terkel would often fumble over the microphone or claim he didn't know how to use it; by eliciting help from interviewees, he implied that the interviewee was the expert, he merely the passive listener.[98] In many instances, the recorder functions as a less passive prop: in addition to bringing other recorded voices into the interview, Terkel often played back a tape recording of an interviewee so they could hear *themselves* and help along that "revelatory" moment. In other contexts, the tape recorder became the symbol of his activism: in his interviews with white supremacists in Montgomery during the Selma march of 1965, Terkel gets kicked out of a bar precisely because he brought the tape recorder inside and plugged it into the wall, wielding it like an elicit form of contraband (*Montgomery*).

In his ambivalent embrace of the tape recorder, Terkel was both reflecting and challenging the paradoxes of tape technology that permeated his contemporary moment. As N. Katherine Hales writes, "By the late 1950s, magnetic tape had acquired the qualities that…gave it the force of paradox: it was a mode of voice inscription at once permanent and mutable, repeating past moments exactly yet also permitting present interventions that radically altered its form and meaning" (Hayles 210). Though marked by the paradox of presence/absence that haunted all recording technology before it, the tape recorder also uniquely enabled consumers to also be (re)producers: to record, erase, and re-record sound. Because it was often wielded by white scholars and teachers, the ostensible democratization of recording technology was

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[98] Just after describing the influence of Billie Holiday on his listening practice, Terkel describes his tape recorder technique: "When I use a tape recorder, I am not very good mechanically. This is truth. As soon as I goof up, not deliberately but I do. Now that person, let us say not a celebrated person; let us say not an academically trained person; say not a writer, not a clergyman, not a teacher or not an actor, actress, it doesn't matter. But let's say someone of the anonymous many, so called, an ordinary quote unquote person who's afraid of the microphone. But he sees me goof up. He feels needed. To feel needed is terribly important, you know. I find the tape recorder on the steps of a housing project far more revelatory, you know, than I do, say, in a studio because that person, the old Black woman, or the old Appalachian guy in Chicago or that little street kid, who is a statistic, who's one of them, suddenly becomes a person. And it's very liberating. For me, too, as well as for him, you see." (*Terkel and Thompson* 10:54). This revelation of an anonymous "person" as "a person" echoes, albeit inversely, a lot of the rhetoric that paralleled the Clinton scandal. As Jane Gallop described in her discussion with Lauren Berlant: "It's clearly what seduced [Lewinsky]. That's the desire…the desire to have this very powerful man revealed as human, as needy; to feel needed by this very powerful person makes you feel powerful" (Berlant and Gallop 251).

underwritten with connotations of "perfectibility, discernment, and editorial control of the reproductive process" (Stoever-Ackerman 786). Artists like William Burroughs and Andy Warhol challenged these so-called democratic values with literary models of posthuman and queer subjectivity that embraced the tape-recorder's paradoxes. [99]

But Terkel's ambivalent embrace of the tape recorder was a direct challenge to the legacy of salvage ethnography, even the role of the Jewish secular ethnographer. As Samuel Shrayer noted when accompanying the famed S. Ansky to the Pale of Settlement at the turn of the twentieth century, "Our phonograph stood in the corner and recorded the Hasidic melodies... Sometimes An-sky would get into the groove and he would sing along like one of them" (Deutsch 35).[100] Like An-sky, Terkel's ethnographic method was informed by performance practice and the Talmudic dictum to "go out and see what the people do," but Terkel's ethical framework was not about "getting into the groove": magnetic tape afforded a critical stance of "being there and not there, simultaneously."[101] Immersion was not the opposite of detachment, for Terkel: it was "something beyond detachment." So while a comparative mode of speaking and vulnerable listening combined to produce revelation in the context of the interview, a Brechtian sensibility prevailed in his relationship toward the tape recorder.

Terkel's ambivalence toward the tape recorder also stems from the ways in which sound, performance, and diasporic Jewish life intertwine in an early 20c American context more generally. In *Talking to Myself*, Terkel describes being sent to a summer camp at Mount Pleasant, just east of Chicago, during the summer of 1924. The camp was owned by two (ostensibly Jewish) anarchists, as there were books by Emma Goldman and Kropotkin lying around (221). While at the camp, he bonded with the couple over his books. But he also found time for himself, listening to the broadcast of the Democratic National Convention, studying the "convoluted designs on the radio cabinet and listen[ing] to the voices." He feels particularly drawn to the "gravel bass baritone of Thomas J. Walsh," Chairman of the Democratic Committee, for he feels the voice to be a "balm to me. On hearing him, I forget about my asthma." The scene then characteristically digresses to a year earlier, in August 23, at the same camp, when all members at the campe learn that President Warren Harding has just died. A group of patriots led by a Judge call for a minute of silence as they salute the flag, but the

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[99] For work on Warhol and queer subjectivity, see Stadler, Gustavus. "'My Wife': The Tape Recorder And Warhol's Queer Ways Of Listening." *Criticism* 56, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 425–56. For Burroughs, see Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics / N. Katherine Hayles.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

[100] As Nathaniel Deutsch writes, "One of the most frequently repeated— and fraught—scenes in the history of Jewish ethnography is that of the secular Jewish ethnographer who literally dons the hat—or the yarmulke or the modest dress, etc.—of the more orthodox Jews among whom he or she is conducting fieldwork" (Deutsch 38). Terkel was never "thrice born," in the sense that he never returned to the Jewish community in a sincere ethnographic way to understand it as Jewish (though there may be work out there that I need to find that suggests he did!). Though he never donned the cap or pretended to speak like his interviews entirely, I do believe he built upon the foundation of Jewish ethnography from An-sky forward that understood the ethnographic encounter as mediated by technology and performance. Though Franz Boas and Erving Goffman avoided studying their own families or cultural groups so as to maintain an objective distance from the observed scenes," Terkel was less interested in producing theories of culture than about exploring individuals (Bronner 324). It wasn't, I think, a conscious avoidance of Jewish subjects for the sake of objectivity.

[101] Tape technology, for Terkel, was as much a medium of authenticity as it was of duplicity: beyond anecdotes of forgotten tapes and accidental erasures, his memoir is full of moments when he must keep a watchful eye over the revolving spool because there "have been times with the tape recorder has double-crossed me" (Terkel, *Talking to Myself* 5).

anarchists refuse to join, lying on the grass as if nothing is happening. Terkel feels compelled to stand but says: “I feel funny…if I had been invited by the couple…would I have lain back in the grass...in a moment of communion between these two? Would the Judge have called me a Goddamn Bolshevik too? And me, only eleven years old and possibly afflicted with asthma.” (224). What interests me in these two scenes is how the experience of listening to a mellifluous voice through the ornate radio cabinet allows him to forget about himself, while the scene of Jewish, anarchist refusal to abide by a patriotic silence forces him to remember it. Here is where we see An-sky’s “between two worlds,” not explicitly at the ethnographic encounter, but in the experience of diasporic Jewish American life in relation two sound technologies: the radio and the moment of silence.

Figure 3.3. Studs Terkel in PBS "American Playhouse" adaptation of *Working: The Musical*, 1982. (*Working, The Musical* 1:25)

If Terkel maintained an ambivalent relationship to the tape-recorder, his own embodied voice reflected this ambivalence. In bringing his “menacing gravel” and uncontrollable “cackle” to international cultural analysis, Terkel was known for his vocal inimitability (Terkel, *Talking to Myself* 263). Terkel would often read columns of his journalist friend Mike Royko on the air, and Royko’s son later resented the readings: "Dad had a very specific voice in his mind, especially somebody he's quoting with a specific kind of Chicago accent. And *Studs always sounded like Studs* when he was reading this stuff, and it would drive Dad nuts" (italics mine) (Wieder 109). Sounding like himself was, in his telling, a practical skill for employment. In a chapter from his first memoir in which he discusses his career as a radio drama actor, Terkel described his success as directly connected to the fact that dominant listening culture equated all non-normative accents: “There were times when dialects were called or. Foreign. Especially bad guys. I had an all-purpose dialect, known as Continental. It was guaranteed to baffle, indeed destroy, Henry Higgins. It, more of than not, was acceptable because it sounded so un-American” (Terkel, *Talking to Myself* 153). Over the next two pages, he describes director after director asking him to put on a foreigner’s accent: Levantine, Mediterranean, Polynesian—all of these voices also cast as “smugglers, assassins, children of nature” (155). For each of them, he does the same bit: “Get in dere, you guys.” The anecdote describes a version what Jennifer Stoever calls the disciplining “listening ear” of American culture: how all vocal difference is heard as a single ethnic other. The non-normativity of Terkel’s voice made him easily cast-able as that other.

But sounding like himself was also part of an overarching ethical framework that resisted essentialist and power-free notions of voice. In a 1963 comic interview with Mel Brooks, for instance, the comedian impersonates a Belarusian Jewish immigrant who’s “mouth got formed at the age of three and a half” and despite living his nearly his entire life in America is condemned

to "sound Jewish" (Brooks and Terkel 1:16). Terkel says, "I find this very unusual," betraying his amusement but also the fact that he himself defies this essentialism. Though he was born into a Yiddish speaking household on the Lower East Side, Terkel's voice did not index Jewishness in any Ashkenormative sense. Moreover, in a 1971 interview with Ralph Gleason, the two discuss the ethical and musical failure of white imitators of black singers like Tom Jones and Janis Joplin, as well the duplicity of newscasters like Chet Huntley and Walter Kronkite, who use the "beautiful feeling and resonance" of their voices to disguise their inability to confront the political powers that be (Terkel and Gleason 30:00; 40:08). In other words, sounding like himself also had an ethical thrust atypical of white, Jewish American culture: it was a way for Terkel to resist white, culture norms toward either projecting an accent-less Mid-Atlantic broadcaster's voice or imitating black vocalists.

Yet the reception of Terkel's voice was not always so straightforward. Terkel was an actor and casting director before he was a radio host and his wife Ida described how "he often takes on the actual rhythm, the speech cadence of the person he's talking with. Or sometimes he might unconsciously imitate a slight accent the other person doesn't realize they have...I think it makes the other person feel closer and that he's easier to talk to" (Wieder 89).[102] Having listened to dozens of interviews, I don't really hear Terkel imitating the accent of others' voices. What I do hear, however, is no less tape recorder-like: he literally repeats back the content and rhythm of what others have just said. Consider this moment from Terkel's famous interview with James Baldwin in 1961 after the publication of *Nobody Knows My Name:*

> Baldwin: I think that all the standards by which the Western world has lived so long are in the process of breakdown and revision and a kind of, a kind of passion and a kind of beauty and a kind of joy which was in the world before, has been buried so long, has got to come back.
>
> Studs Terkel: The passion and beauty and joy once in the world has been buried.
>
> Baldwin: Yes.
>
> Terkel: The impersonality of our times.
>
> Baldwin: Yes, yes, yes.... (Terkel and Baldwin 40:22)

Terkel's responses are at times a repetition of what is said, and at others, a distillation. With Baldwin, it's both: he pulls out the objects of the prepositions that Baldwin strings together with anaphora, concatenating them with conjunctions instead, then offers what we hear now as an Arendtian phrase (after 1963, he often toyed with the prepositional construction of "the banality of evil") that attempts to rephrase Baldwin's lament. This form of voiced "recording" was a manner of being "there and not there" through embodied vocalization: though it was an ethical imperative to sound like himself at the level of timbre, he often did approximate the rhythm of others, repeating back for them what they had just said like an acoustic mirror. In sum, then, Terkel's conversational praxes don't so much accrete as present a palette of contrasting

[102] In his first memoir, he also speaks of this tendency: "I'm constantly play-acting. Here, with you, I begin to talk like you. When I'm with a Chicago hoodlum, I talk like him. I'm a chameleon" (6). But as I describe above, it is precisely that lack of malleability of his voice that affords him work as a radio actor.

techniques: a distinctly Jewish, comparativist manner of speaking that resisted calls for traumatic sublimity; a kind of listening defined by its vulnerability anchored in both the aesthetics of Billie Holiday and Aristotle; and a distinctly Brechtian, ambivalent embrace of literal and voiced "recording" that both thwarts and makes possible human connection.

All of these forms of sonic mediation and interpersonal relation, however, are notedly elided in the literary presentation of Terkel's interviews. After the Studs Terkel Archive released the original *Working* tapes in the mid 2010s, the significance of this translation from sound to text became readily apparent to Terkel enthusiasts. Here's an excerpt from the "Telephone Operator," whom Terkel memorialized under the pseudonym Heather Lamb:

Published 1974 Version	Recorded Version
One man said, "I'm lonesome, will you talk to me?" I said, "Gee I'm sorry, I just can't." But you *can't*. I'm a communications person but I can't communicate.(Terkel, *Working* 36)	HL: You know some people will say "Operator I'm lonesome will you talk to me?" ST: people do say that, really? HL: They say I'm lonesome will you talk to me ST: What happened? HL: You couldn't... I say gee "I'm sorry but I can't" ST: You're doing a great deal of talking, but the talk has nothing to do with actual human communication. HL: Right, that's very true. It's not really a lonely profession or anything, but it's one where you, where's that not a whole lot of communication, even if that's your job.

The original recording reveals how present Terkel's voice is not only in the interviews but also in the so-called transcriptions. What Terkel and his editors put into a monological prose form is a dialogue made up of two voices, one of which is speaking in at least three contexts: Lamb speaks as the caller, as the operator, and as herself. Gone is the technologically mediated dramaturgy of the embodied conversation.

Though Terkel's career is concomitant with the rise of oral history as a discipline, the way in which the textual translation adumbrates those voices, even elides them, may account for why he is not seen as an oral historian per se.[103] Some critics have even argued that Terkel's editorial practices shroud the voices of others and warp them with his own Marxist bent.[104]

[103] As Martin Meeker writes, "the first US historian to conduct interviews and preside over an extensive interview process was Hubert Howe Bancroft...a bookstore owner and expert amateur, conducted in the 1870s...The first major academic historian was Allen Nevins, who founded the Columbia University Oral History Research Office in 1948. But it was not until the 1960s and 80s...that oral history interviewing was widely pursued by academic historians" (Meeker 118–19). In an email, Meeker told me: "I do think many used to see Terkel as a "father" of oral history and esteemed practitioner, albeit not an academic. This was more true in the social history/labor history era of the 1970s and 1980s; I think now he's probably just seen as an old white guy much considered, alas...He was kind of like the white Alex Haley. Very much aspiring to as well as inspired by the social history turn of the 1960s and 1970s."

[104] See, for example, Edward Rothstein's "He Gave Voice to Many, Among Them Himself," written just a few days after Terkel death on October 31, 2008. In this—how should we call it, critical obituary?—Rothstein attempts to paint Terkel as closeted radical: "The difficulty is for readers who presume they are being presented history without perspective...part of Mr. Terkel's wide appeal was that he seemed to be a scrappy liberal...but look more closely and it appears less clear where his liberalism slips into radicalism" (Rothstein).

But the translation from recorded interview to anthological text was also crucial to Terkel's conversational praxis: a way of staging a conversation between disparate voices in the mind of his readers. In *Race,* for instance, the first voice we get is that of Mamie Mobley, the mother of Emmet Till, who offers a heart-rending description about her life as a Chicago teacher after her son's murder. There is a tension in Mobley's testimony: on the one hand, she sees racism as structural ("You hear people say 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps,' but what if you don'' even have shoes?" (Terkel, *Race* 31–34)); on the other hand, she tells the story of her individual struggle against racism: caring for students, offering home visits, holding parent-teacher conferences. The next interview in the book is a reprint of the one from *Division Street,* one a with the black Chicagoan Lucy Jefferson, whose son—here named not Melvin but Julian—was doing terribly in school. Jefferson realized he had three study halls in a row, in an auditorium "with a false ceiling" and no lights. Like Mobley, Jefferson feels this educational failing is both structural (literally, the building is crumbling) but also individual ("there's such a thing as a feeling tone. One is friendly and one is hostile."). Because Jefferson's testimony follows Mobley's, a sense of shared space is created in the mind of the reader. We might imagine Jefferson taking her kid to a school where Mobley is teaching and him having a different educational experience. But the "conversational form" also sharpens the reality that Jefferson's son is *not* in Mobley's school. In essence, the tensions between individual and structural racism that exist within the content of the testimonies becomes formalized through the very juxtaposition of disparate individuals' testimonies: while new possibilities can be imagined across the individual voices, the inequality of the structure also becomes clearer. As we'll see, this ability for a conversation literary form to offer a structural analysis of society is one of the several ways in which Anna Deavere Smith's dramatic reframing of Terkel's praxis is most pressingly felt.

In this section, I have tried to complicate Smith's statement to Terkel—"I do what you do"—by unpacking what it is that Terkel does: that what appears to be a neutral capturing of the "vox humana" is in fact a complex ethical, technological, and performance practice of speaking and listening. "Listening against capture"—a phrase I develop more fully in the next chapter—is one name for this practice: a performance of conversational encounter that refuses to afford the authority of objectivity to the ethnographer or to a technological apparatus. In the following section, I complicate Smith's claim that her revision of Terkel's praxis is simply "but I act out the people." One might hypothesize that what distinguishes Terkel from Smith was precisely the question of the inimitability of voice: Studs sounded like Studs, whereas Smith has this uncanny ability to sound like everyone else. But as Brandi Wilkins Catenese has powerfully written, Smith's work was transgressive in the 1990's not because it produced an ideology of colorblindness or one of racial essentialism, but because it exposed the invisible workings of racial privilege and racial trauma that structure lived experience of Americans (Catanese 21,61). In the following section, I suggest one crucial way that Smith exposed those workings was revising Terkel's conversational praxis in way that foregrounded the social and technological mediation—indeed, the very sound—of the conversational encounter.

Smith's Conversational Praxis

Like her "spiritual mentor" Studs Terkel, any theory of conversation for Anna Deavere Smith is also a theory of voice. In her memoir *Talk to Me,* for instance, Smith writes against the phoniness of politicians who hire acting coaches to train their voices to lie publicly. Against that,

she claims to be in search of "authentic voice," what she vaguely defines as the connection between "the heart of a voice" and the "purpose that the voice is meant to serve" (Smith, *Talk to Me* 41). In the memoir, Smith cites poststructuralist thinkers Hayden White and Judith Butler, both of whom she says looked at her in pity when she described to them her search for "authentic voice." Yet despite her philosophical vagueness, her techniques of performing "authentic voice" are not wholly essentialist. Smith's impressions of Terkel illustrate this point. Here is a transcription of the first time she performs Terkel, in conversation with playwright Tony Kushner in 1996. The asterisks indicate breaths:

> *I asked, uh, Studs Terkel to tell me about a defining moment in American history. And this is the answer that I got.*
>
> Defining moment in American history
> *I don't think there's one you can't say Hiroshima. That's a big moment.
> *I don't think there's any one. I can't pick out any o—.
> *It's a combination of m—.
> *I can't think of any o—
> *I'd say is the defin—
> But the gradual slippage— (Kushner and Smith 23:36)

After the first two sentences, she slips into a version of Terkel's voice: this not-so-gradual slippage calls attention to what is happening vocally in all of Smith's solo performances, what we might call the paradox of timbre. That is, the quality of her voice is always oscillating and sometimes intermingling with the quality of the character she is inhabiting, thus producing the inside/outside Brechtian effect that Studs describes as constitutive of his tape-recording practices.[105] While Studs' textual anthologies tend to disguise the dialogic nature of the ethnographic encounter, Smith's performances always make explicit that relationality at the level of sound. One can hear what ostensibly has been recorded but also the voice of the interviewer—Smith—who partakes in the mutual production of "authentic" speech. Thus, Smith doesn't just "act out" the people in Terkel's books: she embodies his comparative penchant for speaking through the paradox of timbre.

Smith's performance practice also complicates any theory of "authentic voice" when we consider the translational relationship between her texts and her performances, even between performances.[106] W.B. Worthen describes this tension most clearly:

> a crucial problem in Smith's work, one familiar to anyone who has ever followed the video of *Fires* or *Twilight* with the text in hand: the language and rhythms of

[105] In the essay "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect," Brecht writes that "the actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying… once the idea of total transformation is abandoned, the actor speaks his part, not as if he were improvising it himself, but like a quotation" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 137–38).

[106] Like Terkel, Smith usually selects a specific moment to focus her work on and then edits her own voice out of the printed versions of her interviews; often, however, her textual transcriptions of recordings often reveal a greater "fidelity" to the spoken word than Terkel's texts. The source tapes of her interviews are not publicly available, except for some public speeches: I'm thinking here of her performance of Yankel Rosenbaum's brother, Norma Rosenbaum. Yes, she cuts and patches together, but not in a way that elides her voice with his (*Richard Fein - Yankel Rosenbaum - New Yorkers United Against Racism and Anti-Semitism Rally 4/5/92* 32:20).

> the page provide an inaccurate, even deceptive, record of Smith's actual performance. (Worthen 140)

For Worthen, this distinction between text and performance is not a problem but a "sounding," "a vivid and experimental effort to renew the [interviewee's] language but to renew it as something else, as poetry" (140). Smith's history of performing Terkel calls attention to the very sonic material that Worthen's term "sounding" abstracts. Smith's performance of Terkel in May 2000 at the Public Theater differs substantially in *sound* from the 1996 performance above:

> Anna Deavere Smith (Voice Over): Do you think there is a moment that you'd say is a defining moment in American history?
>
> Smith as Terkel: Defining moment
> *in American history
> *I don't think there's one
> *I can't pick out
> *any one
> *you can't say Hiroshima. That's a big moment
> *I can't think of any one
> *moment I would say, is a defining moment But
> *the gradual slippage—(*House Arrest, Act I, 3:30*)

In the 1996 version, her own speaking voice inflects her timbre as much as Terkel's, even as she breaks off the end of each line to index the digressiveness of his literary voice. But here, in the 2000 version, she fills out the ends of the lines and hams up the voice a bit, adding a gruffness, that gargling "Studs-ness" that made him that non-normative, "Jewish voice" on the radio long before Ira Glass. Which one is *closer* to the recording? Because the entirety of the original tapes is not publicly available, it's a moot question. But in any case, the question misses the point of Smith's revision of Terkel's praxis. Smith uses Brechtian language in the introduction to *Fires*: "Character lives in the obvious gap between the real person and my *attempt* to seem like them. I try to close the gap between us, but I applaud the gap between us. I am willing to display my own unlikeness" (xxxviii). The dramatization is never an *actual* rendering but an "attempt," a "longing," or, as Anne Cheng has described it, a "melancholic identification."[107] The history of

[107] In a closed post-show conversation between the actors at the IACD staging of *House Arrest*, Smith describes her work as a kind of longing: "I think one way to deal with...what you're saying about how you feel about these problems in America right now, I think it's you try to create for the audience a longing...you try to make a picture, whether it's the right picture or not, even if it's Sally Hemings and Jefferson, as complicated as it is, to try to create for the audience a state of wanting something else. Hopefully, that would cause someone to do something about it." (Tape 3, 35). Anne Cheng has powerfully written about how Smith's theater enacts Freudian notions of ego formation, suggesting that Smith is not "identifying" with her characters but acting out the process of identification: "Identification is crucially *not* the same as identity, although it is what secures for the latter its mythology of integrity. Identification organizes and instantiates identity" (Cheng 177). In eliding what happens in Freudian's model of the psyche with a conception of the national psyche, Cheng suggests that the US constantly plays outs incorporation and rejection of the racialized other: "racial melancholia is both the technology and the nightmare of the American Dream." In pursuing the term "conversation," I'm attempting, I think, to avoid mapping a Freudian model onto Smith's method, even though the way she speaks about "simply listening" is very connected to Freudian notions of listening technique. Instead, I stay with "conversation" as the operative model, because it accounts for her

Smith's performances of Terkel reminds us that Terkel's voice—like Smith's—is itself not a singular stable physiological characteristic: that it changes over time and its perception depends on various contexts of situated listening.

Smith's revision of Terkel's conversational praxis is thus also a dramatic, embodied riff on his listening practices. Smith often speaks about how earlier in her career she came into interviews with three very specific questions—questions that "taught her how to listen"—but then shifted her method to being deliberately unprepared, to allow for the kind of vulnerability that Terkel describes.[108] We can hear Smith's deep roots in Terkel's notion of the "revelatory phrase" at the Chicago Library conversation, when she imitates Terkel imitating a human/robot voice on the train:

> And so
> I
> imitate a train call
> holding my hand
> over my—
> "George Orwell,
> your time has come."
> Everyone laughs when I say that
> but not on that train!
> Silence! (Smith, *Talk to Me* 44)

Unlike the people on the train, Terkel and the crowd are in stitches. But it's also a revelatory moment *for him*, he says: "I have just seen myself in the mirror as to why I sound sort of goofball like…She noticed, I maintain, she did not mimic me…She caught something of which I was not aware. This is one of the keys, I think, to the giftedness of Anna Deavere Smith, and I hope to me, of me to some extent... And that is, and that is making that person aware" (17:22). Remember that Terkel often produced the "revelatory" moment by playing back the tape recorder for his interviewees; here, Smith has acted as the tape recorder, reflecting to him a reality he claims he was unaware of. This is what I think the distinction between "imitation" and "noticing" is for Terkel: Smith is not so much "imitating" his character as much as she is re-enacting the Terkelian process of revelation on stage, making it *more perceptible* through embodiment than he could in his own work.

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relationship to Terkel and for her own way of speaking about her conversational praxis. Yet, I think the economy of ego formation—what Cheng via Freud calls melancholia—are very much at work in my argument about *House Arrest*.

[108] The three questions were: Can you describe the circumstances of your birth? Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? And have you ever come close to death? The best description of these three is in her 1995 interview with Studs Terkel, when she reads them through Carmel Cato's speech from *Fires* (Smith and Terkel 7:27-11:12). In *Talk to Me*, she adds a fourth question, saying she asked people about their first day of school. "I don't ask those questions anymore," she writes, "but they taught me how to listen" (Smith, *Talk to Me* 55). In an interview with Philip Zimbardo in 1993, she does offer a theory of listening for the interview: "If I have any tools that I take with me is that I speak very little because I believe that a person has a natural literature inside an organic literature, and that if I can get out of the way of that that will come forward. So I'm if I have a strategy If at all, it's that I'm waiting" (Smith and Zimbardo 50:03).

Like Terkel, Smith's conversational praxis never separates listening from speaking. Revelation is made possible, she says, not just through imitation but by listening for broken speech:

> Terkel: Now, let's get to your technique.
> Smith: So I listen. I say it over and over again. I spend a lot of time memorizing it usually. And I tried to get every and every "um" and I think that process of trying to get every "uh" or every "um" I'm more trying to get you know, fill in the blanks.... All these pauses are like musical pauses, those silences are the place where the person's not telling me, but I can feel it like feeling a rhythm, you know, or when you said "and then I [was] holding my hand over my, holding my hand over my," *you didn't even say mouth*... So what is "Studs" is that tendency to go "holding my hand over my... George Orwell," 'cause you don't need to finish the sentence. Right? And that's who people are…those unfinished sentences. That's where the spirit lives and I'm trying to get to that spirit.(*Anna Deavere Smith in Conversation with Studs Terkel* 39:10)

Smith's rhetoric of "unfinished sentences"—what she elsewhere calls "broken sentences," "trochaic beats," "theater," "poetry," and even "music"—develops the Terkelian "revelatory phrase."[109] It repeats his logic that certain linguistic hiccups reveal individual character, yet it turns the technique of listening into a theory of acting. Listening thus becomes, for Smith, much more than a cochlear centric activity. Dorinne Kondo, having worked with Smith as a dramaturg and witnessed her rehearsals first-hand, writes about how Smith makes this embodied, listening technique perceptible:

> Smith sits in the center of the room, Walkman in hand, headphones in place.... Our job was mainly to respond to Smith's *performance* (sic) as she listened to her audiotapes and subsequently performed onstage (Kondo 145).

But Smith gives the attention she gave to audiotapes to other people as well:

> While serving as a dramaturg for a workshop of *House Arrest*, I watched Smith in action as she "listened for someone's poem." As she interviewed Omar Wasow in front of the actors, she sat in front of him, body leaning forward, gaze fixed on his. It was full-body listening (124).[110]

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[109] Smith repeats this notion numerous times, most often in her memoir *Talk to Me*; see also (Jackson, *Professing Performance* 208).

[110] Smith's listening technique as interview technique is on full display in the IACD files. Smith presented a project for the institute entitled "Gross Injustices/Common Infractions," in which she elicited stories from the core audience, and then actors would work closely with the recorded testimony of those individuals. The project was performed on July 30, 1999 at the American Repertory Theater. Smith performed testimony from a Vietnam war veteran named Bill Barbeaux. He served as a trainer for dogs who sniffed out dead bodies in the war fields, and part of his testimony appears in *Talk to Me*. In the IACD files at NYU, there is a recording of Smith debriefing her performance with him in a Starbucks in Harvard Square, and within three minutes, it moves from casual interaction to full-on tears. The ability for Smith to conjure personal memory in the most impersonal of public settings in striking, and it's the only visual evidence we lay people have to confirm what Kondo is describing about her interview technique and "full-body" listening.

According to Kondo, Smith's listening technique is a presence and a posture: the recording technology is on the body but also *is* the body. Smith's innovation, then, is not only to extend a Terkelian listening technique beyond the interview and into acting theory but also to think of as, in the words of Ellison's subterranean narrator, "not only with [an] ear but with [a] whole body" (Ellison 8).[111] But this was not an inward, private practice: in Zora Neale Hurston's words, Smith exhibited a kind of embodied, "hungry listening" that helped others tell their stories.

That is, while Smith's listening praxis has deep roots in the Terkelian "revelatory phrase," she also combines his interview techniques with African-American cultural practices. In her memoir, she says that listening to preachers at church or to stories on the porch of her neighbor Miss Johnson taught her how to listen in general. Her grandmother's funeral made a particular impression: "I can't remember the words of the preacher now. But he made us cry... and it had to do with the repetition of his words" (Smith and Blaszczyk 27:22). Elsewhere, she says that the highest compliment she ever got was from the director Woodie King:

> Woodie said of me at a conference once that when I come on a stage, basically what I am saying is, "You know everybody. I just want you to hear this. Somebody said this to me, and I can't believe they said it, and I want you to hear it, too." It's like the old days of bringing your friends over to hear records. The artist, Lorna Simpson, talks about how, as a girl, all of her friends would come over in the summertime to listen to Richard Pryor records. I think a community can be created around that listening.
>
> So I guess this is a very long sloppy way of saying that the theatre is a place for the listening audience (A. N. Weber 130).

Terkel claims his theory of vulnerable listening stemmed from watching Billie Holiday perform; Smith's theories are anchored in the lived experiences of black performance that were central to her upbringing and sense of intracultural community.[112] Smith's project also signifies on black literary and performance tradition, specifically the literary and ethnographic work of Hurston.[113] As Henry Louis Gates first elucidated, Hurston's innovation in literature to find a "middle voice" between third person and first-person narrative techniques, thus introducing "free indirect

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[111] Charles Hirschkind has described this theory of full bodied listening as "the body in its entirety [constituting] both the medium of expression and the organ of audition" (Hirschkind 27). In an interview with Philip Zimbardo in 1993, Smith does offer a theory of listening as waiting: "If I have any tools that I take with me is that I speak very little because I believe that a person has a natural literature inside an organic literature, and that if I can get out of the way of that that will come forward. So if I have a strategy at all, it's that I'm waiting."

[112] Smith has also expressed an interest in African philosophical systems: "I was reading a book about African philosophical systems and saw a picture of a wheel that had all these little spokes with arrows pointing towards the center. I knew then that I wanted to try to find a way of thinking or a structure that was more like that" (Martin, "Chapter 6" 191). From my own experience with jazz education, I know that her engagement with immersive listening techniques with recording devices signifies on jazz transcription practices.

[113] Daphne Brooks considers Hurston the "signifying ethnographic critic of black sound." In listening to her recordings from the 1930s that Hurston made when the WPA charged her with "holding a mirror up to American," Brooks explains that Hurston can be heard eliciting music from indigenous performers, singing tunes herself, and explaining black sonic practices to white anthropologists (D. Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution* 145). Thus, Brooks argues that Hurston was both ethnographer and performer, both record and recorder, of black southern life. Smith is obviously both recorder and record, but she really speaks more in the language of the WPA: she uses the phrase "holding a mirror up to America" repeatedly. As I'll argue in the section on *House Arrest*, however, Smith is interested in complicating the relationship between recorder and record, never letting the recording device have the last word.

discourse" into the Afro-American canon (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 206). Smith signifies on this tradition of double-voicedness through the paradox of timbre, literalizing the "middle voice" as a "dramatic way of expressing a divided self" (223). But Smith's work also engages with Hurston's communalism, specifically the latter's work as ethnographer. As Daphne Brooks explains, Hurston the ethnographer who learned folk songs while doing fieldwork was always "the woman who was both of and in the crowd, as well as whimsically positioned outside of it" (Brooks 155). [114] As much as it indebted to the Terkelian influence—itself perhaps informed by Hurston's commitment to record black life—Smith's conversational praxis signifies on this ethnographic tradition that understood field recording as constitutive of intra-communal, black performance.

Smith's listening technique was also deeply intertwined with the 1980s feminist turn against Stanislavskian acting methods that emphasized psychological realism. In conversation with Philip Zimbardo in 1993, she notes that much of her thinking about acting at the time came from trying to teach students:

> I felt that, at that time in my life 1979, as we approach the '80s, very disturbed, that I was training people to be self-absorbed and self-interested, and began to think of anything that I could to evoke that part of their imagination, which would make them interested and dependent on others (Smith and Zimbardo 15:29).

In turning towards the tape recorder and eventually the video camera, Smith offered nothing less than a Copernican revolution in acting theory, an "other"-oriented method that rejected the self-oriented basis of "affective memory."[115] Critics like Debbie Thompson have argued that Smith's emphasis on mimicry and broken speech characterizes this "other"-oriented approach as a post-structuralist method distinguished from naturalist ones.[116] But while this binary between naturalism and post-structuralism provides a useful argumentative structure for Thompson, she doesn't account for the specific mediums with which Smith captured voices. Ironically enough, the tape recorder and the video camera, as Jacob Gallagher-Ross has argued, were not antithetical to but in fact facilitated the highest pinnacle of Stanislavskian acting, leaving their

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[114] Brooks is thinking specifically about a 1939 interview Hurston gave in which she describes and performs the jook song "Halimuhfack." Hurston learned the song while doing field recordings in Florida, and it refers to the city of "Halifax"—a city, Brooks reminds, that was an actual site of escape for the enslaved. The "extra syllables" that occur in the vernacularization of the name, for Hurston, is about fitting it into the rhythm of the song, but Brooks challenges her rigid formalism by attuning to the ways that Hurston's performative ethnography index black collectivism: "[the syllables are] the beats that carry the song onto another plane of expressive recourse for African Americans managing the exigent pressures of Jim Crow life, the quest for equality, employment, and human sustenance" (Brooks 154). Unlike Smith, however, Hurston had less formal training: "[Hurston]appears not to give a damn that she is no singer of any great vocal merit. Rather, the work that she is doing here in song and sound is a critical intervention in the ways that she steadfastly believed that Black life ought to be recorded" (Brooks 133).

[115] Shonnie Enelow has shown how this "other" oriented approach even has roots within "method acting" itself, specifically in the acting pedagogy of Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner (Enelow 9).

[116] Thompson cites Smith's account of her first memory as her grandfather saying, "if you say a word often enough, it becomes your own," and Smith's second recollection of the statement as: "if you say a word often enough, it becomes you." Thompson powerfully reads these two statements together: "This difference—between words *becoming your own* and *words becoming you*—is the difference between humanist and post-structuralist models of acting and indeed, selfhood. If words become your own, there is a "you" pre-existing the words; but if words become "you" then your "you-ness," your very selfhood, is made up of your interactions with words" (Thompson 133).

mark in the broken, stuttered speech of its most famous practitioners, and mediating the very dance of public and private that "the method" attempted to navigate (Gallagher-Ross 96).[117] Smith's work, then, has a much more complicated relationship to naturalistic modes and theories of "authenticity" than critics and even she would suggest. Her simultaneous embrace of and desire to question media technology—her Terkelian ambivalence toward it, we might say—was both a departure from Stanislavskian techniques and arguably her greatest connection to it.

That is, like Terkel's, Smith's conversational praxis is also a theory of mediation. A central question at the heart of Smith's work has always been this: why does media *not* move us to action? In *Twilight,* Reginald Denny's testimony is the most obvious riposte to such inaction in that he tells the story of a family that saved his life after having seen him on TV. Smith not only gives testimony of action in the face of possible inaction but also, at times, foregrounds the media that makes that testimony possible.[118] As Carol Martin notes, throughout Smith's career there are various forms of media technology present on stage, from the telephone in her community-based work to the lighting and props of her PBS version of *Fires* and the televisions onstage during *Twilight* (Martin, "Chapter 6" 85).[119] And in the 2000 performance Terkel at the Public, Smith literally plays a snippet of the tape recording of her question to Terkel over the loudspeakers. Smith as Terkel leans in to hear what she's saying (Figure 4):

[117] Moreover, Smith's rhetoric of "authentic voice" may sound reactionary and essentialist, but we also must here her notion of "authenticity" in relation to the discourse of "authenticity" touted by "method acting," where "authenticity must be stripped of its origins...the particularities of accent and diction...evacuated so that their sounds can become more flexible signifiers of a generalized authenticity."

[118] An important example of this is the thematic presence of the radio in testimony of the Anonymous Lubavitcher Woman in *Fires*. The Lubavitcher woman has a baby who accidently knocks the volume on her stereo to a blistering volume. Because it's shabbat, she cannot turn the volume down unless the baby does it out of their own volition. Stuck, she walks outside and gestures toward a young black man with the intent of eliciting his help; like speaking to the baby, the law demand she communicate indirectly. Eventually, the young black man agrees to come in the house and adjust the volume, explaining to her what to do, then turning down the volume himself. In a comic denouement, Smith as Lubavitcher says, "He probably thought…Jewish people are really smart [but] they don't know/how to turn off their radios." The scene is another way in which Adam Zachary Newton sees *Fires,* and its logic of juxtaposition, "very different from the asymmetry of face-to face…What's missing is rootedness of context, of lifeworld – the blood and sinew of habit, practice, and belief—what literature as text, not performance, can embody" (164). But Smith's work is not about blood and sinew, it's about sound: and here, the sound technology thematically provides a structure in which diasporic misunderstanding abounds.

[119] We should importantly add the presence of the video camera and the cell phone video in *Notes from the Field.*

Figure 3.4. Smith as Terkel in *House Arrest* at the Public Theater, 2000. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

Playing the recording over the god mic makes the distinctions between Smith's voices audible, but it also foregrounds—makes more perceptible—the listening that is constitutive of any conversational encounter. It's a Brechtian "gest" if ever there were one. It shocks the audience out of the illusion that they're watching Smith playing Terkel into the realization that they're watching Smith playing Terkel *listening to Smith*.[120] The gest elicits a laughter that reveals the social attitudes that we have toward those who are hard of hearing—Terkel wore a hearing aid throughout the nineties and until his death—while it also formalizes the larger truth that any "defining moment in American history"—like any voice—is not singular but accretive. Bringing recorded media—and, as we'll see, the tape recorder itself—onstage was one of the several ways in which Smith foregrounds the technological and social mediation that are part and parcel of Terkel's conversational praxis. While Terkel's published work tends to obfuscate the mediums in which the voice was captured, Smith's dramatization increasingly makes those mediums perceptible.

Smith's engagement with Terkel's conversational practice was also a theatricalizing of the Terkelian literary form. If you compare the title pages of their respective works side by side, Smith's indebtedness is self-evident (Figure 3.5.). The knowledge that Smith's text will be or has been performed helps to bring out the dramatic character latent within Terkel's work, and it helps explain why numerous dramaturgs have seen his work as readily adaptable to the stage.[121] Indeed, at the Chicago Library conversation, Smith says the first time she encountered "real speech" as theatrical was when she was assigned to play the waitress from *Working* in acting school (8:51). Yet there are slight differences in both text and performance. In the text, Smith

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[120] Elin Diamond glosses the idea of the "Brechtian Gestus" as "a gesture, a word, an action, a tableau by which, separately or in series, the social attitudes encoded in the playtext become visible to the spectator" (Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory" 89). See also Brecht's essay "On Gestic Music." (Brecht and Willett 105). Brecht defines the "social gest" as "the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about social circumstances" (104). A gest more generally is defined as

[121] Andy White, a performer in Lookinglass Theater's 2003 production of *Race,* told me what when Terkel watched rehearsals of the show, he wondered if they needed a stage manager to guide the play. Next to Smith's work, we can see how these textual titles do theatrical work themselves, managing the page and the stage.

inserts her editorial voice by adding titles to the monologues; within the individual vignettes, she delineates the spoken words into poetic lines. In performance, Smith projects the name of the interviewee, the title she gives their monologue, and the section in which that monologue is featured. Unlike the musical adaptation of Terkel's *Working*, these Brechtian projections shuttle the audience in and out of any sense of immersion.

When Smith turns Terkel's conversational literary form into a conversational dramatic form, she dramatizes not just the interviewees but also the experience of reading one of Terkel's books. If Terkel's literary form encourages us to imagine individual interviewees in conversation with each other—specifically about the individual and structural aspects of a racist society—Smith translates this affordance to the stage in both temporal and spatial ways. By temporal, I mean that often in her plays, a character is at first only talked about or hinted at, and then later, they are given a chance to speak for themselves. This happens with Carmel Cato in *Fires*, Daryl Gates in (some versions of) *Twilight*, and Bill Clinton in *House Arrest*. The initial invocation or allusion to the person asks that we imagine their reply; their eventual monologue is then placed in conversation with our earlier expectation by the form of the play. Smith also uses what James Snead calls the aesthetics of the "cut": one character's voice will "cut away" and sometimes "cut back" to another figure, leaving unfinished what has been previously said or responding directly to a previous elision (Snead 72).[122] These cuts also entail spatial conversational forms: Smith will return to certain sections of the stage or selected pieces of furniture, or allow props to linger between the monologues, on the stage or on her body. These spatial overlaps suggest that the monologues inhabit each other's space and metaphorically speak to each other.[123] As well see, spatializing and temporalizing conversation is often Smith's most critical dramatic tool for a structural critique of American society.[124]

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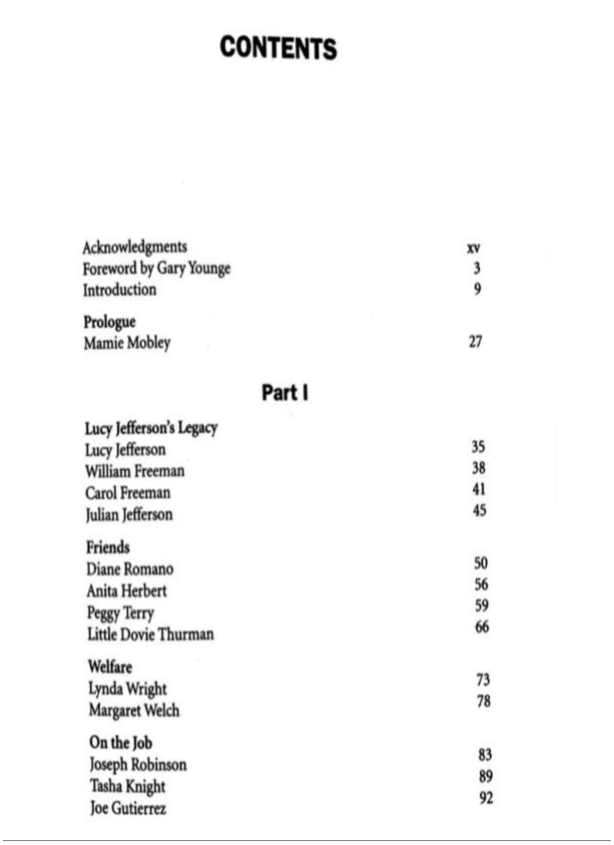
[122] In the 1994 production of *Twilight* at the Cort Theater, Smith and Wolfe experimented with the rapid cut, especially in a section entitled "Rocked," where Smith moves back and forth rapidly between the voices of Shelby Coffee and Lydia Ramos. In the Berkeley Rep reproduction, which largely influenced the PBS version, this aesthetics of the cut operates between Elaine Young and Keith Watson. Smith writes in a stage direction that if this play is to be played by multiple actors, then "if possible, the same actor playing Elaine Young should become Keith Watson and turn the desk over." On the next page, she writes: "having thrown over the desk of Elaine Young and walking the length of the stage in his heart he now topples other things on the stage, in a full blown out expression of rage. This did not happen in reality – but it's meant to use whatever stage language there is to try to embody the rage, power, pain, disappointment of black youth at the center of their identification of the right with Rodney King. Pain in the coleader accompanied the frenzy of the riot or a part of the rage." (Smith, *Twilight--Los Angeles, 1992*). Smith will use stage directions as well as the virtue of a single performer to create this conversational effect.

[123] Anne Cheng reads what I'm calling spatial conversational form as melancholia: "Smith's docudrama enacts a form of melancholia, by opening the audience up to a series of multiple "presences" that flicker and vanish but do not wholly depart" (Cheng 173).

[124] In the PBS performance of *Twilight,* Smith cuts from white, real estate agent Elaine Young's description of her privileged safety at the Beverly Hills Hotel ("No one can hurt us at the Beverly Hills Hotel/ 'cause it was like a fortress") to Henry "Keith" Watson, who was a co-assailant of Reginal Denney. But instead of having Watson immediately speak, Smith transforms herself in silence: she exchanges her gold earrings for a black porkpie hat, overturns the table Young sits at, and has Watson escape into a backstage scattered with broken boxes and furniture. Smith thus again makes Terkel's conversational praxis more perceptible: the structural critique American society doesn't happen simply in the imagination of the reader but in the literal destruction of the set, which both mirrors the riots but also challenges Young's privilege at the level of dramatic form. Another crucial example to analyze her structural critique of American society is Reginald Denny and Pat Parker's juxtaposed imaginings of having a house one day to commemorate their experiences. While Denny says he wants a "happy room" to commemorate and thwart negative memories of all the "riot stuff," Parker says he wants a "no justice no peace" room so his "children can grow up with it" (177). Both present important readings of how American society is itself a kind of melancholia.



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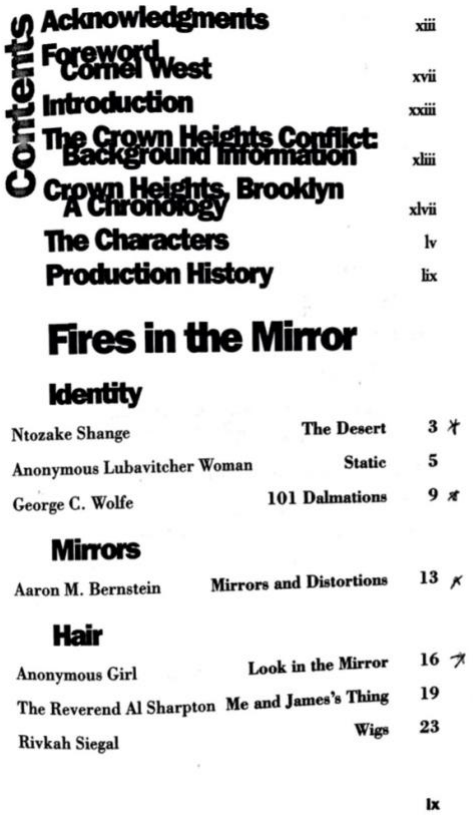

Contents

Figure 3.5. Title page of Terkel's *Working* (Terkel, *Working*) and Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* (Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*)

Smith's theatrical revision of Terkel's literary form is thus an explicit attempt to extend his conversational praxis into a theory of national identity. As she writes in *Talk to Me*, if the broken speech of individuals reveals their character, her juxtaposition of fragment monologues aims to reveal some sort of national character: "If I were to go around and listen listen listen to Americans, would I end up with some kind of a composite that would tell me more about America than what is *evidently* there?" (42). While her language of cultural identity traffics in the imagery of the diasporic—gap, breakage, longing, fragment—she ultimately recuperates these theories into a nationalist project. In her program notes for the Long Wharf Theater production of *Twilight*, she writes:

> When our national conversation about race has become, to some extent, merely fragments of monologues, the theater of *Twilight* seeks to suggest that conversation can be created from these fragments. It seeks to be part of that conversation (Smith, *Twilight*; Cheng 173).

With "merely fragments of monologues," Smith both evaluates the poor quality of public discourse and describes the formal structure of her play: a series of fragmented monologues.

Conversation is not just an interview technique but a dramatic and social form: she suggests that the fragments of her monologues *converse with each other* in the act of performance so as to both affect and effect *public conversation*. For her, the possibility of dialogue happens at three moments: at the pre-theatrical moment (interview as conversation), in the moment of performance (her plays *as* conversations, or as they are read in text), and after the show (in the post-show conversation, or in the "national" conversation). Really, across these moments, conversation is less a reality than a shared abstraction, that—not unlike notions of "the nation" or a "more perfect union"—one strives toward with every performance.

In this section, I have suggested that a crucial similarity between Smith and Terkel is that they both have conversational theories that traffic in the language of vocal authenticity as well as the Aristotelian language of self-revelation. I have also implied that they have conversational practices that undermine these theories, namely because they are performatively duplicitous and engage Brechtian and otherwise culturally specific techniques that aim to reveal the structural conditions that shape individual character. A crucial difference between them is much more than Smith simply "act[ing] out the people" in Terkel's books. Smith, instead, revises his conversational praxis, a process that involves making the forms of technological and social mediation constitutive of conversational encounter more perceptible. That is, she makes Terkel's comparative mode of speaking a necessary precondition of vocal performance through the paradox of timbre; she translates a form of vulnerable listening into an acting technique that involves full-body, non-cochlear centric listening; she embraces Terkel's ambivalence toward recording by foregrounding media technology in rehearsal and onstage; and she enacts the structural critique of Terkel's conversational literary form through a conversational dramatic form, one that explicitly attempts to intervene in the national dialogue through fractured monologues.

Listening Against Capture

When we notice how Smith enacts and makes Terkel's conversational praxis more perceptible, a central paradox for both emerges: the tape recorder signifies the presence of, and the freedom from, capture. Thus the continual dance between their attachment and distance from the tape recorder, their simultaneous embrace of it as tool to collect and use vocal material, but also a desire to go "beyond" it, to sublimate it into their own personhood through interview and acting techniques. As we've seen, tape afforded Terkel a complex stance in relation to the history of Jewish ethnography: while he arguably embraced the performative traditions from An-sky forward, he rejected the politics of salvage ethnography and disaffiliated from the objectivity associated with cultural anthropologists like Boas and sociolinguists like Goffman. He thus engaged recoding technology as a kind of scene partner without affording it, or himself, any objective stance. The ethical framework that I am calling "listening against capture" is an attempt to describe this ambivalent embrace of the tape recorder and its subsequent counterhegemonic effects. Smith's ambivalent embrace of tape also had local significance in rethinking her relationship to the field of "method acting." While she rejects method acting wholesale as masculinist and pedagogically narcissistic, her means of rejecting "the method"—the tape recorder—is also the strongest evidence of her continued attachment to it. In her conversational praxis, the ethical, technological, and performance practice of conversation I'm calling "listening against capture" is not limited to the ethnographic encounter but foregrounded in the act of embodied performance. In her version, this praxis becomes one that refuses to afford

the authority of objectivity to the ethnographer, a technological apparatus, or a dramatic performance.

But there is also a larger, political significance of Smith's use of the tape recorder, especially in the late 1990s. To understand this significance, it's important to note that Smith and Terkel's conversational praxes share a set of assumptions with eighteenth century theories of American democracy. Some theorists have argued that there is an indelible link between theories of nationhood in the United States' earliest years and vocal performance. As Jay Fliegelman has argued, Thomas Jefferson was theorizing conceptions of American orality at the same time as he was theorizing the nation, literally writing diacritic marks into the Declaration of Independence to indicate spoken pauses. These pauses—like Terkel's "revelatory phrase" or Smith's "broken sentences"—indexed moments of heightened individual emotion but also were performative (non)utterances that aimed to make the auditor feel like an orator. Such sonic moments enacted representative democracy, binding the orator and auditor through a sympathetic connection, one that—following Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*—instantiated the relationship of representative to constituent. This conception of oratorical performance could then be repeated in everyday conversation, enacting continuous revolutions in miniature.[125]

It is in the movement from a practice of listening for "broken speech" to a theory of American nationhood that Smith's conversational praxis risks appearing not so much Terkelian as it does Jeffersonian. But it is Smith's play *House Arrest*—which explores the American presidency from Jefferson to Clinton—that allows us to think about how her and Terkel's conversational praxis works with and against these notions of American democracy. Jefferson's theories are deeply racist, disguising the question of "who" can speak behind the question of "how" to speak, while Smith—and Terkel before her—are deeply concerned with exploring not only "how" to speak but also "who could speak."[126] Beyond this, what distinguishes their conversational praxes from these eighteenth century theories of elocution is a more nuanced rhetoric of listening, one that extends beyond a theory of political submission, where the work of the orator is to make the auditor "feel as he feels" such that they "become doubles of one another."[127] For Dorinne Kondo, listening is the key dramatic and political tool that Smith's uses to challenge liberal, "power-free" notions of conversation, to espouse what she calls a "politics of affiliation" (Kondo 137–38).[128] In what follows, I turn to *House Arrest* to understand how a

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[125] Such the sounds, tones, and pauses revealed for Jefferson and Adams not just individuality but "the "common sense of the subject" and thus was "an expression of the American mind." This conception of oratorical performance—which could be repeated in everyday conversation--also relied on a rhetorical logic that challenged classical rhetoric: "Whereas pathos (emotion) is set in opposition to ethos (character) in classical rhetoric, here the former becomes the revelation of the latter" (Fliegelman 43).

[126] As Stephen Best has shown, nineteenth century copyright law attempted to navigate this legacy of racism *and* the future of mechanical vocal reproduction by holding two incommensurables at once: that the voice was both inalienable aspect of personhood and alienable property within the market (Best, *The Fugitive's Properties* 19).

[127] There is one moment when a more complex theory of audition is articulated in *Declaring Independence,* as when Fliegelman writes: "Here was one of the paradoxes of the elocutionary revolution. The living voice must be both particular, referring back to the sincerity of a specific speaker, and general, articulating the auditors' feelings to themselves" (64). But elsewhere, the story of the new elocution is a story about assimilating and subjugating the auditor the vocal virtuosity of the orator. This is *not* a theory of audition in the way that Terkel and Smith propound one.

[128] Kondo reads with and against Chantel Mouffe's conception of agonistics: "For Mouffe, agonistics—in which adversaries debate incompatible, even irreconcilable positions, attempting to make their own positions hegemonic—arises from the irreducible differences that ground politics. There can be no ideal speech situation in a Habermasian

less abstract version of listening—specifically the technology of the tape recorder—affects the cultural meaning of Smith's work. Critically observing scenes of listening—both successful and failed—in a 1998 production of *House Arrest* in which tape-recorders were brought on stage allows us to see how Smith uses the paradoxes of tape to represent, and even challenge, a political paradox at the heart of the American democracy. Specifically, I am interested in how the Terkelian ethical framework I call "listening against capture" becomes embedded in the themes and forms of the play. Bringing the tape recorder onstage, I suggest, had a double a purpose: to test out the fungibility of Smith's method with a multiracial cast, but also to formalize the tension between fugitivity and capture that the play thematizes.

sense, in which rational actors reach consensus through dialogue." Kondo reads this into not just moments of performance but to the very collaborative process of preparing and creating the plays: "This discomfort, the hard work of adjudicating passionately held, sometimes incommensurable positions, characterizes a *politics of affiliation*."

Chapter 4: Listening Against Capture: *House Arrest* and the Paradoxes of Tape

In many respects, *House Arrest* was Anna Deavere Smith's most ambitious project. She interviewed more than 500 people for the play, and over the course of its nearly five-year production, it was staged publicly at least four times: at the Arena Stage Theater in Washington in 1997, at the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue in 1998, at the Mark Taper Forum in 1999, and its last performance at the New York Shakespeare Festival in 2000.[129] It's also perhaps her most experimental play to date. The first three productions were *not* one-woman shows but were instead performed with multiracial casts of 12-14 actors. Unlike *Fires* and *Twilight,* the play is not about a single incident, but instead explores a long history of the relationship between the press and the presidency within Washington D.C. over a 200-year time period, ranging from the debate over Sally Hemings relationship with Thomas Jefferson to the Clinton and Lewinsky scandal.[130] Because of its large transhistorical scope, it includes the performance of written texts as well as verbatim interviews into its form. And unlike most of Smith's other plays, it is largely a satire. Critics found *House Arrest* largely incoherent, and many were turned off by its focus on the wealthy and powerful.[131] Outside of contemporary reviews, there is little criticism on the play. *House Arrest* was, however, at the forefront of theatrical experiments with media technology and deeply engaged with questions within contemporary black studies.

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[129] The number of interviews she gave comes from her 2021 interview with Museum of the African Diaspora (*Conversations Across the Diaspora with Anna Deavere Smith* 41:30).

[130] In its final version, the first act takes a wild, transhistorical ride from the panoptic setting of Jefferson's Monticello to Roosevelt's white house kitchen, to the site of Lincoln's shooting at Ford's theater, to the Dallas street of Kennedy's assassination. The second act slips to the then present, focusing on the media's obsession with Clinton's sexuality, featuring voices as disparate as media moguls like Walter Shapiro, black female Washington insiders like Alexis Herman and Anita Hill, cultural critics like Judith Butler and Christopher Hitchens, and even Clinton himself.

[131] In response to its 2000 version at the New York Shakespeare Festival, Ben Brantley wrote that the piece failed to cohere in the way her earlier work did, and that by the end of the play, one gets the sense that Smith "has lost control of her material." Nancy Franklin also agreed that this play seemed to be not just timely, but *too* timely. Smith brings us "old news" and seems distracted by the fact that she, like her interviewees, have "unlimited access to just about anybody." In response to the 1997 production at the Arena Theater, Claire McDonald described the play as "awkward, excessive, and potentially brilliant" (MacDonald 95). Part of the brilliance, she claims, is that Smith is investigating not only what a theater that aspires to "civil discourse" sounds like, but the relationship between the discourse around the President's body and the American body politic more largely. She provocatively suggests that the play is a meditation on the thesis of the "king's two bodies," suggesting that the question of the body of the work is not separate from the question of the "King's body" or the "body politic": "Smith historicizes the President's body and places it in a nexus of race, gender, and power" (MacDonald). Having studied two versions of the play, I believe that many of the criticisms are warranted. At many times the play can feel heavy handed in its attempt to bridge transhistorical material. In the first act, for example, the dramatization of Lincoln being shot in Ford's theater is juxtaposed with a photographer "shooting" Clinton. Smith's Terkelian comparativism also at times does flatten differences. For instance, the play absolutely makes the elision between a president's "captivity" to the press and Hemming's enslavement to Jefferson, suggesting that Clinton is a kind of "slave" to the media in the way Hemings was to Jefferson. And moreover, the play often makes sloppy ideological elisions. The published version of Smith's play, for instance, begins with a conversation between Margaret Meade and James Baldwin, focusing on the moment when Meade demands an allegiance to historical fact and Baldwin to emotional truth. Smith positions herself between Baldwin and Meade on this issue: "I worry about those who cannot afford to care about the facts. I worry that their educations have not engaged them with anything beyond the 'facts'" (xvi). But Smith's attempt to always position herself in-between—just as she does with Robert Brustein and August Wilson--is another bind that at times makes *House Arrest* ethically suspect: it elides the confusion of historical fact and emotional truth caused by white supremacy and the aftermath of slavery that Baldwin is talking about with the confusion over what is "real" in the contemporary mediascape.

The opening scene of the final version of *House Arrest* begins with Studs Terkel answering the same question as in the scene that ends the play: is there a "defining moment in American history?" But instead of Terkel leaving the Atlanta airport in search of "the human voice," this Terkel goes on to complain instead about Kennedy's satyriasis, FDR's "fling with a socialite," and the pervasive "Clinton-ism" and "Lewinsky-ism" that has taken over our public discourse. He refocuses our attention away from tabloid scandal, toward corporate capitalism and American imperialism. But as soon as the rant gathers coherence, it digresses. Suddenly, we're in a scene from *Huckleberry Finn,* when Jim and Huck are being pursued by "slavers" who they can hear but not see. Huck famously lies about Jim's race, yelling back that the man on the raft with him is white, followed by a pang of double feeling. Why is this the first scene in *House Arrest*? Certainly, it's testament to and praise for Smith's "spiritual mentor." When she performs this scene at the Chicago Library in front of Terkel in 2000, Smith literally points at him, her gesture suggesting that he is a Huck-like figure of conscience. Even in the context of the 2000 production of the play at the Public, the scene traffics in white saviorism. But the performance history of *House Arrest* suggests another possible answer. The opening Terkel bit, in combining a scene of listening with a scene of a fugitive slave's escape, *substitutes for* the presence of tape recorders and themes of fugitivity that run throughout the 1998 production of the play at the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, one in which Terkel is not present as a character at all, and in which Smith is only onstage to play one character: Bill Clinton.

Founded by Smith in 1997 and funded primarily by the Ford Foundation, the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue existed for three summers between 1998-2000. Smith designed the program to have two main parts: each year, it elicited applications from artists and scholars to help support works in progress that were specifically concerned with "art and civic life" (Abaya 5). The institute would then put on three summer series where artworks were "created, staged, and discussed" (*Guide to MSS.127*). But the presentation of works in progress was not just an attempt to support individual artists; the institute was also an attempt engage a "core audience" of community members from greater Boston onto the Harvard campus. In bridging town and gown, Smith was trying to make the post-show dialogue a normative ritual of a theatrical work, but also, conversely, to make conversation a necessary precondition to the very act of artistic creation.[132] One result of institutionalizing conversation at the IACD was that everything was

[132] It's not clear why the institute was discontinued after its summer in 2000, though the funding proposal suggest that the Institute was at pains to clarify—even quantify—the efficacy of its method. The "Report on the Accomplishments of the IACD" published in the summer of 1999, is obviously a pitch to investors, relaying Smith's vision for the institute and its larger place in the relationship between "dialogue" and the American public—from Tocqueville's interest in civic action to more contemporary, business related endeavors, like Laura Chasin's "The Public Conversations Project." The report hovers around the ideological line that Smith's work always straddles: of at once suggesting that art has the capacity to both profoundly affect public life but that is at the same time not its main aim: "The works of IACD...do not aim to resolve conflicts but to provoke long held silence into open expression, to rouse apathy into interest, and to move people at their own pace to make meaningful shifts that would benefit themselves and the societies they live in." (9). Much of the rest of the report are bureaucratic figures relaying information discovered from intra-institute surveys, figures that seem to at times suggest the efficacy of the report's findings and others, to at least relay that the Institute is listening to itself: "Twenty-eight percent of artists and sixty-two percent of interns considered the dialogue to be a productive civic engagement by exploring the aesthetic value of the work and to provide feedback for the improvement of the artists' unfinished work" (49). More than once, the report suggests that the institute develop a more catchy phrase to help it relay its core mission, a suggestion that once evokes a commitment to the institute's, well, institutionalization, and the bureaucratic sort of tenor in which the whole thing operates. These bureaucratic documents, to me, show how that it's in the institutionalization of dialogue

heavily documented. But recording technology played a crucial role beyond the documentation of the institute, in the production of the artistic work itself.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the 1998 production of *House Arrest*. This version—staged with a multiracial cast who wore tape recorders as they performed—is the first ever experiment in "headphone theater," an attempt to make Smith's acting method transferrable to other actors.[133] As Smith announces to the core audience before the show, the cast had only nine days to prepare the play and so the audience might notice that they're wearing "Walkmen." One might infer that they are using these recorders as a crutch to make up for the lack of preparation time. But many of the actors also held scripts in their hands, suggesting that the tape recorder was more than an aid for a cast under pressure. "I believe that the spoken word is where so much of character begins," she tells the audience. Deploying tape recorders onstage became a way for Smith to test out the fungibility of her Terkelian inspired method.

But the presence of the tape recorder is not the only defining feature of this production: Smith used the occasion to explore the legacy of slavery in the U.S. prison system, more so than the published, final production, and in a way that anticipates her *Notes from the Field* (2018). Another way to put it is that the IACD version of *House Arrest* had a much stronger emphasis on "arrest" than "house." The play was performed on the very same day as Monica Lewinsky's first sworn testimony, weeks before Clinton admitted to their relationship, and just a few months before Toni Morrison called him "our first black president" (Morrison, "On the First Black President").[134] One paradox of the historical context of the play, then, is that while Bill Clinton's criminalization was seen by many black artists and intellectuals as representative of the criminalization of black people, many, like Smith, intuited how the "tough on crime" policies of the Clinton Administration would be responsible for causing "the largest increases in federal and state prison inmates of any president in American history" (Alexander 55).[135] Among the multiple projects that Smith was working during the late nineties while she was conducting interviews for *House Arrest* was a series of interviews with incarcerated black women. In her

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that dialogue goes to die. This wasn't unique to Smith: as Gates explains in his article "The Chitlin Circuit," the entire Black Arts Movement was underwritten by the Ford Foundation. But the bureaucratic tenor of these documents appears soulless when read next to transcripts from post-show dialogues. These public documents that were disseminated to core audience members are rife with meaningful questions that were used to engage audiences. The questions are deeply informed by Black feminism of the 1980s, and they resist the neo-liberal impulses toward efficiency and quantification that are otherwise threaded throughout the bureaucratic documents.

[133] Caroline Wake dates "headphone theater"—or what is also known as recorded delivery--back to Alecky Blythe, Roslyn Oades, and Mark Wing-Davey. Wing-Davey worked on *House Arrest* with Smith at the IACD, and Wake quotes Blythe quoting Wing-Davey about that experience (Wake 326). Wake writes that "Smith's invention lies not in her style of interviewing but rather in her style of listening, which is exacting to the point of being exhausting. Wing-Davey's innovation is to make this listening visible by moving it from the rehearsal room on to the stage." It seems right to me then to locate the origin of headphone theater between Wing-Davey and Smith, though that again is part of her listening as collaboration, vis-a-vis Kondo's argument about her collaborative politics of affiliation.

[134] Also see Ta-Nehisi Coates's 2015 essay in *The Atlantic* on how Morrison's comments have been misread. Coates argues that few people remember the actual context of Toni Morrison's claim – they think that she was saying that he was Black because he was born poor, was raised by his mother in a single-parent household, loved junk food, and played the sax. In fact, she was drawing attention to his criminalization – arguing that race was a process of racialization, not an aspect of being.

[135] An essay that perhaps best captures this paradox is Fred Moten's "The Return of the Oppressed" (2001), in which the author grows frustrated with his own black family's support for Clinton during the scandal: "They never see that once the kids fall by the wayside, they become imprisoned over and over, thus serving as fodder for a more and more productive financial empire. They refuse to accept the fact that Clinton has only contributed to this…jails and prisons are being built and expanded right here in Clark County…"(Moten and Jenkins 142).

memoir *Talk to Me*, Smith describes how these voices sounded different: "Whereas the voices of the Washington insiders tended to be constrained in one place or another, the prisoners had full range, and especially full use of the lower parts of their bodies. Perhaps the inner workings of the voice are a rare place to find freedom when you are bound" (247). The technique of acting *with* a tape recorder was a way to test the fungibility of her method, but also a way to formalize the tension between fugitivity and capture that the play consistently thematizes.[136]

The 1998 IACD production of *House Arrest* begins with a noisy soundscape of dogs howling and crickets chirping. An actor with a microphone tells us where we are: "This play will be performed in a penitentiary." A cast of at least twelve actors comes onto the stage and sits in a straight line of chairs in the background of the stage, all wearing tape recorders and all but one wearing gray shirts and jeans that double as prison uniforms.[137] One inmate stands up and delivers this line from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*: "The condemned man represents the inverted figure of the king." Then, a black female actor begins to sing Oleta Adams "Get Here," moving the audience nearly to a standing ovation. Out of that post-applause silence comes a white, female actor dressed in a prison guard uniform, handcuffs hanging from her belt loop, performing the role of Penny Kiser, a Monticello Tour Guide. Kiser explains to us, in one of the longest monologues of the play, why Jefferson refused to free his slaves.

These first few minutes of the IACD production set up a series of oppositions and recurring motifs that the play revolves around: the oscillation between music and noise, between the tape-recorded word and the untethered voice, the powerful and the enslaved. The play will move abruptly between sirens blaring and acapella voices singing, at times even eliding them; individual character scenes will be cut off by a guard yelling "count" and conducting a strip search. These interruptions are the structural equivalent of Smith's focus on "broken speech" as applied to a multi-person cast, breaking not just a character's speech but spatial and temporal continuity. And at the center of these sonic oscillations is always the black female voice, which, according to Farrah Griffin, always does double work during times of national crises: exposing both the deep need for the nation to heal but also providing a vocal "challenge to the United States, revealing its democratic pretense as a lie" (Griffin 121).

In that opening scene, we get the healing gospel, but it's not long before the black female voice is mobilized to expose the lies at the heart of American triumphalism. The next scene, "Unconsummated Affections/Deep Denial," is what Smith describes in the published version of *House Arrest* as a "constructed dialogue" between Jefferson scholar Roger Kennedy and "legal historian" Annette Gordon-Reed: "these people said these words but not in each other's presence" (24).[138] In the 2000 Public Theater version of the play, Smith inhabits both characters, switching between holding a coffee mug and a wine glass to indicate who's speaking (Figure 4.1). This is, again, Terkel's comparative impulse made more perceptible: translated into the paradox of timbre and embodied gesture. In the IACD version, the use of a larger cast allows her to literalize this imagined dialogue by having two actors converse on stage (Figure 4.2):

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[136] "Not restricted to literal flight from slavery, fugitivity belongs to what philosopher and poet Fred Moten—thus far its most expansive and challenging theorist—describes as a capacious category of the irregular in which freedom and unfreedom perpetually coexist in persons who refuse to be objectified or reduced" (M. Feldman 10).

[137] Crucially, the shirts have breast pockets, which allow them to swap tapes in and out during the performance.

[138] Annette Gordon-Reed is, now, arguably the most well-known Jefferson scholar since the publication of her book *The Hemingses of Monticello* (2008).

Figure 4.1. Smith as Kennedy and Reed in 2000 at the Public. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

Figure 4.2. "Kennedy," "Gordon-Reed" and the Tape Recorder at the IACD, 1998. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

Notice how the two actors are sharing a tape recorder. Ostensibly, the actors are listening to the original recordings as they are performing those characters. But if Smith did these interviews separately, perhaps a tape was constructed to splice the voices of Kennedy and Gordon-Reed together. Or perhaps they're not even using the recorder, and it's only there for dramatic effect. With each of those possibilities, the very presence of the recorder, as Ariella Azoulay writes about the phenomenology of the camera, "creates a kind of commotion in an environment simply by being there" (Azoulay). While we might typically see a recorder as one among many, shoved in front of the face of a politician, here the singular tape recorder physically mediates the space between the two characters. One effect is that the technology substitutes for Smith's embodied listening, foregrounding the media technology that makes this conversation even imaginable. Another effect is to create a sense of privacy and a sense of publicity at once, a confusion that mirrors the social confusion around the president's sexuality, or, as Lauren Berlant suggests, around sexuality in general.[139] In Brechtian terms, it's a gest: just as the rhetoric of the performance as "verbatim theater" pulls the audience into an immersive shared reality, the presence of the technology on stage reminds the audience that this conversation never happened.[140] In Terkelian terms, it's a way for Smith to dramatize herself as both "being there and not there, simultaneously."

Notice, too, how Gordon-Reed's character holds the tape recorder: sharing the technology stages conversation, but that technology is also wielded by the black female scholar. Indeed, when we listen closely to what is said between these two, it becomes clear that this scene is less about successful listening than about failed listening. Though Smith splices their words together, Kennedy refuses to hear Gordon-Reed. He argues that there is "not a shred,/ not a shred of evidence..." that Jefferson was involved with Hemings, to which Gordon-Reed responds with amusement: "Well, that's crazy." Her rebuttal of Kennedy is to call his claim not just euphemistic but dishonest: saying that there is not a shred of evidence is a much different claim than saying that the evidence is not persuasive. By the end of the interaction, Kennedy is presented as a bumbling fool embodying what Patricia Williams, in a later scene, calls the "two-step denial" of white historians, who either ignore the evidence that there was a relationship or claim that it had to be "true love." Though we can see him bobbing his head and making facial gestures in response to Gordon-Reed's speech, Kennedy's failure to listen speaks volumes.

Yet both characters fail to speak freely about the Jefferson's sexuality. Kennedy is described in the script as a "middle-aged white male with extremely precise speech and a deep voice," but what we hear from him first is: "Jefferson/ as a man of words and unconsummated/ a-ffection, AAh..." As soon as he starts to talk about the president's sexuality, he slips up. This happens with Gordon-Reed at one moment as well, when she talks about the difference between the "Hemings angle" and the "gay angle": "The problem with the gay angle is, as I say—if you don't have something/ any indication that he had—sex with/ men..." The pauses here also indicate the difficulty of talking about the president's sexuality. The fact that the white male

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[139] "Sex isn't private…it's always personal, in that persons are doing it, but it happens in a nexus of very public and institutional relations" (Berlant and Gallop 257–58).

[140] Notice here also how the characters are typecast in this moment. Why is that? Smith writes in the general production note to House Arrest that "typecasting should only be used in relationship to casting that is about that reach for the other" (House Arrest 5). I take this to mean that she believes it should be used in scenarios in which stereotypes are both confirmed and challenged, or when it's important to dramatize the historicity of interracial conversation. Like the dinner table scene at the end of *Twilight*, it's important at times for the racial and gender identities of the living person to be honored with a multiracial typecasting so that Smith's conversational experiments can play out verbally.

historian and the black female historian both stumble over the president's sexuality suggests that, for Smith, it *should* be difficult to speak about the president's sexuality: *House Arrest* is, from one vantage, a two-hour long plea for us all to talk a little less about Clinton's dick.[141] But at the same time, the play refuses to put the question of tabloid culture aside. These pauses and hesitations suggest that what has finally become at least possible to talk about in 1998—that is, the president's sexuality—has been at the center of American nationhood since its inception. It makes us aware that white supremacy and the consolidation of presidential power have always been concomitant with sexual exploitation, and we need to be able to talk about that more honestly. As one audience member says in the post-show conversation, this isn't *just* sexual politics. The breaks in dialogue here betray the difficulty of talking about Jefferson's sexual habits explicitly, but also the importance of bringing that silence into speech. This moment dramatizes the conversational ethics I'm calling "listening against capture": how Smith vis-à-vis Terkel calls into question both the authority of the tape recorder and the objective historian by dramatizing what resists verbal articulation and recorded capture.

This failed conversation is thus juxtaposed with what historically remains unspoken and fugitive. The adaptation of Smith's method to a multiracial cast is also set against the background of a historical tableau. When the constructed dialogue between Kennedy and Gordon-Reed first begins, two other actors, a tall white man and a black woman, are announced as they appear center stage: "Ladies and Gentleman: Mr. Thomas Jefferson accompanied by Ms. Sally Hemings, one of his one-hundred and twenty slaves." The character playing James Callendar—the infamous journalist of the 18th century to first reveal the Hemings story—takes a strobe of flash photos with a modern camera. The actors playing Jefferson and Hemings face the crowd, then each other. They perform a short, choreographed dance, with him aggressively moving her arm into his, pushing her down on her knees, pulling her back. This dance takes place at least six times throughout the play, at times quickly moving from casual bodily glances to the simulation of rape. As Gordon-Reed and Kennedy speak at stage left with headphones on, a domestic scene of Jefferson's writing emerges. Surrounded by violin music, Hemings begins to rock in a chair stage right, and three enslaved persons, dressed in prison uniforms, hold burning candles.

Behind the two historians, then, Smith stages several contradictions: between Jefferson's private writing and Callendar's public facing writing; between the sensational use of the camera and the more controlled, conversational use of the tape recorder; between the past and present.[142] As the academics debate, the enslaved persons stand still, their spines as erect as their candlesticks, their silence the tax paid for all the academic conversation around the sexual politics. A few scenes later, Smith quickly oscillates by way of the Hemings/Jefferson dance to another scene historical juxtaposition. There, former White House Correspondent Walter Trohan discusses FDR's sexual exploits, followed by Esther Suzuki's description of her experience during Japanese internment. This is again the Terkelian comparative impulse made more perceptible: the tableaux risks flattening all historical comparison as equivalent, but there is a distinct ethical thrust to the comparison. In this case, it's that the sexual politics are not a

[141] See also the final scene when Press Secretary Mike McCurry lamenting the new phase of tabloid culture.
[142] The staging also dramatizes Jefferson's unconsummated affections. Jefferson was widely known to travel everywhere with a violin and to practice for up to three hours a day, and here, the violinist literally taunts him as he writes, circling him, moving up closely behind him to play in his ear, while Hemings simultaneously rocks and avoiding his glance.

distraction from the questions about power, but rather mutually constitutive with how power plays out both historically and in relation to the contemporary "national" conversation.

Midway through the production is another scene of listening that Smith calls the "For Colored Girls" panel (Figure 4.3). Police sirens wail and strobes flash—another reminder of the carceral background of the play's setting. A spotlight opens on center stage, where five actors of different races sit around a table, playing five black women: Maggie Williams, former chief of staff to Hillary Clinton; Alexis Herman, former secretary of labor; Sherri Rideout, inmate at Maryland Correctional Facility; Anita Hill, professor of law; and Lani Guinier, professor of law. Certainly, some of the immediate audience laughter stems from Guinier's presence: though Clinton had withdrawn his nomination of her for assistant attorney general in 1993, she had just been hired at Harvard, becoming the first woman of color to receive tenure in the school's history. This moment, then, is reminiscent of Smith's community work in the 1980s: the play takes the context of its performance—even present audience members—and puts them onstage. But it's also one of those awkward moments in a Smith performance when the audience laughter reveals as much as it disguises: the irony of having a panel called "For Colored Girls" with at least two white actors on stage means that "black voice" is being performed here. Smith's formalist theory of the performance—that anyone can perform anyone if they listen to the rhythms, the music, the gaps in speech—gets put to the test.

Figure 4.3. The "For Colored Girls" Panel at the IACD, 1998. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

What unites these five testimonies is that each has a unique relationship to capture, and Smith's tape recorder provides either the threat of, or freedom from, this capture. Maggie Williams and Anita Hill, in their testimonies, describe the embarrassment and shame of being subjected to a polygraph test. It's worth noting that the polygraph was once the name for what we now call the pantograph, the machine that Thomas Jefferson used to make copies of his hand movements and physical manuscripts.[143] Both devices link physiological responses to the human voice, and in that way, the polygraph is a kind of foil for Smith's acting technique, which also uses a mechanized device to decouple a human voice from an interviewee's body and then recouple it to an actor's body. While the polygraph represents capture for Williams ("I don't know if you've ever taken on/ Well you know it's like going to the electric chair... Ya know you just feel like a common criminal"), being listened to by Smith via the tape recorder provides a way to speak back to that experience.[144] Smith literalizes Williams' claim that she's being treated like a "common criminal," though the only actual criminal on stage is Sherri Rideout, who also feels a sense of liberation from being taped. Here she describes robbing a pet store:

> They charged me with a minx.
> A blue fox.
> We on tape...
> Nah... I ain't do it.
> Pet company, my favorite store.
> I just want it because it's there and because it's expensive.
> I been convicted of all of this so I'm just gonna tell you now. (*House Arrest, Tapes #1A-5A, IACD Workshop Production* 50:33)

Because "we on tape," she feels at first compelled to maintain her innocence verbally ("Nah... I ain't do it,") even though gesturally and affectively, it's clear that she takes pleasure in telling it. Rideout then admits to it because the interview provides a kind of post-facto, *aw-fuck-it* freedom for her ("I'm just gonna tell you now"). As Terkel spoke about with his tape recording practices, Smith's use of the recorder often afforded the interviewee a form of humanity she otherwise felt denied. But Daphne Brooks has written that the "sonic work" of black female vocal performers "is its own form of affective technology" (D. Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution* 17). Because Rideout is played by the same actress who sings repeatedly throughout the performance, the paradox of the black female voice as an affective, blues technology is powerfully elided here with the paradox of tape technology: they both represent fear about, and freedom from, capture.

The "For Colored Girls" panel also gets at an important question underlying Smith's conversational praxis: does the knowledge that you are being recorded change what is being said? The answer is, of course, yes, but not because we can know exactly how a specific medium or technology changes what is said, but because the presence of the tape-recorder is a dramatic way of calling attention to how all human communication is mediated and context dependent. No speech is entirely free. The actor playing Lani Guinier does a similar dance as Sherri Rideout around the possibility of her voice being captured:

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[143] See Fliegelman, 167.

[144] This is the paradox, in African-American Folklore, of the talking skull: "Talking brought me here': these spooky words, spoken by a skull as a warning against speaking and storytelling, could also be Anansi's motto. Talking is what brings us to life but it also can spell or doom and is itself doomed to vanish" (Gates and Tatar 5).

> First tell me, what is this tape for?
> Oh ok
> But use it in your show as you?
> Or use it in your show as me?
> I mean, I may, I may not want that.
> Right
> ok
> Well I'll give it to you on tape
> as long as the understanding is that I get a chance to veto
> the association with my name at any time
> You can use any of my ideas at any time.
> Well what I was saying was that when I first heard
> the story.
> That fateful week in January...
> I felt
> an incredible sadness
> As if the president had died (54:04)

Watching a white actor play an African American woman feels jarring today. But there are other forms of Brechtian estrangement on stage that call attention to the duplicity of the casting. Notice how many other forms of mediation are on stage here: the actor is wearing headphones, holding a telephone in one hand, tape recorder resting on the desk, and speaking into a microphone. The multiple forms of mediated voice literalize capture (Figure 4.4).[145] There's also a distinct affective shift in Guinier's speech as she moves away from talking about the capture of her own voice by Smith to "that fateful week in January" 1998 when the President was accused. As Guinier goes back in time to recall the feeling of that experience, she's in a sense lamenting Clinton's inability to resist "the media's" gaze, but also her own inability to escape the legacies of racism that caused the withdrawal of her nomination. The moment dramatizes how quickly we can go from wanting to resist mediated capture, to feeling liberated by it, even forgetting its presence. This rapid shift reminds us, as Laurence Tribe suggests in the post-show conversation, how easy it is to turn captivity into a metaphor, and how that easy gesture risks occluding the reality of those who are actually subject to strip search and liable to be incarcerated. Brooks has written about how black women are society's analog to Jonathan Sterne's idea of the "vanishing mediator": the idea that a medium works best when it is invisible and inaudible. By casting some non-black actors on the all-black female panel, Smith's production of *House Arrest* always tempts that forgetting, but never quite allows it. The technology onstage always reminds us of what is there and not there.[146]

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[145] The phone also signifies the technology in which a lot of the sex between Lewinsky and Clinton actually took place. Lewinsky famously gifted the president the Nicholson Baker phone-sex novel *Vox* (1992) as a souvenir of sorts.

[146] Following Marjorie Garber, we might also say that Guinier's, as well as Lewinsky's, Jewishness in this moment was also "under erasure" (M. Garber 197). Lewinsky is repeatedly caricatured throughout the IACD version of House Arrest. In one early scene, the same actor who plays Hemmings dons a black beret and a blue dress marked with an "x," ostensibly to indicate Clinton's infamous non-coital semen stain. She begins to dance freely yet traditionally, both courting and resisting the numerous strobes of camera light, and she does so against music oscillating between the Negro spiritiual "It's Gonna Rain" and the Broadway tune "I'm Singing in the Rain." This is

Figure 4.4. "Lani Guinier" at the IACD, 1998. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

A third scene of listening in which Smith entwines the paradoxes of black life in America with the paradoxes of tape is the testimony of inmate Paulette Jenkins, a scene that I'd consider the moral and vocal center not just of Smith's play but of the entire multi-year project of *House Arrest*. Like Sherri Rideout's testimony, Jenkins's testimony was first published in *The New Yorker* in a piece entitled "Broken Sentences" in February 1996, while Smith was at the peak of her career and using that fame to highlight the voices of incarcerated women from her hometown of Baltimore. Smith entitles the piece "Mirror to her Mouth," which refers to the night that Jenkins's abusive husband murdered her daughter Myeshia. She witnesses the violence acousmatically, that is, as sound separated from its source:

> But the night that Myeshia died
> I stayed in the room with the baby.
> And I heard him,
> just beating her,
> just beating her,
> like I said he had her in the bathtub,
> and every time he would hit her,
> she would fall.
> And she would hit her head on the tub.
> I could hear it.
> It happened continuously.
> Repeatedly
> (whispering).
> And I dared not to move
> I didn't move.

---

the first instance when the show uncomfortably brings Jewishness and blackness into conversation, both via the actor's body but also at the level of music. The second instance is when the same actor playing Guinier dons the blue dress while playing inmate Claudia McClane, who describes her retributive murder of her husband. Again, we have an ostensibly white actor playing "black voice" in this moment, but also the uncomfortable suggestion that Lewinsky's relationship to the press is in anyway comparable to McClane's experience before and after incarceration.

I didn't even go see what was happening.
I just sat there and listened. (Smith, *House Arrest and Piano*)

Jenkins then describes how they left her daughter in the bathtub, unable to believe what happened, until the next morning: "So I went and took a mirror to her mouth. There/ was nothing coming out of her mouth." She and her husband then clothed their daughter's body and dumped it on the side of the I-95, after which they went to a mall to report a missing girl dressed in the very clothes they had put on her body. If you read the article from March 8, 1996 from *The Washington Post*, you learn only that Jenkins and her husband were convicted: you don't learn that Jenkins has AIDS, that she was trapped in an abusive relationship, that Myeshia was her daughter by another man, that she'd had a baby by the current husband as a way to convince him to be more loving to Myeshia, or that they both were using drugs (Schmidt and Harriston). The testimony is a classic example of Smith calling attention to the facts—but also the emotional truth—left out by the mainstream press. And it will shock you every time you listen to it.

The Jenkins testimony is a scene of physical *and* acoustic violence that echoes perhaps the most infamous scene in antislavery literature: the description of Aunt Hester's whipping in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*. Because this scene pivots upon axes of gender, sexuality, witness, and trauma, it has played a seminal role in the debate over the testimonial nature of the slave narrative, particularly in the work of Saidiya Hartman and Fred Moten.[147] Hartman consciously omits the passage in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), in line with her argument that "the routine display of the slave's ravaged body" is complicit in "exacerbating the indifference to suffering that is the consequence of the benumbing spectacle" (Hartman 3). Moten, in contrast, quotes it at length and actively embraces the recalcitrance of Hester's screams, because for him they iterate an early instance of black radicalism couched in opacity, illegibility, and discordance.

The performance history of the Jenkins testimony shows how Smith is grappling with these two ethical claims about re-presenting black trauma. When Smith performs Jenkins for the first time at San Francisco City Arts and Lectures amidst a conversation on black/Jewish relations, the audience—and her conversation partner, Tony Kushner—are at a loss for words. Listening to it can feel exploitative, as the scene is ripped out of context: in fact, the character she performs just before Jenkins that evening is none other than Studs Terkel. But it also is one of those moments Smith attempts to assert "the real." It's as if Smith is saying, *let's talk about the reality of some forms of black life in the US.* Before the performance, Smith describes the piece as part of her "Broken Sentences" work in Baltimore prisons. She says to the audience, "None of you here seems to have any indication of a sentence breaking in reality" (Kushner and Smith 40:09). This statement doesn't call the audience's freedom into question so much as it calls attention to the conditions of abjection that make their freedom possible. Sensing an affective distance from the audience after the performance, she attempts to assure them: "By the way, I should just say that that particular woman, Paulette Jenkins, is still incarcerated. She has AIDS. And she's gone through an incredible transformation. And feels very pleased to have her story told" (Smith and Kushner 50:20). Kushner replies that he had never really seen anything Brechtian until he watched Smith perform it: "we know that Anna is in a sense mirroring this person and it becomes both an inside and outside kind of performance at the same time that's

[147] In the scene, Douglass struggles to "commit to paper the feelings with which [he] beheld" the "heartrending shrieks" of his aunt. The tension between the said and unsaid, the seen and the heard, the known and suspected, centers on Douglass' ability, or lack thereof, to represent the sound (noise) of Hester's screams.

intellectually as complicated as it is emotionally complicated in that something that one rarely sees in theater performance. And that's why I think of it is incredibly Brechtian" (Smith and Kushner 59:36). And as Smith says in her *Letters to a Young Artist*, "Being 'in and out of it, at the same time' is a sort of fundamental first exercise one should do as one develops as an artist" (Smith, *Letters to a Young Artist* 22). This paradox of being inside and outside—what Kushner labels the Brechtian capacity of her work—resonates with ethics and aesthetics of Smith's Terkelian tape recording technique. But what I find problematic here is that these artists are *making Jenkins into a metaphor* for Smith's acting technique.

In the 2000 performance of *House Arrest* at the Chicago Public Theater, Smith dramatically changes the context of the Jenkins piece, yet the ethics still feel exploitative. She places Jenkins's testimony just after a scene entitled "Baby Face Down in the Water." The scene features the Deputy White House Counsel under President Clinton, Cheryl Mills, giving an account of how US law attempts to "do right and wrong" but also tries to "preserve and protect certain freedoms." Her point is that unless you live in a state with one of these "Good Samaritan" laws, you need not assist any baby in any bathwater: "our law says,/ we're going to preserve that level of space for you" *not* to intervene. Placing Jenkins's testimony after Mills at once literalizes the ethical bind of the "Good Samaritan Law" in the example of Jenkins—who did not help her own child in the bathtub—and *makes Jenkins into a metaphor* for the paradoxes of the law.

The play then, even more uncomfortably, makes explicit the comparison between Jenkins's child and what is happening to the president. Having just performed Jenkins, Smith wipes the tears from her eyes, blows her nose, and puts on the backwards cap of photographer Brian Palmer, the photographer whose "shots" are earlier in the play sonically elided with the "shooting" of President Lincoln. Smith's own voice plays over the loudspeaker:

> ADS V.O.: Right, would you—would—did you ever think of a dilemma, the dilemma of being in this position where you could save the president's life or take the picture? Which one would you do?
>
> Brian Palmer:
> If it came down to me,
> I mean,
> I would like to think that I would—
> I mean,
> I would obviously sort of make the choice to assist a human life.
> A human, whether its' a—
> I mean, it doesn't really
> it wouldn't matter if it was the president.
> I mean,
> if it's someone getting beaten up in an alley
> and there's something I can do about it,
> I'm not going to stand there and take a picture of it. (Smith, *House Arrest and Piano* 141)

Here, Smith as Palmer is not murderous paparazzi but Good Samaritan, one who, in the face of witnessing violence, would intervene to save the president rather than "take a picture of it." Smith makes a direct comparison between what *could* happen to the president and what *did* happen in Jenkins's situation. The example thus allegorizes Jenkins's story, analogizing the

abused child to the president, the abuser to the press, and the witness to the American people. The scene encourages a kind of gross generalization of experience, even implying that Jenkins is solely responsible for her own child's murder, that as a passive listener, she *let* it happen.

The IACD production of Jenkins testimony, however, resists these attempts at metaphorizing black trauma, I would argue, by contextualizing the scene within a long history of American anti-blackness and by using the affordances of a multiracial cast wearing tape recorders. The scene of Jenkins's testimony begins with the sounds of sirens blaring. Two actors appear in the spotlight as fugitives, one holding the other in what seems like *both* an act of protection and physical arrest (Figure 4.5). Over and against the sirens, another actor sings an acapella version of The Stylistics "You Make Me Feel Brand New," a song historically resonant for incarcerated peoples.[148] The themes of fugitivity and capture are dramatized by the oscillation between noise and music. Then the soundscape becomes nearly silent; vaguely, you can hear crickets in the background, suggesting we're back in the prison yard or plantation. Then two, black female actors appear seated and facing each other, the voiceover announcing that they are both Paulette Jenkins. A black male actor who has played by this point a convict, a slave, Clarence Thomas, and Sally Hemings in drag, walks around the two actors playing Jenkins (Figure 4.6). This dramatizes the scene they are describing, of Jenkins's abusive husband out of sight yet ever-present, but it also connects the Jenkins story to the long history of sexual oppression, from both without and within the black community. Like Annette Gordon Reed and Roger Kennedy, the two women share a tape recorder; unlike them, however, they are performing one person, one recorded voice, not two. There is a conversational structure between these two actresses, as they split the lines of Jenkins's speech.

[148] As Scott Saul writes, Richard Pryor attended a show at a Lorton Correctional Facility In Fairfax County, Virginia in March 1974, and the performance was preceded an inmate singing group who sang this vairy song to the swell of applause (Saul). It may be that the double dream of the song – finding romance, being reborn as someone new – that is particular intense for the incarcerated.

Figure 4.5. Fugitives at the IACD, 1998. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

Figure 4.6. "Paulette Jenkins" at the IACD, 1998. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

After one actress describes the murder scene where the daughter hits her head on the tub, several audience members gasp, and when one actress says, "I just sat there and listened," there is a notable pause, one that in the text is labeled "(Whispering)". This "broken sentence" does not produce Terkelian revelation but instead raises that question haunting Smith's oeuvre: what are the consequences of passivity, of not reacting to violence? One could argue that there is a normative thrust to this question: that this sort of passive listening is always a form of complicity. But in this production, Smith's use of multiple actors and listening technology suggests that not all forms of passivity are the same, and that structures of activity and passivity are shot through with different power relations. Unlike the other two performances of Jenkins, this version doesn't make Jenkins into a metaphor for the paradoxes of the law or for Smith's acting techniques, but rather it explores how the paradoxes of the tape recorder can be used dramaturgically to reveal the social conditions that structure the paradoxes of black life in America. The two actors playing Jenkins are on stage, listening to *each other's* testimony, even though it is the same testimony—another version of a mirror to the mouth. The actors look at each other while they speak, stumbling over each other's words: they must act in relation to the tape, as well as to each other. The split self-mirrors moral conundrum and psychological dissociation: Jenkins is acoustically connected to and yet physically separate from the scene. Her speech is spoken but so broken that it dramatizes its resistance to being captured in any full sense. Because the actors must interact both with and against each other as well as with and against the tape recorder, and because the two characters are haunted by the actor playing the father, it seems obscene to blame this woman for the terror she feels at intervening. Mirrored by the actors who are caught in a web of mediated relations, her complicity is caught up in a web of personal drug abuse and relationship abuse, not to mention the larger web of racial criminalization and gendered subjugation in which she is entangled. Like the experience of reading Terkel's *Race*, Smith's work at its best forces us to see the public and the private, the individual and structural, as mutually constitutive. And the aesthetics of dramatized conversation perform this as well: towards the end of the scene, the two actors interrupt each other, the harmonic rhythm picking up into full-on stichomythia, the lines pinging back and forth between each other, until finally their voices have merged by the end of the scene, returning us to gospel music. While Smith herself has historically been the sole "mirror to the mouth" of her interviewees, the tape recorder becomes, at the IACD, the mirror—or rather echo—that affords one the ability to witness multiple truths at once.

In the conversation after this performance that Smith recorded on tape and was later transcribed, the Paulette Jenkins piece sits at the center of a debate between the actors over the efficacy of Smith's technique. In one instance, an observer seems to challenge Smith's approach, and a person labeled "woman"—perhaps Smith—rebuts him:

> MAN2: I don't mean it as an attack, but... one of the things that's interesting about actors having to put the earphone on... that totally goes against the moment's preparation and how actors... inhabit a role. If I have to do that, all you guys do is just open your mouth and talk. You ain't have to feel shit. Just start talking.
>
> WOMAN: Nonsense…
>
> MAN2: Well, what I'm saying is you didn't have to, but my point is that—

> WOMAN: Let me just say—
>
> MAN2: —it's a technical thing—
>
> WOMAN: Be careful how you respond... because that tape of Paulette Jenkins telling the story about her child being killed, some of you had the experience in the audition of me saying, "Would you go outside and work on this and come back in, in 30 minutes." You would come back in and you *did* feel something. It's not that you two went home and dredged up stuff. It's that you were responding to that thing the same way that people in the audience were crying last night. It isn't that you're dredging it up from you. It's that it's in the tones the person makes... our musical tones (*Transcript 3* 25).

Inside this debate over a tape-recorder technique is a debate over one the element of method acting known as "affective memory," what Smith here refers to as going "home" and "dredging it up from you." For Smith, learning the piece off the tape recorder is not mutually exclusive with feeling—the difference is about where that feeling is located; for Smith, it's in the affective, and musical, power of sound, as opposed to the actor's personal memory. In the *feeling tone.*

The actors are debating not just the merits of "The Method" but also the ethics of representing Jenkins's trauma.[149] One actor—perhaps Smith herself—describes how she gave the Jenkins piece to a nine-year-old boy in an audition:

> WOMAN: So, we put on the [headphones], and he does Paulette Jenkins, and he gets to the part where he's sitting... and she sobs. He's sobbing. And then he takes it off and it's over... I mean, it was in-fucking-credible. We were like... crying...
>
> WOMAN 4: How do you feel about that. What is your... how do you feel about the fact that he was able to do that?
>
> WOMAN: I think there's something about the ability of us to respond that we don't have to own what we respond to...
>
> WOMAN 5: Only nine?

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[149] One actor describes allegorizes Jenkins's testimony to the level of national character: "I mean, for me and Paulette Jenkins, the line that gets me, when she says, the night we came home, getting [drugs].... which is like that is a given. That's the given in her thing. They came home...you know, like they did that all the time. They were fucked up...And to me that's like a metaphor for this whole piece...where are we? Where are we? What are we under the influence of... What's the anesthetization that's gone on from getting drugs...That's what this country's consumed with. I found that in that thing to be such an incredible moment and a metaphor for where are we. Are we fucked up in a room with the baby?" Another actor describes how Jenkins's the testimony differs from Jenkins the actual person: "When I just try to describe her to Karen, when we first started working on her last year, I describe her as a very beautiful woman. Then I took Karen and another actress who is also beautiful like Karen to meet her. We walked in and I saw her and I saw [her], and I was like, What was I talking about? This woman has been completely marked by her fate, but I didn't see it until I, because I was so inside of her version of herself that I wasn't seeing who she was. Last night was more of being able to see who she really is, and that's also a part of what we're dealing with. As actors, that's so hard, to grapple with the monster." It's interesting here how the body is to wear the marks of fate; the implication is that the voice somehow lost that history.

> WOMAN: But he's only nine.
>
> WOMAN 5: But the fact that he's just a nine-year-old?
>
> WOMAN: Of course, he doesn't have a way of configuring the story for what it really means.
>
> MAN: How important is it really to understand what mechanism… it's just, you know, that the mechanism exists, that turns it into theater. (*Transcript 3* 26)

What's distinct about the IACD production of *House Arrest* for Smith is that the experience of wearing headphones on stage creates a unique form of possession, and that this can be felt regardless of the actor performing it. Yet you can intuit, in the broken speech of the transcription, the lingering discomfort with this idea among actors. When actors wear tape recorders onstage and reflect on it, they make listening perceptible, but they also make Smith's method—the preparatory work as well as the complicated ethics involved—more perceptible too.

If one were to watch *House Arrest* from the vantage of a traditional dramatic structure, the climactic moment would be the scene when Smith inhabits Bill Clinton. This interview was a career defining moment for Smith:

> It was just me, the president, and my tape recorder. I was later told that this was unusual. He is seldom left unstaffed, and they normally also do their own tape recording if he is being recorded... Clinton was playing a whole different type of music... I wasn't there to indict the man. I wasn't there to expose him. I was there to listen to him, and to try to get him to talk to me... I had to do a very intense kind of listening to absorb it all. My tape recorder would never absorb this. Technology makes flat renderings, and it requires that we deliver a flat performance... It would be healthier to create a technology that allows us to be as big, as heroic as we are. (Smith, *Talk to Me*)

Smith is clearly thinking about the aesthetics of the tape recorder here: What does it capture? What does it leave out? Interestingly, in the IACD production, the Bill Clinton scene is the only moment when Smith is onstage *and* the only performance of a contemporary figure in which no tape recorders are present. Nevertheless, her performance makes manifest what is left out of Clinton's speech: sexual exploitation, slavery, incarceration. Smith does this by staging two female actors—herself and a dancer—as two types of technologies, one the recorder and one the record. For Daphne Brooks, echoing Sylvia Wynter, the "technology" that is black female performance is an oppositional force:

> To be both record and recorder means not only to unsettle the terms by which we understand Man, it also signals the ways that Black women artists generate and store counterknowledges to those who deny their humanness altogether. (D. Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution* 32)

If the title of the "For Colored Girls" panel was an allusion to Ntozake Shange, this climactic scene is the actual choreopoem: the actor who played Hemings and Lewinsky and Clinton breaks out of her dress, manages to thwart the paparazzi, and begins to improvise a dance behind Smith

playing Clinton. In staging the intersemiotic translation of speech to dance, the character who plays Hemings seems to embody Clinton's rage against the press and (what he believes to be) the unjust accusation. Most of the time, the dance is a straight interpretation: in that way, we might read this as a precursor of Key and Peele's anger translator routine.

But the dancer pauses whenever Clinton's speech hiccups: that is, she brings Hemings's historical (and theatrical) silence into conversation with Clinton's pauses, suggesting—again—that the black woman's body is both the medium and the message of the president's claims about truth and power.[150] And because this dancer has also played female characters who have been subject to the sexual exploits of male, presidential power, this isn't strict translation: those other characters flicker in the background of the dancer's interpretation, like records of past injustice. At times, this critique becomes explicit, as when Smith as Clinton says, "I'm fine," and the dancer starts to crawl across the stage in a reverse crabwalk. In these moments, the dance has an ironic relationship to Clinton's speech, suggesting that to "go beyond" the tape recorder is also to "speak back" to the transcript, albeit through gesture and interpretive dance. What we have then is two actors, one acting as the "recorder" of the president's speech and the other as the "record" of what consolidates and contests presidential power.

One of the difficulties of watching *House Arrest* is that you must make concatenations across history. Like a series of rapid Terkelian digressions, it's much less immersive than Smith's other plays. This is certainly why contemporary critics like David Mermelstein didn't really know what to do with it:

> It remains unclear whether Smith, both writer and director of this overstuffed potpourri, is capable of turning her work into something even moderately coherent, which the present production currently isn't... What for instance does a mother's grief at allowing her husband to beat their daughter to death have to do with Thomas Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings? And why contrast a Lincoln-Douglas debate with comments by Michel Foucault?" (Mermelstein)

But what Mermelstein—and numerous other critics at the time—couldn't see was that these questions about presidential power, sexual exploit, and incarceration are deeply intertwined. As Cornel West says in the post-show conversation at the IACD performance, the play reminds us of "the ways in which precious democratic principles are predicated on undemocratic realities." The 2019 backlash against the publication of Nikole Hannah Jones' *The 1619 Project* reminds us that American society is largely still resistant to facing this paradox.[151] But in 1998, Smith demanded, with the presence of a multiracial cast, her conversational dramatic form, and the use of Brechtian estrangement, that these issues cannot be separated. In a way that anticipated *Notes from the Field* (2018), where a video camera on stage offered an immanent critique of the mediatized violence in our time, the tape recorder in *House Arrest* worked as dramatic prop. But it was also an ethical, even spiritual, tool for structural analysis, drawing out various disjunctions

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[150] Perhaps this something of what Fred Moten means when he writes elliptically: "Bill Clinton enacts modes of behavior that are tied both rightly and wrongly to the image of black women and that are, by way of the critical force of performance, radically misappropriated by black women….Bill Clinton is a black woman. Bill Clinton is not a black woman" (Moten 150).

[151] Jones describes this backlash powerfully in the "Preface" to the 2021 published edition: "The linking of slavery and the American Revolution directly challenged the cornerstone of national identity embedded in our public history, the narratives taught to us in elementary schools, museums and memorials, Hollywood movies, and in many scholarly works as well" (Hannah-Jones xxv).

across form and content—between tape-recorded fidelity and presidential infidelity, vocal fugitivity and the capture of enslavement and mass incarceration. As one actor puts it in the post-show dialogue, “I really felt like we were in the presence of a kind of communal ritual, and that this was by virtue of channeling all these people, a kind of communal exorcism” (Tape 3, Page 35). The IACD production teaches us about Smith’s own method even as it makes what might seem a value-free mechanical technology a space of moral action. As Terkel says of Huck, and Smith of Terkel, it teaches us to listen with a conscience.

Tail Out: "Genuine Conversation"

In a 1995 conversation with Studs Terkel on the host's famed WFMT radio program, Anna Deavere Smith described her acting technique as deeply influenced by the famed director William Ball, founder of the American Conservatory Theater:

> When I studied with him…he taught us something called heroics, in which we took Shakespeare…and it wasn't just the words themselves, but it was how your body was with the word, how your voice was with the words, and you would have sort of your voice teacher and your movement teacher and your text teacher pulling at you, this sort of this great triangle. And that made me understand that the word, the word as it is uttered, becomes the center of performance. (Smith and Terkel 6:18)

Because Smith's rhetoric about the performative utterance is so defining of her aesthetics, typical readings of her work tend to focus on a single word, and then abstract from that single word into a larger claim about the politics and aesthetics her work.[152]

It's a method that is certainly repeatable with *House Arrest*. In all versions of the play, for instance, Smith parodies Jefferson's attempts at racial mastery in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Infamously, he attempts to defend white supremacy on aesthetic terms.

> The first difference that strikes us is of color—a difference fixed in nature...And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusion of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which cover all the emotions of the other race? (Jefferson 145)

Unlike the alternating "red and white" stripes of the American flag, black people's perceived inability to blush permits "no visible register of emotions" (Fliegelman 192). The result are numerous racist inferences: the physiological claim that black people somehow do not feel emotions; the epistemological claim that black people are "inscrutable"; and the political claim that black people, "in their blackness, violate an aesthetics of variety...that same variety that is the touchstone for Jeffersonian liberalism" (193).

When Smith performs this excerpt in the 2000 performance, she hilariously has Jefferson scribbling his racist equations on a blackboard, therefore dramatizing their very inscrutability (Figure 4.7). At the IACD version, the Jefferson character gives a meta-theatrical slide show where the black actors of the play are Jefferson's examples of inscrutability (Figure 4.8).

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[152] For instance, Debby Thompson looks closely at the speech of two characters within Smith's production of *Identities, Mirrors, and Distortions*, the experimental piece that preceded *Fires in the Mirror*: academic Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and the playwright George C. Wolfe. Both "break speech" when talking about race: Rosenberg argues that race is social construction, saying, "How do you find—how do you define race?"; while Wolfe makes the claim for an oppositional Blackness, saying, "I am not gonna defend the the the the the uh uh define uh my Blackness according to your whiteness" (Thompson 136). In exploring the differences between "finding," "defining", and "defending" conceptions of race, Thompson concludes that "racial identity, in Smith's piece, is much more of an embattled site for the Black theater artist than it is for a white academic…At the same time that it is politically progressive for a white woman to consider that race may be a trope, it is politically progressive for a Black man to argue that Black is" (136).

In both cases, Smith changes a crucial word: “that immovable veil of black which cover all the emotions of the other race,” becomes “that immovable veil of black which cover all the *motions* of the other race.” In changing “emotions” to “motions,” she calls attention to the performative aspect of identity so crucial to her aesthetics. As Henry Louis Gates put it, Smith was the very “paragon of casting beyond color” by the end of the decade (Gates, *The Chitlin Circuit* 44–55), and her imperative to see “identity in motion” was a performative analog to Stuart Hall’s notion of cultural identity as “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’” (Hall 70). Though Dorinne Kondo has argued that the collaborative nature of Smith’s work in the process of its production espouses a politics of affiliation that challenges power free notions of conversation, *House Arrest* is also arguably an attempt to hold onto the Jeffersonian politics of variety, even as it shifts the aesthetics of variety from white skin to the multicultural voice. This is perhaps one reason why her work feels so representative, today, of 90s multiculturalism.

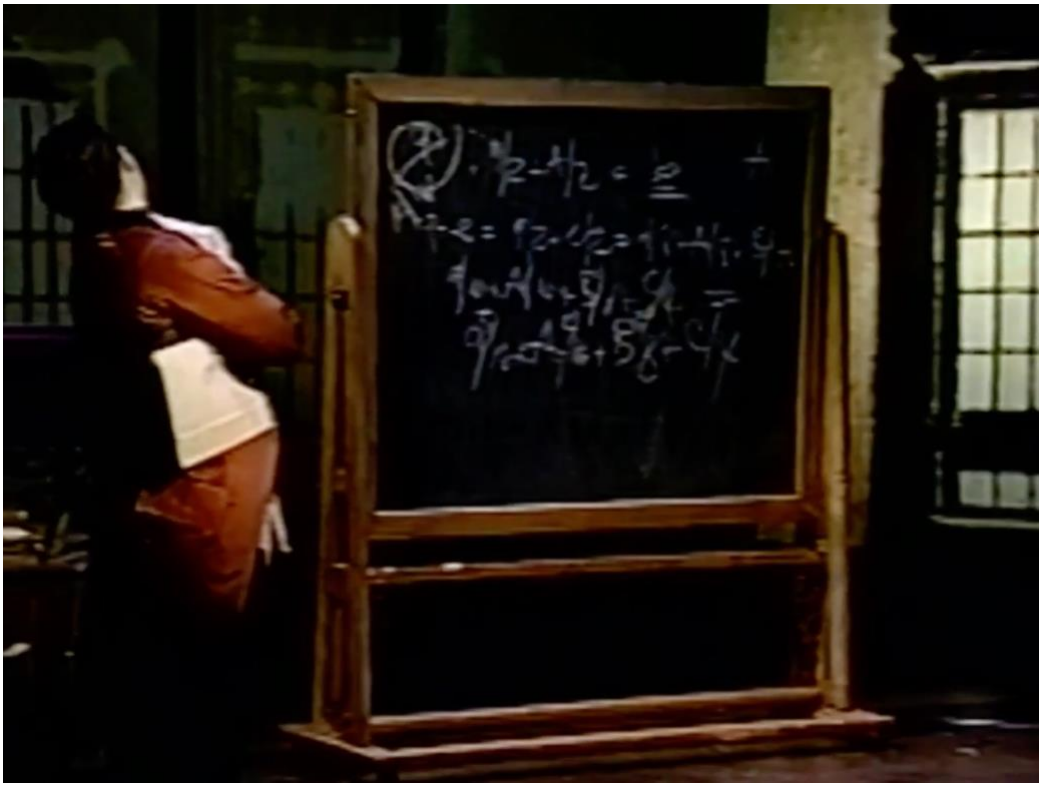

Figure 4.7. Smith as Jefferson at the Public, 2000. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

Figure 4.8. "Jefferson" at the IACD, 1998. Courtesy of Anna Deavere Smith.

Though close reading single words of "broken speech" and then abstracting to a theory is one method of interpreting Smith's work, I've also tried in this part of *This Feeling Tone* to employ a different approach by attending to a crucial historical and aesthetic relationship that made Smith's work possible. Smith draws not only on her theatrical training and her cultural background, but also upon Studs Terkel's conversational praxis, one that has roots in the performative history of Jewish ethnography and that ambivalently embraces the tape recorder as central to ethnographic practice. My main argument was that Smith makes Terkel's conversational praxis more perceptible, and the result is not only a revolution in documentary theater in the early 90s but also the invention of "headphone theater"—a means of making the technical mode of production of her work perceptible to audiences. The tape recorder becomes a fourth constraint within the "great triangle" that Smith describes above--"your voice teacher and your movement teacher and your text teacher pulling at you"—even emblematic of all the other constraints together. But in embracing Terkel's conversational practices, Smith deliberately employed the paradoxes of tape technology to critique of the paradoxes of American society. What made the IACD production so unique, I hope to have shown, is how it situates both "the media" *and* technological media at the center of this question of identitarian—and specifically national—performativity. If cultural identity is, as Stuart Hall describes, "the name we gave to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past," Smith was attempting via Terkel's ethnographic method to tell different stories about Americas past, and thus offer new versions of American cultural identity (Hall 70).

Smith and Terkel's conversational praxes also offers a kind of shadow history to the genealogy of American Performance Studies as we know it today. As Shannon Jackson writes, "One way to resituate [the] two-pronged story of a late twentieth-century formation is to cast Performance Studies as the integration of theatrical and oral/rhetorical traditions" (Jackson, *Professing Performance* 10). The latter tradition begins in Chicago in 1914, and its ascendence is

concomitant with Terkel's popularity across the airwaves.[153] His conversational praxis, I believe, anticipated famed Northwestern University scholar Dwight Conquergood's belief in an "ethnography of performance":

> Conquergood began to encourage students to conduct cross-cultural interviews as the basis for their performance work. The process of interviewing and reperforming an Other was thus positioned as a pedagogical means of confronting difference and defamiliarizing one's sense of self…For Conquergood, and many other rhetorical performance studies scholars and students, the dilemmas of ethnography intimately paralleled the dilemmas of performance" (Jackson, "Rhetoric in Ruins" 143).

Conquergood's method eventually became itself an ethical framework for considering "performance as a moral act," one that positioned "dialogical performance/genuine conversation" at its center (Figure 13). The use of adjectives like "dialogical" and "genuine" might strike us as politically banal today. But like Terkel and Smith's use of "authentic," these words have deep roots in the ethical and embodied tensions of performance practice, as well as the experience of living Jewish and black diasporic lives. What makes Smith and Terkel's ethical framework I'm calling "listening against capture" different from Conquergood's, I believe, is the way it explicitly situated the paradoxes of the tape recorder as central to this ethical practice.

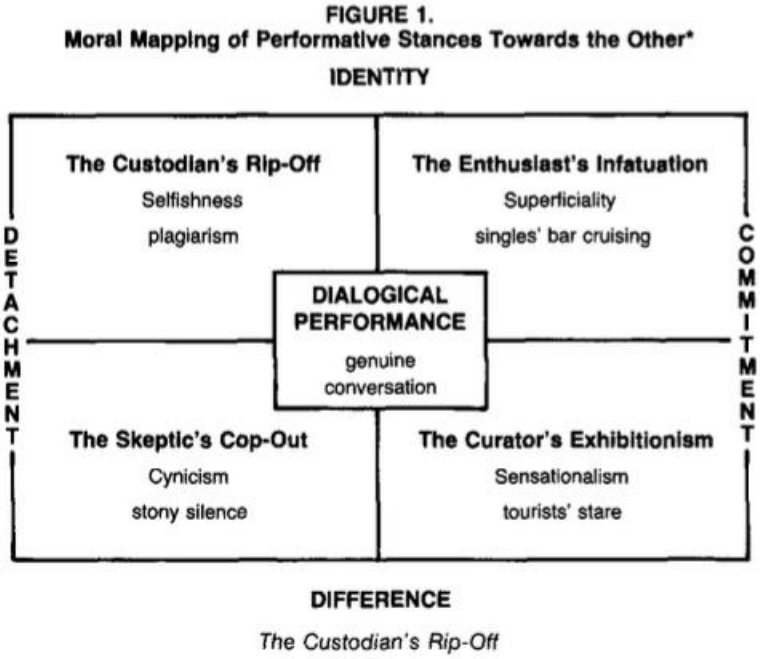

Figure 4.9. Dwight Conquergood's "Moral Mapping of Performative Stances Towards the Other" (Conquergood 5)

[153] Jackson says that in 1914 a National Council of Teachers of English subgroup entitled "Oral English" formed the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, eventually changing its name to the National Communication Association

Recording technology has a long, perilous history in the history of ethnography, historically deployed as the solution to the problem of disappearing cultures. As Brian Hochman writes in his study of salvage ethnography:

> The project of cultural documentation created pressing ethnographic needs that audiovisual technologies seemed uniquely fit to satisfy…During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries…encounters with race and cultural difference actually helped to construct the authority of new media technologies…Race produced media, even as media produced race." (Hochman xxiii)

Technology also provided the solution to the problem of representing sonic practice, and specifically black performance, in writing. As R.A Judy writes in his study of Alan Lomax's recordings of the buzzard lope:

> performance is choreographed according to the dictates of recording, which complements the ethnological story that is not addressed to the Singers, or even in conversation *with* them, but at the "broader audience" for whom the Buzzard Lope is presumed to be something precious in its archaism.…The ethnologist collector has true knowledge of the authentic form and lines of transmission, which are preserved through her constituting the archive, and then providing masterful analysis of its contents. (Judy 235)[154]

By embracing the paradoxes of the tape recorder as a performance tool—even a co-performer--Smith and Terkel countered this ethnographic tradition with a "counterethnography" that drew on both black and Jewish traditions.[155] While their theories of listening resisted the legacy of Jeffersonian elocution that produced submissive auditors and colonial mimics, their Brechtian stance toward recording technology--"Being in and out of it, simultaneously" –allowed them to call into question both the objectivity of the ethnographer and to resist the claim that recording technology could be any reliable, or ethical, solution to the problem of cultural preservation.

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[154] Smith, especially, refuses the implied distinction between the performer's "t*echnē poiētikē"* and the ethnologist's "*epistēmē*," whereby the former was only decipherable by the latter (Judy 238). Smith, I believe, Signifies on the white ethnographic tradition by way of Terkel's ambivalent embrace of technology. That is, she is engaging in her own choreography of ethnography, and not offering the tape recorder as an objective sort of relation of positive mimesis, but as another prop within the dance of the relations between the know-how of the interviewed subjects and the episteme of the interviewer. In Judy's language, she is interested in "the de-commoditizing semiosis of flesh" (245).

[155] The concept of "counterethnography" is most clearly developed by Julian Levinson in relation to his theory of the Jewish short story: "I proceed by offering two models of conceptualizing the Jewish story, models that in turn call for very different hermeneutic strategies. The first can be called the reflection or ethnographic model. It looks to stories for a summation or reflection of a set of values, attitudes, predilections, and sensibilities that are understood to epitomize the collectivity. The second focuses on the dynamic encounter between teller and audience, an encounter that is often forgotten but is, after all, the sine qua non of storytelling. This model, which can be called an interrogative or counterethnographic model, moves into territory staked out by psychoanalysis and reader response criticism. It understands stories as a dynamic process involving a liberation of fantasy and sometimes its demystification, a playing out and vicarious fulfillment of desire as well as a psychic jolt, leading, possibly, to a self-reckoning" (Levinson 288).

In closing, it's worth noting that Smith is not the only black, female artist to consider revising the Terkelian corpus. In a series of podcasts from 2018, poet and sociologists Eve Ewing went back into the Studs Terkel archive at WMFT to re-narrate—to re-sound—several of Terkel's interviews with celebrated cultural figures. There's a fascinating moment in the second episode of "Bughouse Square" that centers around the issue of cultural appropriation. Ewing focuses in on a 1961 interview between Terkel and Jewish children's author Shel Silverstein, and she isolates a specific moment when Silverstein says he's often heard young, white teenagers in Greenwich Village playing songs about being in a chain gang. Terkel says, "Well, don't you think it's good that they sing [at all]?" and Silverstein says, "No I think they should shut up. I think they should shut up and sing somethin' that more fits with what they know" (Ewing and Terkel 7:14). Ewing links this moment to her own experience: she describes how she wrote a poem that many teachers taught in their classrooms, and that she has had many students write to her to ask how she pronounces the poem. She laments that these students think that there is one right way to pronounce the poem when, in fact, by virtue of the very fact that you are someone different, it will never be the same. They are misled, she argues, by an aesthetic theory that suggests it is even possible to take on a voice of someone else, but also an ethics that suggests this is something worth doing in the name of reproducing the art out loud. For Ewing, this is not only a problematic ethics, but a blinkered aesthetics—you never actually can pronounce the way another will pronounce it, so why pretend that you can? "It's important for us to know that if you're going to be an artist, your job is to tell the story that only you can tell, that nobody else will ever be able to tell as well as you because it's your truth, rather than commodifying and appropriating someone else's story" (47:36).

I highlight this moment because it hits right at the aesthetics, politics, and ethics of Studs Terkel and Anna Deavere Smith's relationship. By the mid 1990s, Smith was at the center of debates over cultural appropriation and authenticity, specifically within discussions about colorblind casting.[156] I think Smith would largely agree with what Ewing has to say about cultural appropriation, and thus with the sentiment of Silverstein's rant. And yet, her artistry is somewhere between Ewing, Silverstein, Terkel, and those white kids that Silverstein is describing. Smith's method is not about taking the possessions of others but about *being possessed*. As Brandi Wilkins Catenese has powerfully written, Smith's work was transgressive not because it produced an ideology of colorblindness (as espoused by Robert Brustein) or one of racial essentialism (as espoused August Wilson), but because it exposed the invisible workings of racial privilege and racial trauma that structure lived experience of Americans. It's her Terkelian stance--of providing a conversational forum for that voice to be heard in a way that it has never been heard before--that is where at least part of her artistry lies: in an outward facing act of amplification, of calling attention to the uneven distributions of power in claims about cultural appropriation *and* cultural authenticity.

[156] After the year-long debates in the pages of *American Theater* between Robert Brustein and August Wilson, Smith called a public conversation between them onstage at the Theater Communications Group meeting in January 1997.

PART THREE GEORGE C. WOLFE AND TONY KUSHNER

Prelude: "The Whole World Trembled"

"Seems to me, I haggled too long." These are the heavy words that Mother Courage, the titular character from Brecht's 1939 play, whispers just after her youngest son's death becomes inevitable. Written in the same year that Nazi Germany invaded Poland, the play begins more than three hundred years earlier in 1624, when the Protestant King of Sweden invaded Catholic Poland during the Thirty Years War. An undaunted Anna Fierling traipses across borders and battlefields with her dilapidated wagon and three children, selling wares to both sides (hence the nickname Mother Courage). Often read as an allegorical figure for the complicity of the petty bourgeois during the rise of Hitler, Courage is caught not only between two armies but also between "survival and profiteering" (Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory" 89). By this crucial moment at the end of Scene 3, Courage has lost her eldest son Eilif to the Polish recruits and failed to meet the ransom after the capture of her youngest, Swiss Cheese. While the Catholics want two hundred florins, she won't settle for any more than one-hundred and twenty: an amount that already risks foreclosing on any future profit-making. The scene ends when Mother Courage is asked to identify Swiss Cheese's body but refuses to do so, so as not implicate herself or her mute daughter, Kattrin.

It's a famously affecting moment, not just because of the tragedy but also because of the staging. Just after her economically tinged lament, Brecht writes that "Drums are heard in the distance...Courage remains seated. It gets dark. The drumroll stops. Then it gets light again" (Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* 51). Beyond lighting and sound effect, Brechtian acting techniques, too, are used to convey the depth of emotion: in a 1957 Berliner Ensemble performance, Helena Weigel channels the controlled rage of this mother into the raising of shoulders, the arc of spine, a tilted head, and a Guernica-like mouth agape (*Mother Courage and Her Children* 1:15:36) (Figure 5). Across all of twentieth century theater, Weigel's "silent scream" is perhaps the most well-known Brechtian "gest," what Elin Diamond helpfully glosses as "a gesture, word, an action, a tableau by which…the social attitudes encoded in the playtext become visible to the spectator" (Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory" 89).[157] In a world defined by transition—from pre-modern to modern, from medieval to mercantile, from a "Christian ethos of redemptive suffering" to a "Hobbesian war-of-all-against-all world" (Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* vii)—rhythms of lighting, sound, silence, and embodied gesture speak where Courage dare not.

[157] In "On the Use of Music in Epic Theater" (1950), Brecht writes that a "gestic" theater affords the audience the ability to "[imagine] either a different set of political and economic conditions under which these [characters] would be speaking differently" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*). As Kushner notes in his 1995 interview with Carl Weber, Brecht is slippery about the exact meaning of "gestus." For them, it corresponds to a "visual motif" that threads throughout the narrative of the play (C. Weber 73), in which case, Elin Diamond's notion of "Mother Courage snapping shut her leather money bag after each selling transaction in Mother Courage" would be a more apt example than the silent scream (Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory" 89). In the Kushner/Wolfe production, Streep jiggles her change purse instead of snapping it.

Figure 5.1. Helena Weigel (famed actor and Brecht's Jewish partner) in a 1957 production of *Mother Courage* (*Mother Courage* 1:15:42)

When Tony Kushner and George C. Wolfe collaborated on the production of *Mother Courage* at the New York Shakespeare Festival in 2006, the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were in full headwind. But unlike recent productions of *Mother Courage* or even Wolfe's 1990 staging of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Kushner and Wolfe largely resisted making overt gestures to the contemporary moment. Still, they left their signature styles on the play. For Kushner, Brecht's German always had a Jewish overtone to it, a "domestic sort of clarity" he finds akin to Spinoza, Bloch, and Arendt (C. Weber 69).[158] Kushner's translation of Brecht's approximation of 17th German aims to amplify the "conversational flow" of the language, to draw out the Jewish, gallows humor through the rapid oscillation between Latinate, Anglo-Saxon, and Yiddish vocabulary:

> The jokes in the play are amusing but not ha-ha funny in the original. I've made them more ha-ha funny…Laughing out loud…knits an audience together. It's a moment when the audience gets to aggressively assert its claim on the space, against what's going on onstage. It's noisy and big and you can see the actors react to it. (Kalb)

Wolfe also aimed to bridge the distance between audience and character, albeit through his directorial style. Like the world of *Mother Courage,* Wolfe made the fourth wall of the Delacorte Theater broken: the entire stage was surrounded by a pit of mud in which actors enter, exit, roll upon, dip their hands into, and even smear their faces with. When Swiss Cheese's body is hauled

[158] According to Carl Weber, Brecht wrote *Courage* while in conversation with Walter Benjamin during his exile in Denmark, and *Mother Courage* offers what Kushner calls a "Benjaminian vision of history" (C. Weber 82). Kushner's translation of the participle "gehandelt" as "haggled" at the end of Scene 3 instead of Willet's "bargained" supports what Kushner calls another German-Jewish "similarity": "Germans and Jews are at least willing to talk about haggling" (C. Weber 78).

off stage, Wolfe and composer Jeanine Tesori orchestrate an audible, chilling scream by Kattrin against a soundscape in which "the whole world trembled," as if a thousand bowling pins have fallen at once.[159] And when the drumroll signifies the death of Courage's (Meryl Streep) son, the lights never come up: "After she is denied Swiss Cheese's body, I had a tightspot stay on Meryl's face the entire time while the scene transformed behind her…and the [next] scene pops up…she has not left that moment" (*Theater of War* 56:10). Though they may not be Brechtian "gests" in traditional sense, these experiments with the rhythms of language and staging have a political and social purpose: to show how an individual is haunted by structural oppression, but also to engage, even implicate, the audience in that haunting.

The New York Shakespeare Festival production of *Mother Courage* closed to mixed reviews, but it also significantly closed the third and final collaboration of Kushner and Wolfe. The two first worked together when *Angels in America* arrived on Broadway in 1993 and again through the development and production of *Caroline, or Change* (2001-2003). Like the other figures in this dissertation, they are hardly uncelebrated, yet the aesthetic resonances of their collaboration have yet to be considered in the context of larger performance, media, and aesthetic histories. In what follows, I return to these two earlier productions which, like *Mother Courage*, dramatize how individuals are haunted by grief and yet struggle to exist within oppressive structures of society. Most critics, and even Wolfe, agree that Kushner's greatest theatrical topic of interest is the interplay of historic and personal change.[160] But while criticism of Kushner's plays tends to emphasize his individual genius or his well documented collaborations with Oskar Eustis and Kimberly Flynn, we'll find repeatedly that Wolfe not only changed these plays but mobilized blackness—black bodies, black history, black sound and literal darkness—on stage as an oppositional force within them, albeit with mixed effects. At its most generative moments, the collaboration yielded artworks that updated not only Brechtian but also Hurstonian theories of rhythm for a modern audience, offering modes of aesthetic experience that only theater can conjure. But the history of Broadway is characterized to some extent by Jewish Americans producing, writing, ventriloquizing, and directing black lives, and Kushner and Wolfe's collaborations both complicate and perpetuate that history. In the capacity that they collectively envision the stage as a space for diasporic dissensus in a US context, their work dramatizes how historical power relations haunt the aesthetic affinities between the black and Jewish traditions, both at the level of process and product.

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[159] Kushner's language here, not a translation but an addendum to Brecht's scene description, has a distinctly biblical valence. See Psalm 114:7, where the root *hul* in the line "מִלִּפְנֵי אָדוֹן חוּלִי אָרֶץ מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלוֹהַּ יַעֲקֹב" (Before the Master, Whirl, O Earth, before the God of Jacob" is often translated not only as "whirl" but as "tremble." See also the midrashim on the revelation at Sinai.

[160] "Tony's stories are all about loss and change," Wolfe said in 2004 (Lahr and Wolfe 48).

Chapter 5: When Brecht and Hurston Met: Diasporic Rhythms of *Angels in America*

Some background for the uninitiated: *Angels in America* is a two-part, 8-hour epic play that Kushner began writing in 1987. Though it went through various revisions and productions, its most typical iteration takes place over the diegetic time period between October 1985 to February 1986. It features eight actors and three intertwining narrative threads: the dissolution of the partnership between Louis Ironson, an Askhenazic law temp, and Prior Walter, a WASP-y trust fund queen, because of the latter's AIDS diagnosis; the end of the marriage between Joe, a closeted homosexual Mormon and his valium addicted wife Harper; and the descent of the career of Roy Cohn, the infamous right-wing lawyer of the McCarthy era, due to his own secret AIDS diagnosis. The play also features three other minor characters: Joe's Mormon mother, Hannah Pitt; Belize, Prior's black friend and Roy's nurse; and the Angel, who descends to give Prior the prophecy of "stop moving." Prior refuses this "Anti-Migratory Epistle," instead asking for "more life." It's a plea that testifies on behalf of the voices of the gay community—and more largely, a liberal pluralist multiculturalism—that was threatened not only by AIDS but by an increasingly eschatological form of Reaganism.[161] Bearing the mark of Caryl Churchill's influence, all eight of these characters double and triple, often bending genders and defying the laws of physics, appearing and disappearing as other, more peripheral characters in the play.

By the time *Angels* came under Wolfe's direction on Broadway in 1993, it was already the most anticipated play in a generation.[162] But it wasn't finished. While the first part of the play *Millennium Approaches* was more or less intact, the second part, *Perestroika* had yet to be fully drafted (Kushner claims it still isn't). Wolfe's influence on the 1993 production was thus largely defensive: to ward off the powers that be and allow Kushner time to finish the script. "I think so much of what I did on Part 1," Wolfe has said, "was keeping the hype out of the room and letting everybody play and discover" (Butler and Kois 177).[163]

Wolfe was on the ascent by 1993: he was widely in demand and already engaged to direct Jose Rivera's *Marisol* in Hartford that season. So when asked why he chose to accept Kushner's invitation, Wolfe offered personal and political motives:

> There's a sort of cultural apartheid that exists in New York theater, and…really heavily on Broadway, that…if you're a person of color, you direct plays by people of color, and that's the way it is. And that had been my history. And it wasn't like a punishment…because I was really interested in exploring the complexities of my culture. But I found it very revealing how much I had bought into the play because I'm ambitious…So when I saw this play in Los Angeles, not for one second did it enter my

[161] The play was written and staged at various critical stages of the AIDS epidemic. By the Broadway premier, over six million people had already died from AIDS globally. *Angels* is still largely seen as the *most* overtly political play about AIDS after Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985).

[162] It first garnered international acclaim when *Millennium Approaches*, part one of the two-part play, appeared at the London National Theater in January of 1992. The hype was helped in no small part by Ian McKellan calling it the "hottest ticket" in town during his Tony Award acceptance speech that summer (Butler and Kois 126). The following November, the Mark Taper Forum staged a version of the entire play, and by the time the run had concluded at the Taper on December 6, 1992, it was—by all cultural and legal measures—Broadway bound. *Millennium Approaches* then ran at the Walter Kerr Theater on Broadway from April 26, 1993, while *Perestroika* was in workshop at NYU that same month. After "Millennium" won "Best Play" at the Tony Awards that June, both parts of the play opened in repertory from November 1993 until closing on Broadway on December 4, 1994.

[163] At one point, Wolfe helped delay the production to the tune of losing 40K a day so that Kushner could finish revisions on the script. "George protected me like nobody's business," Kushner said (Butler and Kois).

> mind that I would direct it and when people would say "you should direct it…you could be wonderful with this play," I went, "Yeah, right. Yeah, right." And so that was fascinating to realize how much I'd imprisoned my own mind." (*Interview with Tony Kushner and George C. Wolfe* 2:40)

Wolfe had not even considered that he could be capable of directing *Angels* because *black directors don't do white people's plays*.[164] Though historical and contemporary American theater was very Jewish at the regional and Broadway levels, having a black director work on a white, Jewish playwright's work was essentially unheard of.[165] Born in segregated Kentucky in 1954, Wolfe considers himself a part of the first generation of southern black artists to benefit from the civil rights movement, often borrowing from Audre Lorde's lexicon and calling himself an "integration warrior." Though he found *Angels "*rhythmically more than anything else Jewish," he saw the enormous historical importance of taking on *Angels* as consistent with his larger efforts to "invade white institutions" (Rowell 605–08).

But when Wolfe says the play is "rhythmically more than anything else Jewish," he calls attention not only to the political but also to the aesthetic stakes of the play changing under his direction. The comment, as I take it, doesn't simply just point to any specific rhythm in the play that we might call "Jewish" or "Black"—although, as we'll see, there are a few musical and conversational moments in the 1993 production that are worthy of exploring in relation to these identity markers. Rather, Wolfe's comment offers a vocabulary—specifically, the term rhythm—for understanding how this collaboration engaged the interplay of different aesthetic traditions. Of crucial concern for me is how Wolfe and Kushner's collaboration inflected the rhythmic aesthetics of Zora Neale Hurston and Bertolt Brecht.

Rhythm is of course a perennially difficult term to parse. The OED dates the word's earliest English usage back to 1560 in the context of prosody, defining it as the "measured flow of words…forming various patterns of sound as determined by the relation of long and short or stressed syllables in a metrical foot or line" ("Rhythm").[166] These patterning of syllables and stresses is of utmost concern for Kushner and Wolfe collaboration; as the latter said in an interview with John Lahr, "[Kushner] is a poet and a dramatist…there are rhythms in [his language] that I think have their own power that can take hold of an actor, and can take hold of

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[164] In a 1993 interview with Charles Rowell, editor of *Callaloo*, Wolfe offers a single exception to this claim and references the work of Lloyd Richards, who he says, "unsuccessfully directed one or two white plays"(Rowell 608).

[165] Many of the people that served as the backbone of the regional theater movement—Gordon Davidson at the Taper, Zelda Fichhandler at the Arena Theater in Washington D.C, and Joseph Papp at the Public Theater—were Jewish. Moreover, out of the three main organizations that control theaters on Broadway—Jujamcyn, Nederlander, and Shubert—two of them have origins in Jewish ownership. According to Stuart Hecht, the Jewishness of Broadway is especially prevalent in the genre of the American musical, where "from the 1910s on, America's Broadway musical was developed primarily by Jews" (Hecht 1). Hecht also writes that "except for a few notable exceptions (George Cohan, Victor Herbert, and Cole Porter), the creators of the modern musical were all Jews" (33). But in its use of single names for "creators," this claim obviates the collaborative nature of theater making which is central to this chapter, and it also elides the long history of the black American musicals, which, like musicals written by Jews, also emerge out of the minstrel and vaudeville genres. The first is widely believed to be *Clorindy: The Origin of the Cakewalk* (1898)). Thematically, black and Jewish coexistence had a long history on Broadway, at least since Lorraine Hansberry's *The Sign on Sidney Brustein's Window* (1964) and Harold Da Silva's *The Zulu and The Zayda* (1965).

[166] Music theory also used the word as early as 1576, concerned more with beats rather than words, stresses more than syllables, measures instead of lines. By the eighteenth century, the word had taken on more general meaning: "regularity in the repetition in time or space of an action, process, feature, condition, event, etc."

an audience" (Lahr and Wolfe 2). But there are larger, political stakes to the use of the term rhythm as well, with and beyond the patterning of syllables. As Michael Golston has written, the emphasis on "measured flow" and "regularity" had a host of political meanings in the early twentieth century, where cross-disciplinary research explicitly aimed to regulate and measure human bodies. These pseudo-sciences that linked rhythm to human physiology had their aesthetic antecedents in antisemitic tracts like Wagner's "Jews and Music" (1869) and achieved their most devastating political expression in a German context under the ideology of Nazism, which mobilized "fears about the effects of…Jewish and Negro rhythms in the Aryan body politic" (Golston 37).[167] Reactionary European and American modernism largely inherited these harmful, discriminatory discourses of rhythm. Loos, for instance, distained ornament as inessential to the rhythmic integration of a work of art, couching his disdain in homophobic language: "Absence of ornament has brought the other arts to unsuspected heights. Beethoven's symphonies would never have been written by a man who had to walk about in silk, satin, and lace" (Loos)[168] Pound, another opponent of ornamentalism, understood rhythm as the link between a hidden, organic, primitive depth and a more rational, volitional surface. The centaur his premier image for this dialectic, "rhythm acts as a suture between these opposing forces" (Golston 109).

But the work of Hurston and Brecht offered parallel modernist theories of rhythm that celebrated the minoritized, resisted the language of aesthetic integration, and, in Hurston's case, embraced the ornamental. In "The Modern Theater as Epic Theater" (1940), Brecht famously distinguishes his work from the Wagnerian *Gesaumtkunstwerk* and calls for a "radical separation of the elements," a theater that emphasizes "montage" over "growth," and "curves" over "linear development" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 37). In reflecting on his poetic and prose style in "On Rhymeless Verse with Irregular Rhythms" (1939), Brecht again praises asymmetrical rhythmic forms, stating that "our ear is in the process of being physiologically transformed. Our acoustic environment has changed immensely" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 119). He cites jazz and American cinema, but he also dwells on the irregular rhythms of working people whose language he hears in the street—"a band of proletarians," the Berlin "newspaper-seller" (118). At the base of Brecht's embrace of the contemporary and his resistance to a formalist iambics is his theory of the gest: "it must be remembered that the bulk of my work was designed for the theatre; I was always thinking of actual delivery. And for this delivery (whether of prose or of verse) I had worked out a quite definite technique. I called it 'gestic." (116). A famously elusive term, "gestic" comes close in this essay to meaning language that rhythmically accentuates the action or emotion it describes:

> The Bible's sentence 'pluck out the eye that offends thee' is based on a gest - that of commanding - but it is not entirely gestically expressed, as 'that offends thee' has a further gest which remains unexpressed, namely that of explanation. Purely gestically expressed the sentence runs 'if thine eye offends thee, pluck it out' (and this is how it was put by Luther, who 'watched the people's mouth'). It can be seen at a glance that this way

[167] For Wagner, the "rhythms and melismata of synagogue song usurp" the "rhythms of our [German] folk song and folk dance" (Goldman and Sprinchorn 56).

[168] Loos misunderstands the role of ornamentation in Beethoven's music. As pianist and scholar Charles Rosen suggests, Beethoven's work shows considerable acceptance of ornament as structural device. Whether through the variation of motifs or through the structural use of trills, Rosen argues that "the most typical ornamental device is turned into an essential element of a large scale structure" (Rosen 1201).

> of putting it is far richer and cleaner from a gestic point of view. The first clause contains an assumption, and its peculiarity and specialness can be fully expressed by the tone of voice. (117)

Brecht inverts the syntax, putting "pluck it out" at the end of the phrase and thus placing an emphasis on the action. And that rhythm is most effective when it reflects the way people actually speak ("the people's mouth"). In his latter *Theaterarbeit* (1952), Brecht theorizes rhythm beyond the expression of an individual emotion or action and into an acting technique that affects the structural rhythm of a play: "Among numerous other items of the actor's technical equipment…is the ability to take one's partner's tone. An actor needs to take the lines served him like a tennis player taking a ball. This is done by catching the tone and passing it on, so that rhythms and cadences develop which run through entire scenes" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 244). Brechtian acting technique is often couched in the language of alienation and estrangement. But Brecht was also deeply interested in how the rhythmic coherence of an artwork was created conversationally and horizontonally—horizon-tonally, if you will—between the actors. What we have here are not the dialectics of surface of and depth of Wagner and Pound but the movement of a tennis ball, back and forth, gaining social meaning over time. Brecht's theory of structural rhythm was a formal analogue to his political goal of challenging the Aristotelian aesthetics of revelation. Brecht famously wanted to use theater to move beyond the revelation of a character's inner self and instead reveal the social conditions that structure that inner self. And his writings that invoke that term rhythm suggest that theatrical dialogue was not just the expression of individual action or emotion but a rhythm—a collectively powered feeling tone—that structured an artwork.

Though Hurston shared with Brecht a concern for how rhythm conveys the sociality of experience, what sets her aesthetics apart from his are the "will to adorn"—"skillful imitations that pleasure both the 'entire self' and the community similarly watching and doing" (Diamond, "Folk Modernism" 117).[169] Though she often embraced white audiences doing the "watching" (unlike her contemporary Du Bois, and yet like her legatee George C. Wolfe), it was an explicitly black folk culture that was most often doing the "doing." Her work, especially her theatrical output between 1925 and 1944, was a distinct challenge to the prevailing dramatic forms that even by the 1930s could not envision black life outside of the "veil of the minstrel show"(Hurston, *Zora Neale Hurston: Collected Plays* xxi). Rhythm was an important term for her distinguishing indigenous black art forms from white caricatures of black life. In her oft-cited essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1934), Hurston described how irregularity—or "asymmetry"—was particular to black aesthetics:

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[169] Hurston, unlike Brecht, was not explicitly interested in Marxist dialectics nor in the formation of a socialist subject. Her prose work arguably reflects her embrace of a "radical individualism" (Hurston, *Zora Neale Hurston: Collected Plays* xxvii) and is often "far more interested in human motivation and the idiosyncrasies of character as manifested in language-use than in what we might broadly think of as 'the nature of the Negro' or the struggle for civil rights"(Hurston, *The Complete Stories* xii). But one of Elin Diamond's main points, I believe, is to suggest that it is characteristic of Hurston's gestural drama to offer audiences a way to "see a collective past in the present of performance" (Diamond, "Folk Modernism" 126). In a recent conversation, Roshanak Kheshti also compellingly suggested to me that the individualist take on Hurston politics and aesthetics is a distinctly page-based one that elides her central work as an ethnographer.

> the presence of rhythm and lack of symmetry are paradoxical, but there they are. Both are present to a marked degree. There is always rhythm, but it is the rhythm of segments. Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry. (Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*)

In her essay "Ritualistic Expression from the Lips of the Communicants of the Seventh Day Church of God" (1940) Hurston celebrated a notion of rhythm that never settled into a notion of aesthetic wholeness, even in its choral context:

> This Seventh Day Church of God… is a revolt against the white man's view of religion… Its keynote is rhythm…Every song is rhythmic as are their prayers and their sermons. The unanimous prayer is one in which every member of the church prays at the same time but prays his own prayer aloud…(Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*)

Black oppositional aesthetics, in Hurston's view, combined black individual expression within a black communal structure. In "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals" (1934), this happens even at the level of the individual voice:

> Negro singing and formal speech are breathy. The audible breathing is part of the performance and various devices are resorted to adorn the breath taking. Even the lack of breath is embellished with syllables. This is, of course, the very antithesis of white vocal art. European singing is considered good when each syllable floats out on a column of air, seeming not to have any mechanics at all. Breathing must be hidden. Negro song ornaments both the song and the mechanics. (Hurston, *You Don't Know Us Negroes*)

Like Brecht, Hurston was deeply interested in resisting the aesthetics of integration, of situating the individual character struggle within collective social structures, and in calling attention to the "mechanics" of individual expression—the human labor behind the magic. Unlike Brecht, however, Hurston's project was not to pivot generally against Aristotelian dramatic theater but to resist white, European aesthetic values. In her literature, she invented various forms of free indirect discourse to accomplish these ends; in her theatrical work, it was her "gestural" aesthetics, or the "rhythmic embodied language of the segment and the break" (Diamond, "Folk Modernism" 117).[170]

As an inheritor of both Brechtian and Hurstonian aesthetic traditions, Wolfe was often faced with the problem of representing black interiority in forms—in *Angels,* the Brechtian epic, or in *Caroline, or Change,* the American musical—that historically ignore it, but also of showing the social conditions that shape such notions of interiority.[171] Rhythm is a particularly important term for Wolfe in doing this double work, both as writer and director: he has said that "more than

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[170] Gates goes beyond suggesting that Hurston introduced free-indirect discourse to African American literature, and argues that her invention was a collective one: she "uses free indirect discourse not only to represent an individual character's speech and thought but also to represent the collective black community's speech and thoughts….This form of collective impersonal free indirect discourse echoes Hurston's definition of a 'mood come alive'" (Gates and Mitchell 230–31).

[171] It is widely known that Kushner's work up and through *Angels* was deeply influenced by Brechtian aesthetics. But Wolfe has said that by the early nineties, his "two main influences were Brecht and the minstrel show" (*Signature: George C. Wolfe* 6:56). Speaking of the minstrel show, Wolfe says "I choose to find a lot of the rhythms in minstrel show structures because I'm very fascinated by that structure" (*[Interview with George C. Wolfe*).

anything else, I write from rhythm" (*Signature: George C. Wolfe* 22:54); that in his work he's "very interested in how history and rhythm reflect one another" (*[Interview with George C. Wolfe* 58:13); that "rhythm is something I obey more than music" (Savran, *The Playwright's Voice* 345).[172] And it's a term definitively anchored in Hurstonian aesthetics. Among many of Wolfe's innovations in the nineties was to revive Hurston's work, and her rhythmic aesthetics, for the postmodern stage. In the introduction to *Spunk* (1990), Wolfe's dramatization of Zora Neale Hurston's short stories, he elaborates on how this rhythmic sense goes beyond a strictly musical context and into the linguistic registers and embodied gestures of the play's characters:

> It is suggested that the rhythms of the dialect be played, instead of the dialect itself. The former will give you Zora. The latter Amos and Andy. The emotional stakes of the characters…should not be sacrificed for 'style'. Nor should style be sacrificed…The preferred blend is one in which stylized gesture and speech are fueled by the emotional stakes (Hurston and Wolfe).

Rhythm, here, represents the linkage between emotional circumstances and the embodied stylization of characters' lives, but also the distinction between cultural celebration and cultural appropriation. In this way, Wolfe was keenly attuned to the ways in which individual emotional expression was mediated by social conventions—a central dialectic that links Brechtian and Hurstonian aesthetics. But he was distinctly interested, following Hurston, in celebrating black indigenous culture and of parodying white cultural forms that caricatured black life.

When Kushner was asked in 1996 about his artistic relationship with Wolfe, it wasn't Brecht or Hurston, nor any explicit clash of "Jewish" and "Black" rhythms, but a shared sexual identity that mediated their racial and ethnic differences:

> Any culture that develops from oppression has a strong relationship to irony and humor, true of Jews, of African Americans, of gay people...Both George and I are gay, and [we use] the gestures of camp culture to explore serious themes seriously…" (*Signature: George C. Wolfe* 26:30).[173]

The "gestures of camp culture" may refer to the shade thrown within the play—what actor Reg Flowers (who played Belize in 1994) calls the "fun, snappy stuff" (Butler and Kois 302). But what concerns me here is that shade and camp are not simply gestures but also rhythms: they are queer practices that traverse the dialectics of surface and depth, stillness and motion.[174] A 1990 draft of *Angels*, in a parenthetical scene description, directly invokes these tensions:

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[172] Wolfe's own embodied speaking voice, for choreographer Hope Clarke, is a rhythmic event: "George doesn't have conversation like you and I would... his mind is going so fast…he does his hands…Energizer bunny...he's thinking" (*Signature: George C. Wolfe*). Wolfe's voice is lovingly parodied by Anna Deavere Smith in *Fires in the Mirror* (1992).

[173] His comments also concerned Wolfe's visual sensibility: "I chose him because his apartment looked good. Directing is about good taste." (Signature 26:30).

[174] Sontag famously describes camp as "decorative art, emphasizing texture" and "sensual surface" in her famous 1964 essay "Notes on Camp" (Sontag). *Angels* is arguably the paradigmatic aesthetic convergence of "homosexual aestheticism" and "Jewish moral seriousness" that Sontag saw as historically concomitant in that essay. But as Namwali Serpell writes, these camp aesthetics of surface and depth are not equivalent but adjacent to the aesthetics of "reading," "drag," or "shade"—practices indigenous to black queer culture: "to drag is to run horizontally but also

> Scene 5: Prior and Belize in Prior's hospital room. Several days after admittance; Prior is very sick but improving. Belize has just arrived. (NOTE: Prior and Belize are ex-lovers and very good friends. Their customary conversational mode is camp, but it is very relaxed, unforced and gentle—real feelings should always be clear as day underneath the queenliness (Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia On National Themes, Part One: Millennium Approaches (Fifth Draft)* 78).

The language of comic surface and emotional depth that Kushner writes into this scene description resonates, I think, with Wolfe's description of rhythm in his adaptation of Hurston, although it pertains not to an intra-racial but an interracial—and explicitly queer—diegetic context.[175] This camp "rhythm" also refers to a conversational dynamic that defined the production process:

> KUSHNER: George didn't dramaturg in the sense of going through the script line by line, talking about serious structural things. We would just have these conversations here and there. We'd have dinner. I'd go to his place after a day's rehearsal.
>
> WOLFE: There were all these beds that were around—Prior's bed, Roy's bed—so Tony and I would, like, lie in bed and we'd talk about the script.
>
> KUSHNER: And he just talks. He throws out little remarks that are completely brilliant and push you in one direction or another. (Butler and Kois 202)

Camp—a social register in which queer, black and Jewish difference interact through embodied vocalization—is just one of the many "dialects," as John Lahr writes, that defined the development and production of *Angels* in 1993.[176] But shifting our analysis from "dialect" to "rhythm" offers a way to consider patterns of sound, light, structure, and feeling without reference to, or reification of, any perceived linguistic norm. Moreover, rhythm offers us a way of re-reading the play by the light of Wolfe's directorial influence. Rhythm is sound and pattern, time and space, but also method. A rhythmic reading of *Angels* that we pay attention to how the dialectics of surface and depth not only resist theories of aesthetic integration but are also haunted by issues of racial inequality and cultural appropriation. My main question in this chapter is thus: how did Wolfe, whose aesthetics were distinctly shaped by his influence of Brecht and Hurston, reshape *Angels* when it came to Broadway in 1993?

In what follows, I explore how Wolfe defamiliarized the play rhythmically at the level of scene, lighting, sound, and character. I move through these four aspects, exploring rhythm in its

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slightly vertically, to undulate unexpectedly, to be hindered or staggered, to scrape under or wrinkle over a level surface. To drag a text would be to trace a movement along it, to touch it without plumbing its depths, but also without the naiveté implied by a strictly "straight" or "surface" reading" (Serpell, "Notes on Shade").

[175] This resonance stems as much from a shared aesthetics of rhythm as it does from the fact that they both had done each other's jobs: Kushner had trained as a director and Wolfe as a playwright. In a 1994 conversation with Kushner and Robert Marx, Wolfe says that "because we had each done what the others job was…you couldn't completely be annoyed by what the person was saying, because you knew that was a thought process that was informing it… I think our conversations were informed by an understanding from the vantage of the director or from the writer what was going on" (*Interview with Tony Kushner and George C. Wolfe* 7:27).

[176] Lahr wrote in his 2004 profile of Kushner, "It told its story in numerous dialects—camp, black, Jewish, Wasp, even Biblical tones" (Lahr, "Tony Kushner's Political Theatre").

more literal sense—the stressing of syllables, the patterning of light—but also more figuratively to index the uneven undulation between various surfaces and depths that flicker through the structure and thematics of *Angels*. Through a comparative analysis of available typescripts and archival footage, I argue that Wolfe always attempted to highlight the emotional stakes of the play's characters, but also that the 1993 version inflected the theatrical and historical conditions under which the play was produced: a black, gay playwright directing a "Jewish fag play" on the Great White Way (McLeod and Kushner 150). What I'm calling "diasporic rhythms" are those moments when the collaborators aestheticized the thematic of migration without ever losing sight of the emotional stakes of a scene. Diaspora, for these two artists, is as much about movement as it about being moved.

Structural Rhythm: Split Scenes and Conversational Form

One well known rhythmic change in the play under Wolfe's direction is that the second half *Perestroika* expanded from three acts in the 1992 performance in Los Angeles to five in the 1993 Broadway staging.[177] That's not to suggest that the 1993 version was much longer—indeed, many of the scenes match up in terms of chronological order, and Wolfe also helped streamline the ending of the play by cutting the haunting (and hilarious) "Roy Cohn in Hell" scene.[178] Yet, this formal change created a kind of fluidity, one in which the plurality of voices had more room to interact with each other, to "breathe," as Stephen Spinella put it (Butler and Kois 200). For example, the 1993 version of the script shifts the scene in which the Angel delivers the "Anti-Migratory Epistle" to Prior from the first act to a second act entirely devoted to this visitation. Moreover, this "Epistle" scene is no longer presented within the diegesis of the play but rather nested as a retold memory inside a conversation that Prior has with Belize, the two characteristically camp conversationalists. The change effectively creates a split scene between a present conversation and retrospective experience: a form of simultaneous staging that increased from the 1992 version of *Perestroika* to the 1993 version by a ratio of (at least) three to one.[179] The split scene formally dramatizes a simultaneous temporality that is at the heart of the play's Benjaminian thematic, a historical materialism in which a past event is relived in the context of its present retelling.[180]

But these changes in structural rhythm were not simply a formal intervention: they were deeply connected to the emotional stakes of the play and the context of its production. Take this "Epistle" scene: in the earlier 1992 production, Belize and Prior are sitting outside a funeral for a mutual friend who died of AIDS. They get really nasty, telling each other repeatedly to "eat shit and..." But if the conversational mode of camp is one in which the true feelings of care exist underneath the insults, those feelings come through much stronger in the 1993 version. There, we get more from Belize, the play's only black character, who not only reacts viscerally to

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[177] This five-act structure in fact preeded he 1992 Taper Forum version but was brought back for the Broadway run.

[178] The oral history emplots this anecdote into a conversation between Wolfe and stage manager Mary Klinger:

> Wolfe: I was sitting there going, "He's dead! He almost died three times!"
> Klinger: I think George was instrumental in making that [ending] more succinct.
> Wolfe: "LET HIM BE DEAD!"(Butler and Kois 207)

[179]The relationship between the labeling of a split scene and the use of it on stage is consistently unstable in the 1993 production: even though there are only three split scenes labeled as such in the 1993 script (against one in the 1992 script), I've noted many more in the recording of the 1993 production, including this more conversational depiction of the "Epistle" scene.

[180] This transtemporal form of storytelling was also central to Wolfe's then recent hit, *Jelly's Last Jam* (1991).

Prior's retelling of the Angel visitation ("There's no Angel. You hear me?...I can handle anything but not this happening to you."), but also resituates the Angel as a "cosmic reactionary" ("don't migrate, don't mingle, that's. . . malevolent, some of us didn't exactly choose to migrate"). The scene of Jewish prophecy thus becomes nested inside a scene of black listening, which at once increases Belize's emotional depth and at the same time reinforces his subordinate position as listener. This an example of what I'm calling a diasporic rhythm that emerges in the 1993 production, when the thematic question of both voluntary and forced migration is translated into formal movement—here, the use of a split scene. One might consider the changes in the "Epistle" scene a result of Kushner's solitudinal genius, as Oskar Eustis (characteristically downplaying his own collaborative role in the development of the play) describes in relation to Kushner battling the script in the 1992 production: "[Kushner] did the most brilliant thing I've ever seen a writer do: He took this difficulty of making these characters change and he made it the content of the play" (Butler and Kois 131). But the changes in the content and the form of the play as we know it today are also deeply connected to the social structure of collaboration between Wolfe, Kushner, and the rest of the team in 1993. Kushner remembers some of these conversations about the "Epistle" scene specifically:

> And we were all sitting around saying, 'What is this epistle and what should it be?' and it was this great conversation where I think, and we finally cracked it, and I went home that night, and did these little changes, and it came back. And that and then from that point on, audiences started to get it in a way that they hadn't been before." (*Interview with Tony Kushner and George C. Wolfe* 42:07)

Ellen McLaughlin, who played the Angel, remembers it a bit differently:

> When we started rehearsals [for Perestroika] in 1993, Tony brought in several rewrites, including one for "The Epistle." I assume what he was trying to address was the length of it, but he basically put two scenes together and had much of what the Angel was saying overlapping with another scene, which meant that my language, which is so poetic, dense and, well, weird, didn't have a chance and could often literally not be heard. I started to panic, not because I didn't think I could do it, but because, as was seldom true of Tony, I thought the rewrite was not a good one, that we would lose the scene entirely and the Angel's message would become drowned-out gobbledygook. I didn't want to approach Tony because I knew the kind of pressure he was under and assumed that he wouldn't want to hear this from me. So on the next day off I said to George, "Can I just come over to your place and talk to you about the problems that I'm having?" He was sympathetic and agreed, and the rewrite was rewritten—several times over the course of rehearsal and previews, as it turned out—but the overlapping went away and I was deeply grateful for that (*Interview with Ellen McLaughlin* 12.48).

What Eustis says of change in the 1992 version might be said of "conversation" in the 1993 version: the increased use of split scenes and the nesting of stories within conversation between characters to create a transtemporal form of storytelling were at least two ways in which Wolfe's directorial style left its mark on the structural rhythm of *Angels*.

Visual Rhythms: Aestheticizing the Void

Creating a more conversational, structural rhythm to the play was also directly connected to Wolfe's signature visual style. "Light is kind of the medium that he works in," Kushner told me in an interview in summer 2022. Wolfe's self-described obsession with lights had a radical influence on changes in the 1993 set design (*Interview with Tony Kushner* 16:04). In the 1992 LA production directed by Oskar Eustis and Tony Taccone, a large Federalist structure stands upstage, one that the Angel (Elin McLaughlin) famously breaks through in the final scene of *Millennium Approaches*.[181] But in the 1993 production, Wolfe and scenic designer Robin Wagner largely set the play in a "void," emphasizing that this piece is "73 themes and 73 different locations…it has to be very fluid." (Figure 5.2). It's common for plays to start in the void, but Wolfe made it the default visual context in the 1993 production of *Angels*.[182] Indeed, the first lines of a typescript for "Perestroika" dated September 14, 1993—unlike any other typescript that precedes it—are: "Scene One: In the darkness a voice announces" (1). "The production got literally darker," Kushner said to me, and yet this scenic design also created a definitive "toughness…it was very New York."

Arnold Aronson, in his essay on "Design for *Angels in America*," argues that Wolfe "opted for neutrality" in setting the play in a black void (Aronson 215). But as Dionne Brand teaches us, no language is neutral, and certainly not Wolfe's visual language. The use of literal blackness to create ambivalence—both fluid and tough, nowhere but "very New York"—bears the unmistakable mark of Wolfe's contemporary aesthetic. For instance, the first sentence written in Wolfe's *The Colored Museum* (1986) is a single-word scene description:

> (Blackness. Cut by drums pounding. Then slides, rapidly flashing before us. Images we've all seen of African slaves being captured, loaded onto ships, tortured. The images flash, flash, flash. The drums crescendo. Blackout. Then lights reveal Miss Pat, frozen. She is black, pert, and cute. She has a flip to her hair and wears a hot pink mini-skirt stewardess uniform.) (Wolfe, *The Colored Museum* 1)

As the rapid movement between slave ship and modern air travel might suggest, Wolfe is concerned, across much of his work, with how the history of American slavery haunts the present. *The Colored Museum* considers this haunting largely by satirically interrogating cultural stereotypes, or what Wolfe describes elsewhere as "reexamining the silhouettes" (Callaloo 605). But the visual language of chiaroscuro is not euphemistic: it points to Wolfe's frequent use of lighting to dramatize transtemporal and racialized haunting. Wolfe's Broadway breakthrough, *Jelly's Last Jam*, begins not explicitly in the middle passage but in another middle:

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[181] For a depiction of this set design during this scene at the 1992 Mark Taper Forum, see the photograph at the top of the article "Los Angeles Is Changing. Can a Flagship Theater Keep Up?" at https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/theater/center-theater-group-los-angeles.html. (Nagourney)

[182] The stage was, of course, not literally a void. In 1993, the stage was often framed with six blue panels that are moved between scenes to suggest different locales via the projection or absence of light. And the void is much more pressingly felt in *Perestroika*, which Wolfe had much more control over than *Millennium*.

Figure 5.2. The Angel (Elin McLaughlin) visits Prior (Stephen Spinella) against the void. Courtesy of Joan Marcus.

> Lights reveal a large door, carved with Yoruba motifs, floating in the middle of a black void. The stillness is cut by the faint sound of piano riffs, dissonant yet melodic. The door to the void slowly opens and light from within casts the silhouette of a man in a top hat and cut away. (Wolfe, *Jelly's Last Jam* 3)

Throughout *Jelly's,* the Legba-like "chimney man" leads the deceased Jelly Roll Morton between this bardo state and the various historical places of his musical and romantic history, so as to remind him of the black roots he famously eschewed (Figure 5.3). Both *The Colored Museum* and *Jelly's Last Jam*—although very different formal experiments—together intervene in a long history of black theater that attempts to "more accurately reflect the variety of African American history and identity" by signifyin(g) on notions of authentic blackness (Nelson 41).[183] With the help of set designer Robin Wagner and lighting designers Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer—all of whom Wolfe brought to *Angels* from the production of *Jelly's Last Jam*—the control of literal blackness onstage was one of the key mediums in which Wolfe sought to defamiliarize Kushner's epic.

Setting *Angels* in the default context of a black void had various, uneven rhythmic effects on the play. At times, we might describe its most pronounced temporal effect as an aesthetics of lingering. In the 1993 staging of *Millennium*, this lingering is often proleptic, when a character arrives early to the next scene and hovers in the shadowed periphery, haunting the former scene and forcing the play to transition seamlessly.[184] The default blackness of the play also allowed for various spatial hauntings across split scenes. In A2.4 of *Millennium,* for instance, Kushner orchestrates a split scene in which Louis is fucked in the Central Park ramble by a leather man (played by the actor playing Prior) stage right, while Joe and Roy talk at a bar stage left. Under Wolfe's direction, Louis' head moves from the void into a single spotlight with each thrust. The effect is that the unspoken sexual tension between Roy and Joe is made explicit: Louis' head emerges into the quality of light in which the two others sit. The void is most pressingly felt in the more Wolfe-ian influenced *Perestroika*, where lighting is used to signify not just lingering, but also overhearing. As in the "Epistle" scene where Belize hears the Angel's message both first-hand *and* as reported speech, lights suddenly emerge on a character to signify that they can hear across diegetic levels. In several moments in *Perestroika* (that I'll explore in the next section), characters even break through these narrative boundaries, attempting to speak back to those who would choose to leave them in the dark.

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[183] Following Sianne Ngai's work on nineties television, Wolfe's work disrupts the binary between what Philip Bryan Harper calls "mimetic realism" (that representation "faithfully mirrors a set of social conditions" one might call the authentic "black experience") and "simulacral realism" (that "an improvement of status can come from mere representation") by "foregrounding its own artifice" (Ngai 104). And Wolfe's critique of authentic identity went beyond blackness: "We're all mutts," he often says in interviews in the 1990s (Savran, *The Playwright's Voice* 341).

[184] At the end of A1.2 of *Millennium,* for instance, the mere mention of the word "wife" by Joe summons Harper in the shadowed periphery of the stage, anticipating the coming scene between her and Joe. The 1993 version filmed by the Theater on Film and Tape archive at the NYPL rapidly cuts back and forth between the lingering Harper and the waning main scene with Joe and Roy: it's one moment when the theatrical effect of lingering anticipates, even demands, a filmic effect.

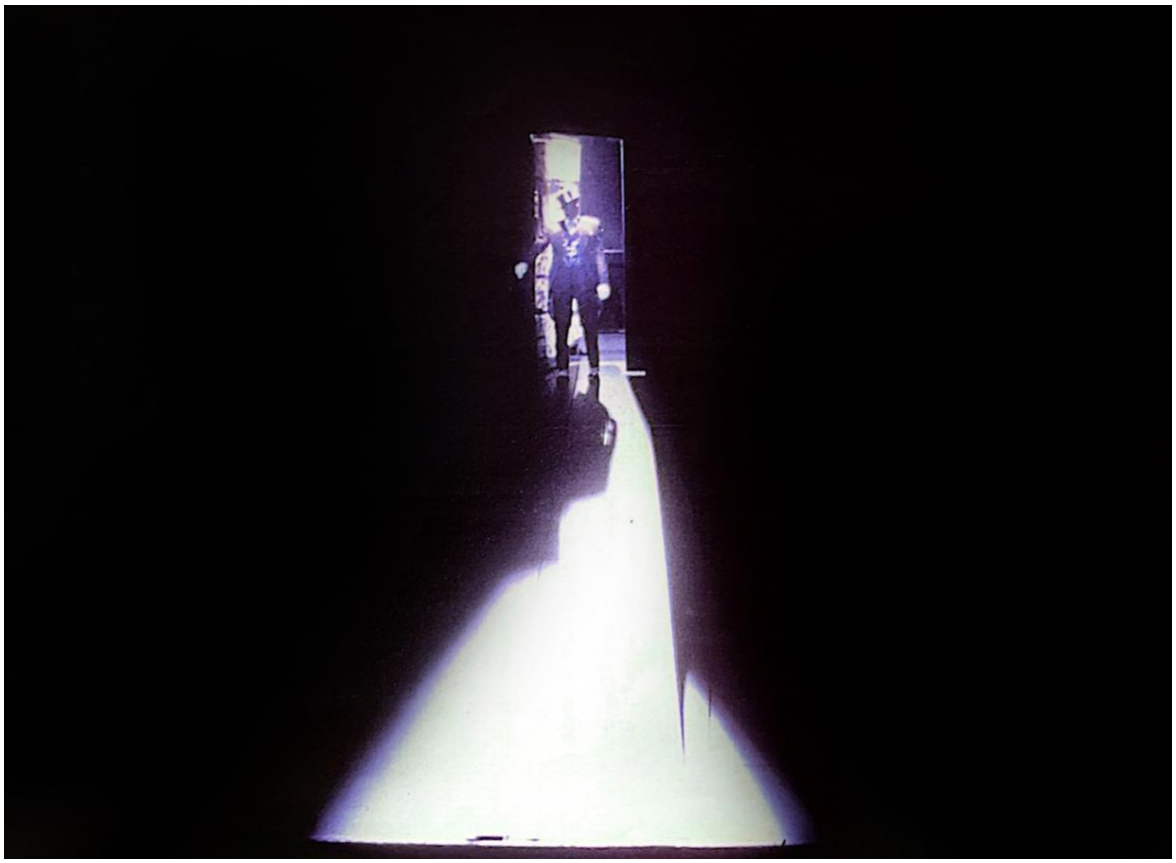

Figure 5.3. The Chimney Man (Keith David) in *Jelly's Last Jam*. From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 46, Folder 4.

There are emotional and political stakes to this metaleptic use of light: so much of the way that Kushner writes about homosexuality and illness in the play traffics with the (now dated) language of depth.[185] What Wolfe achieves through the orchestration of chiaroscuro is to take Kushner's essentialism and create a spatial and visual logic out of it, where the darkness signifies not just night, the closet, and unknowingness, but knowledge, possibility, and witness. The effect is a vivid tension between the characters but also a tension between how queerness and illness function in the staging of the play: as ontology—something you are—and performativity—something you iteratively (un)do. There's also a definitive ethnic and racial politics that emerges in the production as a result of Wolfe's experiments in the semiotics of light. Classical theatrical terminology is rife with seemingly apolitical language about the medium. As Martha Nussbaum writes in *The Fragility of Goodness*, for instance, the word "katharsis" historically means "clearing up" (Nussbaum 389). In both the medical and ritual contexts in which Plato and Aristotle used the word, it was often "mediated by the dominant metaphors of mud and clean light" (Nussbaum 389). As Kushner implied in my interview with him, Wolfe understood these

[185] For example, Joe says to his wife about his closetedness, "Does it make any difference? That I might be one thing deep within?" (Kushner, *Angels in America* 40) And in Prior's hallucination, Harper says to the protagonist, "Deep inside you, there's a part of you, the most inner part, entirely free of illness" (Kushner, *Angels in America* 43).

metaphors to be fraught with racial meaning.[186] Moreover, they both were collaborating in a larger media context in which photographic technology was racially biased and the white skin of "Shirley cards" was the "recognized skin ideal standard for most North American analogue photo labs" (Roth 112). As Wolfe's acclaimed Jewish lighting designer Jules Fisher has described in an oral history, the theater largely automated lighting technology after 1975 (Fisher and Daniels). But a recent symposium at the Park Avenue Armory attests that a host of racial biases have continued to plague the theatrical lighting aesthetics ever since.[187]

Angels—as a play that largely focuses on the trauma of the AIDS epidemic on cis-white gay men—is hardly the test case for understanding how Wolfe used light to challenge these racial biases. But in a manner that anticipated *Caroline, or* Change, Wolfe and lighting designers Fisher and Eisenhauer, at times, experimented with lighting different races differently. In A1.3 of *Millennium*, for instance, Harper (Marcia Gay Harden) experiences her first valium-induced hallucination, and "Mr. Lies" (Jeffrey Wright) appears out of the void as a "chimney-man" like figure, backlit with red light that peers over his shoulders. Wolfe stages the scene as a seduction: the red light moves onto Harper's hair as she begins to move rhythmically, even dance, to Mr. Lies' oboe playing. After they nearly kiss, Mr. Lies, in some sort of mating gesture, draws open his black cape to reveal a map of the earth printed in white. The effect is that Harper's desire for escape from the trappings of heterosexual marriage becomes situated—through the omnipresence of red-light on a black body that emerges out of a black void—as both an interracial and an imperialist fantasy.

But it's not black skin that is most differentiated by different light, but white skin. The most consistent aesthetic difference of white light in the 1993 production is between an auburn and verdigris shading: the former signifying New York in 1986 and the latter some other, more celestial time and space. In the many scenes where Roy Cohn is haunted by the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, for instance, the lighting will shift between these two forms of white light, signifying not just two different temporalities but also two different types of white Jewishness: the one that is haunted and the one that does the haunting. Perhaps the most distinct example of where Kushner and Wolfe's aesthetics emerge is in the lighting of the very first scene of *Millennium*, when Rabbi Isidor Chelmwitz (Kathleen Chalfant) delivers the eulogy for Sara Ironson, Louis' grandmother:

> She was…not a person but a whole kind of person, the ones who crossed the ocean, who brought with us to American the village of Russia and Lithuania…You can never make that crossing that she made, for such Great Voyages in this world do not any more exist

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[186] "[George] always says this beautiful thing, I don't know, if he still says it: 'We're the people in the light, telling the people in the dark, what they need to do…And the [actors] arrive in the light from the same darkness that engulfed the audience. We're all in this…cloud of unknowing, and the work of the artist is to bring with real effort to bring knowledge into the light…but also to carve knowledge out of darkness…I'm not putting it very well. But it's a very unique thing to his work" (*Interview with Tony Kushner*). This is of course an allusion to Genesis, but it's also, as I've tried to show, related specifically to Wolfe's melancholic historicism.

[187] In a January 2023 symposium, lighting designer Jane Cox gathered four lighting designers of color to discuss race and lighting. Repeatedly, across the hour long conversation, the designers attempt to work against tropes of blue ("the one trope…nighttime is blue" (*Darkness and Light* 19:23)(19:23)), white ("there are many shades of white" (41:28); and black ("often we start with blackout…but some many different things come from there" (17:00). Channeling Ellison, Itohan Edoloyi suggests that the aesthetics of lighting design are not just about destabilizing tropes of color but also normative notions of perception: "What is really seeing?" (23:16). Wolfe's collaborative work with lighting designers has largely anticipated the explicitly anti-essentialist aesthetics of lighting designers today.

> But every day of your lives the miles that voyage between that place and this one you cross. Every day. You understand me? In you that journey is (Kushner, *Angels in America* 11).[188]

Naomi Seidman powerfully reads this speech as the moment when the play, at its very outset, introduces a "rhetoric of descent so central to ethnic discourse," one that will consistently be challenged by its content (its emphasis on relation "discontinuities" and "homosexual variety") and by its form (a female actor playing a male rabbi) (Seidman 160). Under Wolfe's direction, lighting also becomes a crucial medium to spatialize the Rabbi's words: at the moment Chelmwitz says "you can never make that crossing," a whiter light opens upon the Rabbi's face, signifying the opening of another, more celestial, register of speech. Lighting designer Peggy Eisenhauer has said that just after these words, Wolfe wanted "'the light to be going off to an old, ancient place,' so we brought up a shaft of warm, low light, like it was going into some distant horizon" (Butler and Kois 82). With the depiction of this "ancient light," the language of diaspora that is couched in depth ("in you that journey is") gets materialized, again, across the surface of the stage. Moreover, it's here that the lyrical, Jewish rhythms of Kushner's accented writing combine with Wolfe's visual aesthetic to forge a mutual, diasporic rhythmic aesthetics.[189]

Sonic Rhythms: Musicality, Telephony, Ventriloquism

The changes in lighting and structural rhythm were not unconnected to several sonic changes in the play that resulted from the 1993 collaboration as well. Reflecting upon Wolfe's directorial influence, Lin Manuel Miranda remembers its musicality: "I'd never seen anything that moved the way George's production of *Angels* moved. The seamless transitions, and a tempo and a rhythm—it felt like a musical to me" (Butler and Kois 363). Music *was* central to the production: for the most part, Wolfe used original chamber music by Anthony Davis and Michael Ward to thematically evoke suspense at moments of transition when the void was most poignantly felt.[190] But there was also a notable use of performed and recorded black music—both experimental jazz and soul—to orchestrate scenes. When Prior rejects his prophecy at the end of *Perestroika,* for instance, the sound of Dinah Washington's "This Bitter Earth" plays over the loudspeakers, specifically the lines: "But while a voice within me cries/ I'm sure someone will answer my call." The music signifies in at least three ways: it foreshadows the presence of Belize next to Prior's bedside in the coming scene; it socializes Prior's internal struggle with hearing voices as treatable by a communal "someone"; and it audibly highlights how this entire narrative

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[188] In an interview, Ellen McLaughlin (who played the Angel in 1993) told me a wonderful story this scene's importance to Wolfe: "On our first day of rehearsal for the Broadway production before the first read through, George addressed us all—as I remember it, the producers were still in the room—saying, 'This play begins with a terrible mistake. The mistake is that Louis did not visit his grandmother in the Hebrew Home for the Aged. If he had visited his grandmother, this play would not happen.' It was such an original way of thinking about the dynamics of the play and everything that unfolds in it. It's that fundamental question that the Greeks talk about so often: what do we owe to each other? And further: what do we owe to the dead?...what do we as a country owe to those who came before us?" (*Interview with Ellen McLaughlin* 3:07)

[189] Kathleen Chalfant asked me to remember that the scene with sister Ella chapter is also about movement, journey.

[190] This most notably occurs in Act 1 Scene 7 of *Millennium Approaches*, when Montserrat Caballé's aria from the finale of *Il Pirata* accompanies Prior's drag-dream, and again in Act 3 Scene 2 when Aretha Franklin's "Respect" and "Think" bookend the "Democracy in America" scene between Belize and Louis.

that centers around the hope of white suffering is made possible by the availability, generosity, and necessity of black care.

Under Wolfe's direction, however, the production also at times approached the condition of a musical. This happens in *Millennium* often at the level of a scene: in Harper's first hallucination with Mr. Lies, for instance, Wolfe sets the scene completely to solo bass and choreographs it as a dance. But in *Perestroika*, where Wolfe had a much stronger directorial influence, the structural rhythm of the play takes on the quality of a musical in its oscillation between stillness and movement. After the opening scene, in which the world's oldest living Bolshevik Aleksii Antedilluvionovich Prelapsarianov (Kathleen Chalfant) demands society stand still until it holds a viable theory of historical change, the curtain drops to the sound of crashing and gongs.[191] Every actor in the production is then revealed on stage, frozen in a kind of operatic tableau, to the sound of heaving violins and horns. In this opening gesture, Wolfe takes the dialectic of movement and stillness that is *the* central theme of the play and creates an embodied, gestural logic out of it.[192] Another tableau bookends the first half of *Perestroika:* just before the intermission, all eight actors are onstage, bringing at least four scenes together at once.[193] But the oscillation between movement and stillness takes on its most political charge at the very end of the play. There, Prior sentimentally breaks the fourth wall and addresses the crowd directly about the AIDS crisis, while the other actors behind him gradually unfreeze. Such movement from stillness allegorizes the political thaw marking the end of the Cold War. But the staging is never too far from the emotional stakes of the scene: the unfreezing foreshadows a spring in which the frozen Bethesda fountain (upon which they sit) will flow again—a spring in which Prior says he hopes to survive long enough to see.

In addition to heightening the musicality of the play through the orchestration of embodied gesture, Wolfe heightened its sonicity by theatricalizing sound technology, specifically the telephone. A1.2 of *Millennium* is when we first meet Roy Cohn (Ron Leibman) and his disciple Joe Pitt (David Marshall Grant). While Joe will later be haunted by the fact that he "sounds" gay to Louis' ears, Leibman plays the character with a stereotypical "gay voice," nearly spitting on every lisped, sibilant "s."[194] But much of the humor of the scene turns on the fact that

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[191] Wolfe, anticipating the aesthetic he uses in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog Underdog* (2001), uses footlights to give a vaudevillian largeness to the Bolshevik.

[192] As I'll explore in the following chapter, this use of stillness and motion is a related—although not entirely equivalent—dialectic that goes to the heart of the American musical tradition. Rogers, writing against "the widely held belief that musicals burst into song when words will no longer suffice to carry the emotion," argues "instead that musicals burst into song—and dance—when one *body* will no longer suffice to carry the emotion" (Rogers 5). Rogers is arguing that what is at stake when we consider the musical form is not (just) what "words can do" but what the limits of a theory of individualism can do. Wolfe's choice here, at the end of *Perestroika*, is not to have bodies break out into collective song but to collective freeze.

[193] The four scenes that come together at the end of Act 3 through the tableau in the 1993 production are: Joe on the beach, Louis on one end on the phone and prior on the other, Roy in bed with Ethel haunting, and Harper stage front with the Mormon woman, asking, "how do people change?"

[194] In his 2014 documentary *Do I Sound Gay?*, director and star David Thorpe historicizes the "gay voice" in the lineage of the "pansy" of early Hollywood film, who in his erudition, elite status, and (quite often) villainy "had the money and time to linger over things like vowels." Thorpe also suggests that "Gay voice" might tell us less about someone's sexuality and more about their personal history of affiliating with female identifying speakers. Recent research on the harmful effects of "gaydar" support this constructivist position without making what I consider to be the film's essentialist assumptions about what a "woman" is or sounds like: "The voice is not a stable marker of sexual orientation, but, rather, a versatile communication device used in a flexible way to underline or disguise the speaker's sexual orientation" (Fasoli and Maass 104). More than anything, Thorpe's documentary situates the

the telephone, not Joe, is Roy's scene partner: he punches its keys, listens to it upside down, and even dances with cord. The emotional rhythm of the scene also turns on the sounds of the telephone: the ever-increasing sound of ringing eventually erupts into a cacophony, drowning out all other sound. The telephone then becomes a crucial sound effect in the transition between A2.8 of *Millennium*, when Joe calls home to tell his mother he's gay. After she hangs up the phone on her son, Wolfe, along with sound designer Scott Lehrer, moves the dial tone from diegetic sound to extra-diegetic sound, as we move from a payphone in central park to the split scene where both relationships break open. The sound of a disconnected dial tone is then translated into a disconnected visual and vocal rhythm of these two fights, where the four actors crisscross the stage, stepping in between each other and interrupting each other's heated speech.

The rhythms of telephony—the technological manifestation of the acousmatic situation in which a voice is separated from its source—underly much of the thematic tension of the play. With disembodied voices haunting the void and a plethora of diegetic levels at play, telephones often appear on stage as a means of mediating geography and temporality. But in Wolfe's staging of *Perestroika*, the acousmatic situation that the telephone embodies becomes a live, visual and audible tension within the theater. In A1.7 of the 1993 manuscript, for instance, Kushner writes the longest split scene of the production, with Louis and Joe in bed stage right, and Harper and Hannah stage left. Kushner characteristically threads the dialogue through a single word: when Hannah asks Harper "Are you going to stay in bed forever?", the word "bed" cues the lighting to dim on Harper and Hannah and to reveal Joe and Louis in bed together. The initial effect is dramatic irony, where the audience knows what Harper does not: that Joe and Louis are fucking. But towards the end of the scene, Harper begins to linger in the shadows as the lights are up on Joe and Louis in bed, moving toward them slowly, as if she can overhear their dialogue. Just when Joe admits to not having any dreams, Harper haunts them: she jumps through the visual and sonic border of the two scenes and into their bed. While the black void of the stage functioned to create an aesthetics of lingering in *Millennium*, *Perestroika* goes further and embraces an aesthetics of "overhearing," in that characters will hear what's happening across the stage on another diegetic level, even seek it out.

The diorama scene at the Mormon Visitors Center in A3.2 explores the aesthetics of overhearing by having characters move not just through diegetic levels but also through different bodies. Here, Harper and Prior witness a dramatic retelling of Joseph Smith's journey across the United States, but Kushner frames the story about the Mormons moving across distances of space through an aesthetics of ventriloquism. The actor playing Joe (David Marshall Grant) here plays a mannequin among a family of Mormon mannequins, moving his mouth up and down as the sound of the actor's own voice plays over the loudspeakers from a recording. The effect is that you have Joe's voice split from his body at the same time that it is *partially* reattached to his body: only partially, because Joe is also playing a mannequin, who moves his mouth up and down to the sound of his own voice playing on a recording. The acousmatic split here is thus dramatized through a voice-over that compounds upon the thematics of migration (the Mormom dummies ventriloquize Jewish tropes of "wandering" and "exodus") and the liberal use of actor doublings the script *already* deploys.

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embodied voice for homosexual men not so much as an element of pride but as the site of self-hatred. The voice was often what outed gay men when they were young, so the voice eventually becomes what Dan Savage calls "the last chunk of internalized homophobia" (*Do I Sound Gay?*).

This kind of theatrical disjunction is an acoustic analog to the identity crisis that Wolfe saw at the core of Joe's character:

> [Joe's] a Negro. He's a Negro just in the sense that he is hyper-aware of how he is perceived by the "other." In my mind, the definition of a Negro is someone who is exaggeratedly aware of how they are perceived by white people, so therefore it can inhibit more organic impulses. And Joe Pitt is imprisoned in a very similar way. (Butler and Kois 143)[195]

The movement from race to sex in Wolfe's thinking here is problematic, I think, in the way it flattens the differences between racial and sexual oppression. But the staging of this identity crisis in the midst of a metatheatrical scene and against the backdrop of a black void was a way of aestheticizing these tensions.[196] The lack of Joe's "organic impulses" is aestheticized into the freezing of a homosexual, Mormon body into a mannequin, and ventriloquizing that body with his own voice.

Things get even more complicated when it's not (just) Joe's own voice that animates his frozen body: in the middle of the diorama scene, Louis emerges from the void. The scene then imaginatively—but not literally—transforms into Joe's office at the courthouse. Louis is having a crisis about the revelation of Joe's Mormonism ("Jesus, Mormons everywhere, it's like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. I don't like cults" (194)), leading Joe out of the scene and into the void. Prior screams across the diegetic level: Louis thinks he faintly hears something but can't quite grasp it. Just after a frozen mannequin takes on bodily form and walks out of the scene, the play itself risks changing theatrical form. Watching his former boyfriend walk out of a Mormon diorama, Prior is completely verklempt, yelling "It's crazy time…I feel…this is nuts. I feel…this is nuts." Wolfe choreographs this repetition as a gestural, almost musical dance, as Harper and Prior swing in their seats back and forth with their fingers pointed at each other as they experience another "threshold of revelation." In a final twist, the hallucination becomes—in classic Wolfeian fashion—a physical door. To the tune of increasingly triumphant music, Harper steps into the diorama and the Mormon woman (Ellen McLaughlin) steps out of frozen stillness,

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[195] In a documentary of *Jelly's Last Jam*, Wolfe described Morton in a similar vein: "I am not this thing, and yet I fully embody this thing…the thing we deny most is the what we really are" (Jammin' On Broadway).

[196] The aesthetics of ventriloquism also bear the mark of Wolfe's interest in Hurston. Hurston's 1926 short story "Sweat," for instance, tells the story of a washerwoman named Delia who is married to an unloyal man named Sykes. Beyond parading his lover Bertha throughout town, Sykes brings home a rattlesnake to torture Delia. One night, the rattlensnake escapes its cage, and the narrator describes Delia listening to it from the outside shed before it retributively attacks Sykes: "She mused at the tremendous whirr inside, which every woodsman knows, is one of the sound illusions. The rattler is a ventriloquist. His whirr sounds to the right, to the left, straight ahead, behind, close under foot everywhere but where it is. Woe, to him who guesses wrong unless he is prepared to hold up his end of the argument! Sometimes he strikes without rattling at all" ((Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 84) Here is Hurston's collective free indirect discourse at play, where we get the voice of "every woodsman who knows" as well as an implied social situation—the "argument"—that the rattler interrupts. What fascinates me is how Wolfe, in staging "Sweat" in 1989, explored how such free indirect style could be dramatized. In the first few scenes, Delia will speak to the narrator (named in the production as "Blues Speak Woman") or speak the narrator's words (effectively describing herself in the third person). In latter scenes, Wolfe uses various peripheral material (puppets, masks, and the audience) to represent characters; he has female characters ventriloquize male characters, and he has a collective chorus embody the snake's rattle to the underscore of music. The dramatic effect is that ventriloquism is formalized into the staging of the play; the thematic effect is that heterosexual masculinity is not just parodied itself presented as a kind of unbidden possession.

leading Harper downstage to a threshold marked by white light emerging from the void. Still mannequins possessed; diegetic levels crossed; bodies about to break into dance: throughout the 1993 production, Wolfe haunted the staged with diasporic rhythms across the mediums of scene, light, and sound.

Affective Rhythms: **Belize's Ambivalence, Rage, and Utopianism**[197]

Wolfe also defamiliarized the play's rhythm at the level of character, and specifically the relation between character and emotional expression. Because five out of the eight actors from LA were brought into the New York production, Wolfe felt generally that his job was to have the actors confront their roles anew: "They knew what they knew. And so it was my job in some respects to contaminate what they knew" (Butler and Kois 178). But this contamination happened most definitively in the characterization and casting of Belize. Who is Belize? Kushner doesn't give us much, describing him in the 1993 typescript as "a registered nurse and former drag queen whose name was originally Norman Arriaga; Belize is a drag name that stuck." Belize appears to speak fluent French, and though his name signifies a Central American nation that did not gain its independence from Great Britain until 1981, it's not clear whether his French belongs simply to drag's "girl talk," as Belize describes it to Prior in Act 2 Scene 5, or if it is a product of a possible diasporic upbringing looming in his background. The difficulty of knowing who Belize is of course stems from his status as a minor character: across 73 scene play, Belize appears in only 13 scenes as himself, and in two others as "Mr Lies," Harper's hallucinatory oboist and Antarctic travel agent. The relative silence around Belize's characterization has led many critics to criticize Kushner for his, at best, inattention, or, at worst, tokenism.[198]

Still, Belize did change under Wolfe's tenure, even if those changes failed to detokenize the character.[199] Perhaps the most notable change was through the casting of Jeffrey Wright, one

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[197] Significant parts of this section were drafted with Jared Robinson and presented in the paper "'I live in America, I don't have to love it': Belize's Ambivalence and Impossibility in *Angels in America*" at the 2018 "Black Impossible" conference hosted by Princeton's African American Studies Department. I reprint parts here with his permission.

[198] Criticism of the play figures Belize as the "moral Bellweather" (Lahr, "The Theater: Earth Angels"); the "ethical center" (Román); "the ideological point of reference for the white gay man" (Savran, "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism" 222); the illuminated functionary who "inhabits a particular position" more than a "particular character" (Minwalla). The black, gay experimental group Pomo Afro Homos perhaps captured this critical sentiment best in their biting satiric scene "Aunties in America" from their sketch play *Dark Fruit* that debuted in the summer of 1993 in Chicago—the same summer that *Angels* was running in New York. In "Aunties," Belize is one among a litany of black homosexual men from white authored shows that "gather to compare notes" and by the end of the play "turn themselves into stereotypical black mammies" (Holden). Cory Nelson has argued that Belize's tokenism is largely a result of compressions that took place before the 1992 staging. The 1991 draft of *Perestroika*, for instance, features Belize and Emily the nurse as union organizers that converse about the intersections of race, gender, and class (Nelson 128). Nelson argues that the effect is that Belize changes from a nurse who once had an overt commitment to subversive political action in the play to a nurse whose actions, "without the complicating and contextualizing presence of Emily," seem more "spontaneous than systematic"(Nelson 130).

[199] Kushner says in his '94 conversation with Wolfe that "George's influence becomes very clear in *Perestroika* when, I mean, there were changes in the character of Belize, especially, that I would never have done if I hadn't been working with George." (*Interview with Tony Kushner and George C. Wolfe* 41:03). Wolfe comments directly on this in the oral history: "It was very important for me to believe that Belize was as smart and had just as aggressive a degree of intellectual rigor as Louis did. That was very, very important to me, because I didn't just want a black gay clown" (Butler and Kois 294).

of three actors who did not continue from the 1992 production. As is typical of the identity politics of the '90s, Kushner and Wolfe were concerned with getting the right actor, not an actor whose sexual identity also matched that of the character. This, however, led to a host of problems in production.[200] But the problems were more fundamental than casting: in some sense, a white, gay, Jewish author attempting to represent black indigenous queenliness is doomed to fail, even if the attempt is to make the effeminate black man more visible in a culture that largely ignores him. This is a problem Kushner is not unaware of:

> The issue of a white writer writing a black character is so loaded. And I made mistakes when I started the play in 1988 and if I were doing it over again I probably wouldn't make him a nurse; having read Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark,* I would have avoided that. I didn't feel tremendously comfortable with the fact that I was writing a contemporary black character and I think some of that discomfort is embedded in the text of the play. (McLeod and Kushner 149)

Yet, as Vinson Cunningham has noted, the play will succeed in presenting various projections of what white Jewishness conceives of as black queerness.[201] The task, then, becomes not only to understand if and how the collaborative nature of the 1993 production intervened in the white imaginary, but also in how represented the failures of "black and Jewish dialogue," both in the performance and production of the show. These failures left their most lasting impact on the play as we know it today as they were shaped under Wolfe's direction. If any theater director had experience staging the complexities of the "SNAP! Diva," it was George C. Wolfe.[202] My claim is that Wolfe built on the silence in Belize's life to create theatrical presence within that narrative absence: to stage Belize's ambivalence to black-Jewish conversation as motivated and oppositional.

This ambivalence is on full display in the "Democracy in America" scene, when Louis and Belize meet at a diner in Act 3 Scene 2 of *Millennium*. Wolfe begins the scene with Aretha Franklin's "Think" and carefully stages the two characters unevenly against the void: Belize's back against blackness while Louis sits in front of a blue panel. If there are any Jewish rhythms in the play outside the Rabbi's speech, Louis spits them here: the language is performed with a rapidity of speech characteristic only of Kushner's own voice.[203] But rhythm isn't just about speed, it's also about time: there is a digressive, almost Terkelian, narrative structure to the

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[200] It's a larger theme across the oral history that heterosexual actors struggled to play gay characters, especially alongside gay actors. But Wright remembers this specifically in relation to his experience: "I remember at one point George saying, (George Wolfe voice:) "Jeffrey! Drag queens don't drag their feet." I said, "George, I know I'm not quite there yet. I'm not quite comfortable yet." And George said the most incisive thing to me that I still think about. He said, "I don't want your comfort. I want your talent" (Butler and Kois 182).

[201] Cunningham says, "Belize is weirdly not a token because even the white people are highly differentiated. There is a Jewish guy, and part of his deal is that he's very Jewish. There's a Mormon guy, and part of his deal is that he's Mormon and clueless. Even the white people are playing types. So you feel like he is part of this tapestry of types. There's that commonplace thing people say when discussing representation in art, that blackness is not a monolith. The play is a kind of argument that whiteness isn't a monolith, either" (Butler and Kois 296).

[202] The term "SNAP! Diva" stems from E. Patrick Johnson's 1995 sociological study of signifyin(g) in black, non-verbal communication (Johnson). The character of Miss Roj—a black, extra-terrestrial drag queen--in Wolfe's *The Colored Museum* was largely an attempt to theatrically present "somebody whom we construe [as] having no power having tremendous power" (Rowell).

[203] Joe Mantello, the actor who played Louis against Wright's Belize, says in the oral history that he asked Tony to read it out loud "just...to hear the rhythm of it," and that's how he understood it (Butler and Kois 222).

scene, a rhythm central to what Benjamin Harshav describes as "Jewish discourse."[204] In the middle of his rantings about how "America" has no racial past, Louis describes how he met a "Jamaican guy who talked with a lilt" in a pub in London, a man whose "family had been in England since the Civil War—the American one." Kushner doubles this patronizing retelling of a moment of encounter between an American secular Jew and a Jamaican in a London gay bar against the *present diasporic* encounter in a Brooklyn cafe. Whereas Louis sees his description of himself and the Jamaican man as a moment of diasporic affinity (which has occurred outside of the play), Belize sit across from him as a reminder of the impossibility of that very kind of identification inside the play. Nadia Ellis' notion of "queer diaspora" clarifies the potential in such moments of failed affinity: for Ellis, "diasporic consciousness is at its most potent when it is, so to speak, unconsummated" (Ellis, *Territories of the Soul* 3). Unconsummated argument ensues: Belize snaps, literally and figuratively, at Louis's racial insensitivity and blinkered ideal of America as perfectible in a teleological sense, saying that "black drag queens have a rather intimate knowledge of complexity of [those, meaning America's] lines of oppression." Louis' only response is to correct him, reminding Belize he is in fact an "ex-drag queen," repairing his deflated sense of the truth by seizing an opportunity to revert the conversation to facts. However, to undo even this seemingly banal recourse, Belize retorts "Actually ex-ex....*Maybe*." This "maybe" exemplifies what I'm calling Belize's ambivalence, his desire not to appear in full, not to let himself be a stable source of information about himself or for others (Robinson and Ullman). This ambivalence is itself a kind of rhythm, one most fully developed in the Wolfe production.

The concept of ambivalence is further developed in this scene when Belize matches his "maybe" with a tale of historical fiction *about* ambivalence. In the heat of argument, Louis attempts to reframe Belize's intellectual challenge through a nineties "black-Jewish relations" framework, saying "most black people are antisemitic," listing off "Farrakhan" and "Jesse Jackson," then claiming he's "ambivalent" about the rainbow coalition after Belize points out he donated to them. Kushner's characteristic range is on display as the scene switches linguistic registers from a defensive rapidity to a contemplative lyricism: Louis says to Belize he was never ambivalent about his love for Prior, claiming, "real love is never ambivalent." Belize's response is not to thwart the facts of this claim, as Louis would, but to mock his patronizing allusion to the Civil War and again emplot the current conversation into another narrative level:

> BELIZE: "Real love isn't ambivalent." I'd swear that's a line from my favorite bestselling paperback novel, *In Love with the Night Mysterious*, except I don't think you ever read it.
>
> LOUIS: I never read it, no.
>
> BELIZE: You ought to. Instead of spending the rest of your life trying to get through *Democracy in America*. It's about this white woman whose daddy owns a plantation in the Deep South in the years before the Civil War—the American one—and her name is Margaret, and she's in love with her daddy's number-one slave, and his name is

[204] "Associative digression," Harshav writes, is one of the three major principles in Yiddish communication (Harshav 100). Wolfe describes in the Lahr interview how the digressions were ways actually to get to the heart of the matter: "this detour will happen that will seem like this incredible detour. Like the Louis and Belize conversation in Part One…it's a brilliant detour, and ends up taking you back in" (Lahr and Wolfe 33).

> Thaddeus, and she's married but her white slave-owner husband has AIDS: Antebellum Insufficiently Developed Sexorgans. And there's a lot of hot stuff going down when Margaret and Thaddeus can catch a spare torrid ten under the cotton-picking moon, and then of course the Yankees come, and they set the slaves free, and the slaves string up old daddy, and so on. Historical fiction. Somewhere in there I recall Margaret and Thaddeus find the time to discuss the nature of love. Her face is reflecting the flames of the burning plantation—you know, the way white people do—and his black face is dark in the night; and she says to him, "Thaddeus, real love isn't ever ambivalent."
>
> *(In the outpatient clinic, Emily enters, wearing latex gloves. She turns off Prior's IV drip.)* (Kushner, *Angels in America* 100–01)

We could read this story as allegory: where Louis is Margaret, abandoning her Husband who has AIDS (this husband being Prior) and pursuing a form of forbidden love (with Joe).[205] But it's not just the equivalence of allegory at play here; it's Belize schooling Louis not on whether love is really or not really ambivalent, but embodying ambivalence as a form of failed affiliation**.** In his use of historical fiction, Belize tells this story not as an imaginary exercise that attempts to cast itself as the eventuality (or former reality) of America, a thinking toward redemptive possibility, but instead is used to reorient the conversation toward America as it *is*: a house on fire (Robinson and Ullman). Just as the vocal registers have shifted, the emotional stakes have too: Kushner breaks open the conversation to reveal a split scene, with Prior in the hospital with his nurse Emily.

In the 1993 Wolfe production, staging queer diasporic disaffiliation involved depicting not just a scene of virtuosic—albeit racially insensitive—speaking by Louis, but also virtuosic listening on the part of Belize.[206] In the footage from the 1993 production, Wright's use of bodily gesture—snaps, air quotes, and the physical pointing his body in the other direction—resituate Louis' speech through non-white ears (Figure 5.4). For instance, when Louis says, classically, "I'm not racist" and then immediately says "ok, maybe I am a racist," Wright, closes his eyes, waves his hand back and forth, and turns to a crowd that erupts into laugher. This gestural performance of listening elicits the audience's allyship against Louis. [207] But the gestures are also "gestic" in that they inflect, in that Brechtian way, the historical conditions of this conversation: the characters can be experienced as existing "outside" this scene and thus representative of a social situation of "black-Jewish conversation" more largely. As the 2018 oral history attests, the 1993 staging of this scene was particularly rich because the actors playing Louis (Joe Mantello)

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[205] Framji Minwalla introduces another level of historical allegory when he says that Belize's story demonstrates how Kushner considers AIDS a racial category in itself, a kind of biological stigma provoking a particular kind of intra- identitarian discrimination. In that reading, Louis exemplifies how "queer discrimination against persons with AIDS is akin to black discrimination against black queers" (Minwalla 114).

[206] In the oral history, several black actors have described the terrors and joys of performing this role. Nathan Stewart Jarrett, who played Belize in 2017 and 2018, said, "I understand the idea of allies, I understand the idea of discourse, of doing something through conversation, through argument. But you are using my oppression as social currency, and it kills me. And for that conversation to happen onstage, I don't even have the words to describe how frightening and awful that is" (Butler and Kois 224). I'm fascinated by conversation as itself a kind of "social currency," and it's a topic I develop more in the following chapter.

[207] Gregory Wallace (who played Belize in '94 at ACT) describes the extreme "pleasure of listening to an audience quietly turn against another character" (Butler and Kois 223)

and Belize (Wright) had tension off-stage as well as on.[208] Wolfe also describes his collaboration with Kushner as, at times, another version of this scene.[209] But another effect of this historicization, and across the rest of the scene, was situating the histories of America as told by white, Jewish people as *exactly that*: the whole "black-Jewish relations" conversation is thus framed as a kind of smokescreen, a defensive construction of Jewish guilt. And then Wolfe goes further in staging diasporic disaffiliation when he pulls the lights up on the void to reveal Prior naked and sick in the hospital, a scene that *itself* splits when Prior begins hearing the language of Hebrew through the unwitting possession of his nurse Emily by the Angel. His disbelief is hilariously countered when the lights darken and a massive "burning Alef" emerges from the floor. In the middle of a scene that features the clash between a desperate Jewish man who walked out on his sick lover and an ambivalent, black ex-ex-drag (maybe?) queen nurse, Wolfe stages the burning of a Jewish letter against a literal black void—the void as "Tehom" but also not-not-the black Atlantic.

[208] Wright also mentions that he was the youngest of the cast, and that he felt "to some extent that I was being observed as I rehearsed" (Butler and Kois 181). McLaughlin told me that "that the tension between the two actors was mostly due to Joe's reliance as an actor on Jeffrey because Jeffrey was so damn good…Joe preferred doing the "Democracy in America" scene…with Jeffrey rather than an understudy, but…sometimes Jeffrey's chronic lateness to the theater meant that he had to work with an understudy…no one felt that Jeffrey's work was anything other than extraordinary—it always was—but just that he was a young actor and often had difficulty with basic scheduling…" (*Interview with Ellen McLaughlin* 35:03).

[209] In 2004, Wolfe hilariously described Kushner's loquaciousness to John Lahr: "when he and Mark got married…when Tony said, 'I do,' it was the only time in his life he ever answered a question with two words" (Lahr and Wolfe 25). Wolfe says that he learned from his work with Gregory Hines on *Jelly's* on how to be patient with Kushner: "If somebody is saying 27 things that feel so ridiculous and over the top, you have to listen, because the twenty-eighth thing that they say is gonna be so exacting, and so smart" (13). As a result of their "intense" personalities clashing, "we've evolved this incredible way of listening" (33).

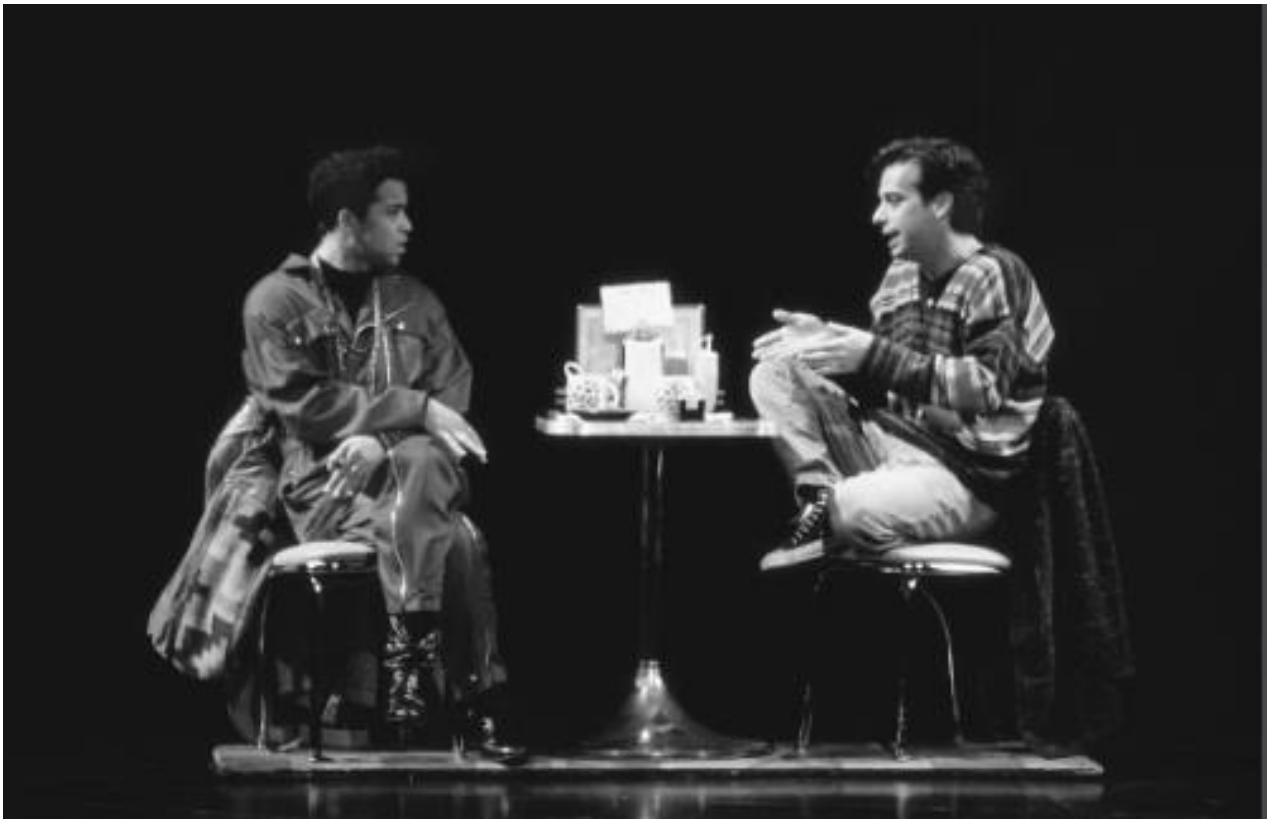

Figure 5.4: The "Democracy in America" scene, with Belize (Jeffrey Wright) and Louis (Joe Mantello) against the void. Courtesy of Joan Marcus.

The ambivalence in the "Democracy in America" scene is powerfully echoed in A4.3 of *Perestroika*, when Louis and Prior meet at the Bethesda fountain. The construction of this scene precedes Wolfe's tenure and came out of conversations between Kushner and Joseph Mydell, who played Belize in London 1992-93.[210] But Wolfe leaves his mark on the set design: the towering Angel of central park hovers downstage as shadowy outline against the black void. After emerging from the shadows fashionably late—it's his third long scene in a row—Belize once again mocks Louis' blinkered patriotism by sarcastically asking him to *please* tell us about the history of the Bethesda Fountain and "The Naval Dead of the Civil War" that it commemorates. As in the "Democracy in American" scene in which this moment echoes, the emotions eventually come to the fore: Louis accuses Belize of being jealous of his relationship with Prior, and Belize drops the truth while honoring his own: Joe is in fact "Roy Cohn's buttboy" and that "I love Prior but I was never in love with him. I have a man, uptown, and I have since long before I first laid my eyes on the sorry-ass sight of you." What this "man uptown" does for the play is open up for the audience a world for Belize outside the evermore

[210] Mydell: "I remember very distinctly that just as we got to Part 2, I had a conversation with [Kushner] about Belize, saying, 'Why is it that a black character's always an attendant to a white character? Why don't we know anything about Belize other than his relationship with Prior? Does he have a life outside being a nurse?' Then he wrote this incredible scene between Louis and Belize" (Butler and Kois 298).

tightly interwoven diegesis and its imposition on his life (Robinson and Ullman).[211] Alex Woloch writes that "all minor characters 'work' (as they are functionally integrated into the narrative totality), 'disappear' (as they are, necessarily overshadowed by a more central character), and "linger" (insofar as they are in a narrative--that ultimately does not concern them--at all) (Woloch 308). Belize—as someone who does much of the theatrical labor of Act 3, is always on the way out, and often lingers at the literal black periphery of the stage in Wolfe's production—embodies the power of representing black life and black love *as ambivalent* towards this situation of minor-ness. But it's also an ambivalence to that some extent inflects the process of production, as John Lahr's archival notes from an interview with Wolfe attest:

> Wolfe: very frequently, if [Kushner and I] are arguing about something, or discussing something, and I feel really strongly about it, and he feels really strongly about it, periodically what I will say, "Well, okay, then I will do it that way, because I am the director, and ultimately I work for the material…" And that produces a tremendous amount of anxiety inside of him…
>
> Lahr: Then why does that make him nervous?
>
> Wolfe: Because that's not what he wants.
>
> Lahr: He wants a fight.
>
> Wolfe: No, he wants the collaboration. He wants to hear what I'm saying, so that therefore…because the thing…I think [that] makes the collaboration work is, aside from the fact that I think we both respect each other, is that if the other person is saying something that makes sense, you surrender what you think is right (Lahr and Wolfe 28–29).

Wolfe here describes the collaborative process with Kushner as one defined by mutual respect but also the ability to surrender to the role of the director: a balance of activity and passivity we might think of as its own type of ambivalence.[212] And we might say that part of Belize's failure as a character is how he is forced to balance his own ambivalence—not toward America, we he here clearly states "he hates"—but with the people who inhabit it:

> *(A rumble of thunder. Then the rain comes. Belize has a collapsible umbrella, and he raises it. Louis stands in the rain.)*

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[211] In an interview, Kathleen Chalfant told me that Wolfe is, like Belize, "a very private person. His whole life…didn't get mixed up with the play" (*Interview with Kathleen Chalfant* 38:00).

[212] Two years after this 2004 interview, in what would be Wolfe's eleventh year as the producer at The Public Theater, he revised this statement. Speaking less specifically about his relationship with Kushner and more generally as a director, Wolfe described collaboration as a kind of synthesis: "now collaboration does mean surrender…collaboration consists of going forth with your strongest passion and your strongest idea, and meeting someone, or any number of people, with their strongest idea. And then, something new emerges, something hopefully better" (Viagas 104–05)

> BELIZE: I *live* in America, Louis, that's hard enough, I don't have to love it. You do that. (Kushner, *Angels in America* 230)

At the end of this scene, Wolfe has Wright embody this ambivalence: moving downstage toward the peripheral darkness, to deliver some of the most lyrical lines of the play.

Ambivalence has been a crucial affect that appears across scholarship of *Angels* since at least the mid-nineties. David Savran, in his powerful essay "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism" (1995) described the play just like Belize describes Louis: it's ambivalent about everything. Savran says that it's so difficult to write about the play because "the opposite of nearly everything you say about *Angels in America* will also hold true." Yet, he also believes this ambivalence is really a surface manifestation, a disguise for the play's ultimately unambivalent theories of politics and gender: the play has dogged commitment to liberal-pluralist notions of "progress" and both naturalizes and centers male-ness. He invokes Eve Sedgwick's notion of ambivalence—"kind of subversive, kind of hegemonic"—to explain the plays instant canonization: it is seen as very popular and very radical at the same time, its ability to amass both economic and cultural capital. In lieu of this critique, Savran's read of Belize is that he is merely the projection of a white imaginary. Cory Nelson, in providing a draft history of Kushner's work through the 1993 production, has responded that the play's ambivalence and Belize's affect in specific both stem from the practicalities of editing.[213] But my push is to actively remember that this play is not circumscribed by Kushner's solitudinal genius, but rather deeply shaped by the material conditions of creating this play in collaboration with other people, especially one whose stated goal was to intervene in the white imaginary.

And not all ambivalences are the same. There is a Jewish, and specifically Freudian notion that Kushner is exploring in the play. Harold Bloom's introduction to Olivier Revault d'Allonnes' M*usical Variations on Jewish Thought* (1984)—a text that Kushner says was central to him finishing the play—explores one aspect of Freudian ambivalence at the level of affect:

> Ambivalence, in Freud's sense, is simultaneous love and hatred directed toward the same object. The transference and the taboo alike are variations upon Freud's central vision of psychic ambivalence, the Oedipus complex. Transforming an obstacle to analysis into a technique of analysis. (Revault d'Allonnes and Bloom 7) [214]

When he says "transferring an obstacle into a technique," he suggests that ambivalence is not an emotion to be eliminated but to be managed. And that is, to some extent, how Belize is facing America in the play: to persist in loving the people inside a social situation that creates the conditions for massive social, and literal, death. But there are some ambivalences particular to the social death of the black American experience. Hortense Spillers describes with this very term as a disposition toward living in America with African ancestry:

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[213] In previous drafts of the play, Belize was a union organizer and revolutionary figure. Because his "background is never revealed and [his] perspective never becomes entirely clear," Nelson argues that his actions feel random and tokenizing (Nelson 109).

[214] In his translation of Freud's essay "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" (1915), James Strachey says that the term originated in a psychoanalytic context from the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, and adds that Freud actually distinguishes between at least three types of ambivalence across his career: "(1) emotional, i.e. oscillation between love and hate, (2) voluntary, i.e. inability to decide on an action, and (3) intellectual, i.e. belief in contradictory propositions" (Freud 131).

> But if by ambivalence we might mean that abeyance of closure, or break in the passage of syntagmatic movement from one more or less stable property to another, as in the radical disjuncture between "African" and "American " then ambivalence remains not only the privileged and arbitrary judgment of a postmodernist imperative, but also a strategy that names the new cultural situation as a wounding. (Spillers 54)

What Kushner and Wolfe are juxtaposing through their collaboration, I think, is a desire to examine multiple, overlapping cultural situations as "a wounding," and portray how those wounds fester at different degrees. It's in the 1993 staging of Belize's interactions with Roy that we experience the character moving into this more nuanced form of an ambivalence that oscillates not just between love and hate, or activity and passivity, but also a rage and a utopianism that attempts to locate a black "wounding" most keenly.

As in his interactions with Louis, Belize's interactions with Roy in the 1993 production are a place for him to vent his frustration about the Jewish desire for conversation, even though that push to "talk" comes from a Jew on the complete opposite side of the political spectrum.[215] In Act 1.6 of *Perestroika*, Cohn runs the typical "black-Jewish relations" changes:

> ROY: Jews and Coloreds, historical liberal coalition, right? My people being the first to sell retail to your people, your people being the first people my people could afford to hire to sweep out the store Saturday mornings, and then we all held hands and rode the bus to Selma. Not me of course, I don't ride buses, I take cabs. But the thing about The American Negro is, he never went Communist. Loser Jews did. But you people had Jesus so the reds never got to you. I admire that.
>
> BELIZE : Your chart didn't mention that you're delusional.
>
> ROY: Barking mad. Sit, Talk.
>
> Belize: I'd rather suck the pus out of an abscess. I'd rather drink a subway toilet. I'd rather chew off my tongue and spit it in your leathery face. So thanks for the offer of conversation, but I'd rather not. (Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. Part 2: Perestroika* 29).[216]

Unlike the 1992 script, Belize never agrees to be Roy's hospice nurse, nor does he magically seem to have acquired some of Roy's AZT. Instead, in a revision of A3.1, Belize goes tit for tat with Roy and attempts to nab some of Roy's stash of AZT right in front of him:

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[215] Both of them also offer processional, aggadic positions on the law (the process, the struggle, the debate, "gastric juices turning") as opposed to what we might consider Belize's halachic position (rigidity, reality, the police, "The Law for Real").

[216] Ellen McLaughlin described to me that it made a difference that Roy was played by Ron Leibman: "Ron was Jewish and that identity was key to what made his portrayal of Cohn so brilliant. He really understood that profound element of the character. One of my favorite things he came up with for the character was also one Tony's favorites, as it happened, because we talked about it at Ron's funeral. He did it in the scene with Joe, the last scene that they have together, when Roy gives him a kind of blessing. Joe knelt before Roy, who was wearing a bathrobe, and Roy took the end of the cord of his bathrobe, kissed it, and slapped it on Joe's forehead. No one but Ron would have had the instinct to do that— it was absolutely right, so meaningful, but also so funny" (*Interview with Ellen McLaughlin* 1:03:07).

> Roy: I expect you to handover those keys and move your n*** ass out of my room.
>
> Belize: What did you say.
> Roy: move your n** cunt spade faggot lackey ass out of my room.
> Belize (overlapping, starting on "spade"): Shit-for-brains filthy-mouthed selfish motherfucking cowardly cocksucking cloven-hoofed pig.
>
> Roy: Mongrel. Dinge. Slave. Ape.
> Belize: Kike.
> Roy. Now you're talking!
> Belize: Greedy Kike.
> Roy: Now you can have a bottle. But only one.
> (Belize tosses the keys at Roy, hard. Roy catches them. Belize takes a bottle of the pills, then another, then a third, and leaves. As soon as Belize is out of the room Roy is wracked with a series of spasms he's been holding in). (Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. Part 2: Perestroika* 77)

Since these changes have since become canonical in the script, watching Belize invoke the gestures of black queer culture—reading, throwing shade, cracking one's face, and playing the dozens—with one of his patients still makes many critics uncomfortable.[217] The aim here is hardly mimesis, but rather another form of testimony to that "cultural situation that is a wounding": it's in the 1993 *Perestroika* that Belize's obligatory caring for Roy is first matched with a justified rage. Belize, here, for the first time, literally holds the keys. The power (and humor) (and horror) of this scene is how this particular inflection of the nurse-to-patient power dynamic is contrasted with the historical power relation between "blacks and jews." But Wolfe and Kushner also add another layer: the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg haunts the entire scene, backlit behind Roy's bed as if emerging from a "threshold of revelation" only made visible by angled light. The version of Jewishness that Cohn represents is thus haunted not just by queer, diasporic blackness but also by a Jewishness that Cohn succeeds in executing in body but not in spirit.

If the dynamics of Belize's ambivalence are rounded out in the 1993 production by the full-fledged exposure of his rage toward Roy, it also featured his utopianism for this first time as well. In my interview with Kushner, he said Wolfe "was probably the first person to suggest that there needed to be some kind of scene between Belize and Roy," and he returned to rehearsal with a draft of the "Negro Night Nurse" scene that became Act3.4 of *Perestroika*. Here, Belize walks in on a morphine laden Roy, who makes a characteristically racist remark: "Oh. The bogeyman is here. Lookit, Ma, a schvartze toytenmann."[218] Roy then makes sexual advances ("open me up to the end of me") and identifies Belize as the "Negro night nurse, my negation. You've come to escort me into the underworld." Like the chimney man that haunts Jelly Roll Morton in *Jelly's*, Belize plays the trickster here. Wright takes off his hat, flips his hair: "You want me in your bed Roy? You want me to take you away?...I'll be coming for you soon.

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[217] In response to the 2018 revival, Hilton Als writes: "Despite Belize's virtues, I have never felt comfortable in his presence. Even the greatest actor would love to do all the finger-snapping part-time-drag-queen stuff, but I don't know one black man in nineteen-eighties New York who would have felt entirely himself—entirely safe—"reading" white people while on the job. The character is a dream of black strength, an Angela Bassett of the ward" (Als).

[218] Kushner claims this is the only Yiddishism that he made up (NYTimes March 27, 1994).

Everything I want is in the end of you." Kushner plays on the sexual inuendo of "end," but when Roy asks what "it's like after" death, Belize is really flirting with the future:

> Belize: Like San Francisco. Big city, overgrown with weeds, but flowering weeds. On every corner a wrecking crew and something new and crooked going up catty corner to that. Windows missing in every edifice like broken teeth, fierce gust of gritty wind, and a gray high sky full of ravens.
>
> Roy: Isaiah
> Belize: Prophet birds, Roy. Piles of trash, but lapidary like rubies and obsidian, and diamond-colored cow-pit streamers in the wind. And voting booths…
>
> Roy: And a dragon atop a golden horde.
>
> Belize: and everyone in Balenciaga ground gowns with red corsages, and big dance palaces full of music and lights and racial impurity and gender confusion…And all the deities are Creole, mulatto, brown as the mouths of rivers. Race taste and history finally overcome. And you ain't there.
>
> Roy: And Heaven?
> Belize: That was Heaven, Roy.
> Roy: The fuck it was. (suspicious, frightened.) (Kushner, *Angels in America* 222)

Kushner told me that Wolfe "gave [him] permission to try something that had to do with race that…I would have been nervous about trying" (*Interview with Tony Kushner* 19:54) What's he trying here? Kushner borrows language from the Angel's "Epistle" ("Heaven is a place much like San Francisco") that Belize heard in the conversational form of Act 2 as both reported and direct speech, and tunnels it a utopian vision. Belize is, prior to Wolfe's intervention, both the reality principle of the play *and* its object of racial and imperialist fantasy. But under Wolfe's direction, the character changes slightly as he entertains a version of the future that is as queer as it is impossible.

If there's any question that haunts *Perestroika*, it's Kushner's most perennial: the very question of change. "The Great question before us, is can we change?" asks the world's oldest Bolshevik at the beginning of Act 1. And in the final scene of Act 3, Harper asks the Mormon Mother "How do people change?" leading to one of Kushner's most lyrical perorations:

> Well it has something to do with God so it's not very nice. God splits the skin with a jagged thumbnail from throat to belly and then plunges a huge filthy hand in, he grabs hold of your bloody tubes and they slip to evade his grasp but he squeezes hard, he insists, he pulls and pulls till all your innards are yanked out and the pain! We can't even talk about that. And then he stuffs them back, dirty, tangled and torn. It's up to you to do the stitching. (Kushner, *Angels in America* 200)

What I hope to have done with this chapter, thus far, is to suggest that the play as we know it today was inevitably yet specifically changed by the aesthetic relationship between Wolfe and Kushner. When asked directly why he chose George Wolfe to direct *Angels* in 1993, Kushner's

comments were charmingly flip: "I chose him because his apartment looked good. Directing is about good taste" (*Signature: George C. Wolfe* 26:30). The description risks perpetuating what Sarah Whitfield has described as the "Cool White Guy" narrative of Broadway: "the story…where the benevolent white men get to extend their spaces and be heroes for doing so"(Whitfied xiv).[219] But Wolfe defamiliarized *Angels* rhythmically at the level of scene, lighting, sound, and character, in a way that heightened the production's sensitivity to blackness but that ultimately attempted to sharpen the emotional circumstances. In doing so, the play at times forged what we might think of as a diasporic rhythmic aesthetics, while at others it resuscitated some of the dynamics we might associate with the tropes of classic black-Jewish collaboration: ventriloquism, racial fantasy, and essentialism. Ultimately, however, it might suggest that conversation was not only a rhetorical trope in the play nor just a technique of embodied performance, but a process whereby both artistic and historical change is both enacted and thwarted.

[219] Whitfield is challenging the claim that Florenz Ziegfeld "integrated Broadway" when he employed Burt Williams for the show *Follies of 1910*: "seeing Williams as the recipient of Ziegfeld's good intentions misses the far more complex reality of understanding Williams' negotiation of racist structures and expectations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (xvii).

Interlude: "The Great Capitulation"

The question that haunts Brecht's *Mother Courage* is different than that of *Angels*. It's not "can we change?" but something more fatalist: "why don't we change?" This question memorably motivates the scene immediately following Swiss Cheese's death—the one that Wolfe haunted with a single pinspot against a blackout. When the lights go up, we encounter Mother Courage outside an officer's tent, seeking to file a complaint for the destruction of her wagon. A clerk warns her to keep her mouth shut, but nevertheless she persists. That is, until a "Young Soldier" arrives enraged, claiming he saved the Captain's horse and won't stand for the injustice of being delayed his award:

> Young Soldier: I won't let myself be treated unfairly.
>
> Mother Courage: How long? How long will you refuse to be treated unfairly? An hour, two? See, never occurs to you to ask yourself that, and that's the first thing you should ask, 'cause it's not good figure out later, after all the skin on your back has been flayed off…then it's a little late to realize that maybe, on second thought, actually you can live with being treated unfairly. (Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* 54)

The answer to the question of change here is structural: people don't change, not because they're lazy or stubborn (as the Cook would have it in Scene 3), but because they don't want to be tortured.

But Courage plays an important role in the resistance to change, too, especially when she encourages the "Young Soldier" to "spare his big fine voice" with the sound of her own:

> *She sings "The Song of the Great Capitulation"*
>
> Back when I was young, fresh as grass and innocent
> Any day, I'd fly away on butterfly wings.
>
> *(Speaking.)* (Not just a peddler's daughter, me with my good looks and my talent and my longing for a better life) (Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* 55)

The opening lyrics of this song feature Courage remembering an idyllic youth when, like the Young Soldier, she felt she always got what she deserved. But the music undermines this sentiment. Brecht writes in his notes to the play that Paul Dessau's composing "is not meant to be particularly easy; like the stage set, it left something to be supplied by the audience" (Brecht, *Collected Plays* 279). The point is to unsettle any "easy" identification the audience might have with Courage or the Soldier, and the very form of the song testifies to this kind of unease: the frequent oscillation between speaking and singing never lets the music entirely take flight.[220] Jeanine Tesori, who composed the music for Kushner and Wolfe's 2006 production, set the tune to a broken stride piano and describes how this song became even more disjointed after rehearsal: "as it went on, we realized that, coming out, she should sing it a cappella" (58:37).

[220] In Brecht's words, any "easy" identification between the audience and character "will only increase the spectator's own tendencies to resignation and capitulation…It will not put him in a position to feel the beauty and attraction of the social problem" (Brecht, *Collected Plays* 301).

Soon, it's not just the music but the lyrics too that begin to undermine any sentimental vision of the past.

> Birdsong up above:
> Push comes to shove,
> Soon you fall down from the grandstand
> And join the players in the band.
> Who tootle out that melody:
> Wait and see
> And then: it's all downhill.
> Your fall was God's will.
> Better let it be.
> But within a year I would eat what I was served.
> And I learned, you smile and take your medicine. (Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* 56)

The broken musical aesthetic formally resists the coherence of the Wagnerian "Gesamtkunstwerk" but also thematically resists what the song evokes with its "big brass band"—a kind of totalizing music that subsumes individuals into an integrated whole. Under Wolfe's direction, Streep pulls and pushes at this formal and thematic pressure. In the final verse of "The Great Capitulation" song, she moves from a calm, prostrate child's pose to a maniacal frolicking—breaking the fourth wall, shooting an imaginary machine gun into the crowd, rolling around into the mud.[221] The question of why people don't change, in this scene, thus becomes both an aesthetic one: what role does conversation play in structural and personal change? What does musical dialogue achieve that spoken words can't? How integrated must talk and song be in order to create the aesthetic conditions in which the audience can experience the problem of change as both individual and social?

The question of personal, historic, and aesthetic change goes to the heart of Kushner, Wolfe, and Tesori's collaboration on *Caroline, Or Change*. In the capacity that it makes the tensions between black and Jewish American experience central to its plot, *Caroline* is *Angels'* most definitive revision (Nelson). Yet *Caroline* is an entirely different formal experiment: while *Angels* attempts to juxtapose various uneven histories of change through theatricalized talk and at times approaches the condition of a musical under Wolfe's direction, *Caroline* explores historical and personal change explicitly through the medium of the "through-sung" musical. But music is not the only medium at play here. As Avery Gordon writes, haunting is itself a mediation: "a process that links an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and a biography" (Gordon 19). *Caroline* haunts the aesthetic history of the integrated musical artform with a less-told history of American racial integration.

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[221] One could argue, as Brecht and Kushner both have, that singing "The Song of the Great Capitulation" represents the most unforgivable action that Courage takes in the play, even beyond bargaining for Swiss Cheese's life. She convinces this young soldier to abandon his revolutionary fervor—"eat shit and like it," that's the message here—and by the end of the scene she has dropped her own complaint. In the 2006 production, the casting arguably charges the scene racially: Courage (Streep) runs up to the "Young Soldier" (Ato Essandoh) and smears mud all over her own face, suggesting it's not just generational difference that gets erased by the fatalist sentiment of her capitulation but also racial difference that might affect their capitulations unevenly. The moment also points, as I'll show in the next chapter, to the history of racial masquerade that underlies the question of the "integrated" musical.

Chapter 6: Haunting Integration: Light, Lyrica, and Music in *Caroline, or Change*

Caroline, or Change tells the story of Caroline Thibodeaux, a thirty-nine-year-old domestic worker employed by the Gellmans, a Jewish family living in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The play is set in November 1963, when eight-year-old Noah Gellman has recently lost his mother—a chain smoking bassoonist—to lung cancer. Though Noah's father Stuart—a grieving, detached clarinetist—has remarried a bubbly New Yorker named Rose, the real mother-figure is also the "other" figure: Noah constantly demands attention and affection from Caroline. Southern, black, Christian, and a single mother with four kids, Caroline spends most of her labor time in the Gellman's basement doing laundry—her frown and "vacant stare" the "gests" that unremittingly attest to this oppressive social position (Nelson 141). Much of the ethical and aesthetic tension of the play derives from the suggestion that Noah's grief is any way commensurable to Caroline's social position, or as we come to know throughout the play, her own history of loss.

But there is a definitive limit to the amount of affective labor that Caroline is willing to perform (Dinero 296).[222] When Rose attempts to teach Noah financial responsibility and encourages Caroline to keep the "change" that he leaves in the laundry, the questions of underpaid emotional and physical labor merge. Unlike Mother Courage, however, Caroline won't so easily accept charity: she feels caught between using the change to support her family and the ethics of "taking pennies from a baby" (Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change* 53). When Noah leaves his twenty-dollar Hannukah gelt in his pocket, Caroline refuses to return it: a scene of racist and anti-Semitic verbal exchange climactically ensues. Though the play largely focuses on the "quotidian" as opposed to the "historically momentous," both at the level of affect and plot, it is set against the backdrop of the Kennedy assassination and racial unrest in the American south (Low 291). Indeed, the final scene is Caroline's daughter Emmie revealing her involvement in the decapitation of a Confederate statue.

Why would George C. Wolfe, the author of "The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play," direct a play about a black, southern maid?[223] One answer is that this mama is not on the couch. As many critics have noted *Caroline, or Change* attempts—with uneven success—to subvert the "mammy" stereotype by endowing its title character with a complex subjectivity, a history of sexuality, and an ambivalence toward her social situation.[224] According to composter Jeanine Tesori, Wolfe had his doubts about the project between its first draft in 1998 and its debut in 2003 at the Public Theater:

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[222] In Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez's formulation, affective labor is a term that attempts to show how "the social fabric of domestic work is shaped by affection, the expression and exchange of affects" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 5). "Domestic work" is, for Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, a form of affective labor because it is "intrinsically linked to sustaining personal well-being even where the task involved is only cleaning the stairs" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 4).

[223] Why wouldn't he? I wanted to capture here how the superficial content of the play might clash with Wolfe's stated political principles.

[224] See, for example, Thomas, Aaron C. "Engaging an Icon: Caroline, or Change and the Politics of Representation." Studies in Musical Theatre 4, no. 2 (2010): 199–210. In *Bodies in Dissent,* Daphne Brooks argues that Pinkins' performance, in particular, gave "Broadway its newest, richest, and most densely textured representation of a black female character" (D. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent* 346). See also Jeremy O. Harris' characteristically cutting Tweet from October 22, 2022: "The only white person who has ever written a good piece of theatre or film about a white child confronting their white privilege as they discover the different ways society has been shaped for their family in relationship to a black friend is Tony Kushner w "Caroline or Change"… This is because Caroline is giving the grace of humanity. A fully embodies humanity. She's not a symbol or a metaphor. She's a person." (Harris).

> John Lahr: George doesn't like the issue of maids.
>
> Tesori: I think George took a while, and I think that caused—you know, in some sense, a necessary friction. Because he questioned the material constantly. (Lahr and Tesori 31)

Even as early as the late eighties, Wolfe had been stoking controversy over the dramatic representation of black stereotypes on stage, especially in shows that had primarily white audiences.[225] His own work across various media, often bitingly satirical and ironically aware of its own artifice, always "insists that racism involves more than the mobilization of stereotypes" (Ngai 106).

In a 1989 short film entitled *Hunger Chic*, for instance, Wolfe deployed the figure of the black maid explicitly to parody white domesticity and the forms of gazing it entails. The film begins with a white couple desperately preparing for a dinner party and the arrival of their housekeeper: Enid (Carrie Fisher) studies cookbooks from around the world while her husband David (Griffin Dunne) takes artful pictures of salad (*Hunger Chic* 3:20). In a style we would today call mockumentary, the film is interspersed with voiceover and interview, to the effect that we experience the white couple as both strikingly unaware of their own egotism and as mouthpieces for Wolfe's satire ("if we were to acknowledge complexity, our world would completely fall apart"). In one scene, they insist that their TV-watching daughter keep her attention on the minstrel-like cartoons and avoid the PSA channel, where the white narrator tells us that a black boy named "little Abdul" is stuck in the desert and hungry ("so please call 1-800-STARVE"). But when "the girl" arrives—Emma St. John, the black maid from the Caribbean (Danitra Vance) — there is a striking reversal to the expectation of her labor. David and Enid follow *her* around the house as she refuses to clean. Accused by Enid of giving her a "look," Emma St. John levitates, casts a spell on the entire apartment, and conjures "Little Abdul" out of the TV set (the white daughter stands by with a bowl of popcorn, as if she's watching a movie). By the end, a black family, including "Little Abdul," watches a TV tuned to the channel of the white family: Enid, David, and their daughter dine at a long table in the desert. In *Hunger Chic,* then, Wolfe mobilizes stereotypes in a representational context that is *constantly* subverting the white gaze and the limits of the medium. If Ellison taught us that invisibility lies not in the object but in the subject of the gaze, Wolfe's work emplotted these questions of racialized perception into late 20th performance cultures and mediascapes, constantly foregrounding a medium's artifice even as the artwork resuscitates forms of cultural stereotype that now feel dated (Ngai 104). The task for reconsidering *Caroline, or Change* by the light—or the dark—of Wolfe's aesthetic, then, is to ask how various forms of mediation—lighting, sound, music, acting, and haunting—are mobilized alongside the stereotype of the black maid, and to what aesthetic and political effect.

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[225] In a 1992 essay entitled "Who's Listening? Artists, Audiences, and Language," M. NourbeSe Philip described how when *The Colored Museum* premiered in Toronto, it "played to full houses of predominantly white people. Here was a powerful, painful, and at times funny collage of Black American life over the centuries. There were many scenes that were 'funny,' which I laughed at, my laughter always tinged with the pain represented in those opening scenes on the slave plane—a pain that circumscribes my history. Why were they, the white audience, laughing, though? Were they laughing at the same things I was laughing at, and if their laughter lacked the same admixture of pain, was it laughter which, having been bought too cheaply, came too easily? Were they, therefore, laughing at me and not with me?" (Philip 77).

But it wasn't just cultural stereotype but also the musical form—specifically the "through-sung" musical—that Wolfe was at the forefront of experimenting with during the 90s. According to Bradley Rogers, "breaking out" into song is a defining features of American musicals, one that contains within it a radical critique of essentialized, singular identity.[226] Yet because the form originated in 19th century vaudeville and minstrel shows that relied on the spectacularization of racialized and gendered bodies, these moments are always haunted by an ethical dilemma that this most radical of aesthetic moments is also its most regressive politically (Rogers 10).[227] Unlike more traditional musicals, however, the characters in "through-sung" musicals break into "spoken dialogue at emotionally heightened moments, rather than the other way around" (Low 294). The "through-sung" musical is thus, according to Rogers, an excessive attempt at aesthetic integration and authorial control.[228] Theories of theatrical and rhythmic "integration" are themselves caught up with legacies of othering, erasing, and exploiting racialized—and specifically black—bodies.[229]

Wolfe was one of a few artists challenging this legacy of the integrated, holistic art form of the "through-sung" musical in the nineties. With shows like *Jelly's Last Jam* and *Bring in da' Noise, Bring in da' Funk*, Wolfe wrote and directed "through-sung" musicals that centered black life and employed all black casts. But he also challenged authentic and stereotypical notions of identity in these shows at the level of aesthetic form. In *Jelly's Last Jam*, for instance, Wolfe has the central the character divide into two—old Jelly (Gregory Hines) and young Jelly (Savion

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[226] Rogers argues that "the transitive force of musical imitation, with one imitation prompting yet another, bodies imitating other bodies" becomes "all unleashed in the moment of bursting into song" (Rogers 3). Underneath this is a critique of individualism: "Re- vising the widely held belief that musicals burst into song when words will no longer suffice to carry the emotion, I argue instead that musicals burst into song—and dance—when one *body* will no longer suffice to carry the emotion. To satisfy our desire to exceed the expressive limits of a discrete body, we must create complex psychic relationships across different bodies. Just as 'The Rain in Spain' prompts everyone involved to 'become' bodies different from their own, the same is structurally demanded of spectators every time the musical indulges its genre-defining impulse to burst into song" (Rogers 5).

[227] Ambivalence, interestingly, is the affect produced by this haunting: "Given this dynamic of power, the genre is understandably preoccupied, indeed obsessed, with the *labor* of the bodies that permit these identifications. Because the genre's sites of rupture always activate both the progressive and exploitative possibilities, the musical inescapably pairs its ecstatic joy with a deep ambivalence about the potential exploitation involved in achieving this effect" (Rogers 10).

[228] Beginning with Jerome Moross and John Latouche's play *Ballet Ballads* (1948) and achieving its most commercial success with Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*, the "sung-through" musical achieves its tightest control in *Hamilton*, which comes under the complete aesthetic control of Miranda (Rogers 195). While the play, Rogers argues, explores the radical possibilities of casting, it also reifies a "conservative model of stable subjectivity—a subjectivity that formally mirrors the conservative subjectivity advanced by the plot, which reduces major structural issues to matters of individual agency" (Rogers 199).

[229] Stuart Hecht writes that Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma* is synonymous with the "complete integration of the American musical." But Hecht is talking about "integration" in the modernist sense as well as the (albeit limitedly) political sense. *Oklahoma* was one of the first plays to offer an ethnic—and specifically Jewish—secondary couple plotline as a foil to the primary couple plot. But Rogers shows us the limits of considering *Oklahoma* integrated at all. Reuban Mamoulian—the director of *Oklahoma*, and eventually *Porgy and Bess*—imported these theories of rhythmic integration from his study with Evgeny Vakhtangov at the Moscow Art Theater. "Mamoulian's brilliance was…in recasting these avant-garde Russian aesthetics as being fundamentally American ones…" (98). This assimilation of a theory of rhythm from Russia to American was as original as it was typical: "Mamoulian did nothing less than bring the modern concept of direction to musical theatre, framing it as the orchestration of bodies—and he introduced this radical theory through the orchestration of black bodies in particular" (98-100). Following Michael Rogin's argument about Jewish-American blackface performers, Rogers calls Mamoulian's rhythmic language a "directorial form of blackface" (101).

Glover)—where the older, European-identifying character will break out into talk with a past, more African-identifying version of himself, before they both break out into a show-stopping tap-dance. For Rogers, these moments challenge notions of singular identity by "[giving] bodily expression to the racial dynamics explored in the plot" (Rogers 205). *Noise/Funk* takes this even further: in channeling the aesthetics of early Hurston, Wolfe turns the "through-sung" form into a series of skits, ones that collectively attempt to tell the history of slavery in the United States through tap dance. In the "Uncle Hucklebuck" sketch, for instance, Wolfe has a young white, hillbilly girl talking to an "Uncle Tom" like figure, but he stages this conversation through a scene of double ventriloquism. Savion Glover taps to the rhythms of a musical voice-over (itself produced by a black performer imitating what a white girl's young voice might sound like) while there is a puppet of a young white girl attached to all four of his limbs.[230] In both resuscitating and challenging the exploitative history of the American musical and especially the "integrated" "through-sung" form, Wolfe again combined Hurston and Brecht's projects to ask new questions about musical form: how does one celebrate indigenous black life through a medium that historically traffics in its subjugation and caricature, and how does theater implicate the audience in that paradox?

Caroline, or Change broached these questions not just by challenging integration both at the level of content and form, but also by disrupting the normative distinctions between singing and talking altogether.[231] Kushner's Brechtian experiments with musical structure did not start with Tesori and Wolfe: in his interview with me, he said he was hired to write the libretto for a setting of Heinrich von Kleist's short story "St. Cecilia; or the Power of Music" in response to a commission from Bobby McFerrin and the SF Opera. In an interview from 1990, McFerrin describes his vision for a non-traditional opera:

> I'd like to write a choral opera. I'd like to do away with the orchestra. And I'd like to get like 150 voices. And my idea to have like, nine people could be one character…so that…you can really get a sense of this character, their quirks and everything, because they have nine people singing the same character, right? And then maybe have 50 singers to be the orchestra, whatever, and, and see what happens. I think it would be great. I'm thinking about 1995 to take a year or two years to sort of develop this and put this together. (McFerrin et al. 59:19)

But Kushner's draft was long, and McFerrin didn't agree to it. After a draft of *Caroline* was also rejected by McFerrin, it took a while for Wolfe to support Kushner and then wrangle Tesori on

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[230] The scene harkens back to the Brechtian aesthetics of the diorama scene in A3.2 of *Perestroika*. But it's also a striking reversal of the puppetry scene from Ellison's *Invisible Man* that Sianne Ngai so powerfully elucidates in *Ugly Feelings* (Ngai 111–15).

[231] Kushner writes in the introduction to the published version of the play that his collaboration with Wolfe and Tesori changed how he even thought about words and music: "Words can do all sorts of things…words can say what words can't say; the apt description can describe the indescribable. But…music offers up emotion and idea with an organicity and shapeliness and spontaneity that must be what we mean when we say that something possesses grace (Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change* xiii). This distinction between words and music resuscitates a long debate dating back at least to 17th century opera. Monteverdi—largely thought of as the progenitor of modern opera—famously declared music the "servant of words." But this was a debate not just over the best medium for creating emotional impact but also a debate about narrative motion: what do words and music do? Does talking move the plot forward? Does music stop the show?

board.[232] "There are no songs in it… it's an opera," Tesori said; according to Kushner, Wolfe's enthusiasm helped persuade her to pursue the project (*Interview with Tony Kushner* 33:30).[233] Though it went through various drafts and workshops between 1998 and its premiere at The Public Theater in November of 2003 (where Wolfe had then been head producer for eight years running), the play retained its experimentalism. It avoids the strappings of any traditional AABA song structures, radically oscillates between the operatic vocal forms of aria, cadenza, recitative, and is largely a musical pastiche of "Jewish and black rhythms" (Lahr and Wolfe 24). What I want to attend to is how the chorality that McFerrin was seeking to represent within individual voices was still pursued in the Tesori and Wolfe version, not through the elimination of the orchestra—as McFerrin would have it—but through experiments in theatrical haunting. In what follows, I explore the medium of haunting in relation to three different characters in the 2003 Public Theater version, asking: what haunts these characters, and to whom or what do these characters haunt? Are the ghosts bidden or unbidden? And how does the aestheticization of these hauntings—light, lyric, and music—disrupt normative notions of the "sung-through" musical, as well as normative notions of "black-Jewish conversation"?

Caroline: Articulating the Void

Caroline is haunted by change in a triple sense: personal change, historical change, and change as money. As in *Angels,* these forms of haunting are aestheticized through lighting and sound, but unlike *Angels,* they intersect with the history of the American musical and reflect the historical circumstances of American segregation. When we first encounter Caroline (Tonya Pinkins) at "nine thirteen Saint Anthony Street, Lake Charles Louisiana," the Wolfe/Fisher visual aesthetic is pressingly felt. The basement is set against a black void, with the door as much entryway to the basement as threshold to another world.[234] Caroline walks down the steps, dressed in white and holding a basket full of white linens too. Her first sounds are hums, not words—a mournful, minor-keyed lament. "Nothing happens underground in Louisiana," she then sings, acapella. But something soon does happen, as the void onstage transforms into haunted presence. When the orchestra kicks in with an Afro-Cuban beat, a woman shrouded in fuchsia

[232] The earliest draft of the play I could find is in fact a poem named "Money" that Kushner read at a February 1995 event at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Kushner's reading was sponsored by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and broadcast by their leftist radio program "Beyond the Pale" later that year, along with readings by Grace Paley, Judith Sloan, and Ronnie Gilbert at the same event. The poem is characteristic of Kushner's verse in its buoyant, rhyming tetrameter, and it essentially tells the plot of the play (the maid's name is, at this stage, Joanna): "Joanna, Joanna did you find?/ 'Yes,' she says, and now it's mine." It's only in Gilbert's performance of an excerpt from her one woman show on Mother Jones that we get the connection between washing and political activism that becomes a crucial metaphor in *Caroline*: "Mother Jones showed them/ how to be free/ You know the washing machine where you wash your shirt/ Well it's a stick in the middle that does the work/ It tugs and it twists and it may be mean/ but it loosens the dirt gets a shirt darn clean/ and they call it: an agitator." (Kushner, *Readings and Performances: Judith Sloan, Tony Kushner, and Grace Paley [1995-010]*)

[233] A 2021 article on Tesori suggests that Kushner and Wolfe first became interested in her work after hearing her score the 1998 operatic production of Twelfth Night at Lincoln Center (1998) (Weinert-Kendt, "5 Key Songs From Jeanine Tesori's Songbook"). Tesori was on the rise by late 90s and early 2000s; *Violet* (1997) won the Drama Critic's Circle Award for Best Musical and *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2002) the Tony. Critic Rebecca Applin Warner argues in 2019 that "Tesori's significant output has received little in the way of serious critical musicological responses" (R. A. Warner 151); this chapter aims to address that gap.

[234] From the end of A3.2 in *Perestroika* to *Caroline,* the singular door is a distinctly Wolfeian mode of diasporic consciousness that anticipates Christian Sharpe's reading of Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* (Sharpe 18).

light and African robes (Capathia Jenkins) emerges.[235] The onomatopoeic sounds (hum-chicka-hum-chicka) she makes are the only hint of her object-ness until she announces herself as a "brand new nineteen sixty three/seven cycle wash machine" (Figure 9). Through the rest of the scene, a radio and the dryer come to life, each with their own musical style, color of light, and aspect of Caroline's personality.[236]

Figure 6.1. Caroline (Tonya Pinkins) and The Washer (Capathia Jenkins). From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 19, Folder 2.

[235] Assistant lighting designer Justin Partier confirmed for me that the light here is known as Rosco 349, or "Fisher Fuchsia," named after the play's lighting designer Jules Fisher. "When you think of musical theater," Partier said, "that's one of the colors you think of…it [has] musicality, but it also shapes people" (Partier). Partier also confirmed for me, as lighting designer Jane Cox first told me, that *Caroline* is the first production to employ automated VER lights, which are incredibly quiet and thus useful for intimate musical theater (Cox).

[236] The cast recording separates the music form this twelve-minute first scene into eight different "tracks," which span the history of African American music: from the Dryer's final "work song" to the radio's imitation of the "The Supremes."

In a 2003 draft, lighting designer Jules Fisher scribbled on his copy of the script: "GEO[RGE]: 'articulating the void'—showing them in space, not in isolation" (Kushner and Tesori, *New York Shakespeare Festival Draft of Caroline or Change*). "Articulating the void" was both a vocal and visual logic: cues were being enacted at the level of the syllable (Figure 6.2). As in *Angels*, the point was to make blackness active and present, an intertextual echo-chamber that resonates between the "Tehom" of Genesis and "the hold" of the slave ship; unlike *Angels*, here the black character bids the ghosts to awaken.[237] But this uniquely colorful, black space never lasts for very long. When Noah appears halfway through the scene in the doorway to haunt Caroline with his demand for attention, we're thrust again into the white light of the present. Though Noah and Caroline speak in recitative *to* each other as he lights her "daily cigarette," they also sing arias *in spite of* each other—Noah accompanied by solo clarinet and Caroline by a guiro-lead beat. The effect is, again, quite different than *Angels:* the history of segregation becomes aestheticized musically and visually, where different music and light is used to highlight different worlds that come meet in the "contact zone" of this basement, this littoral space "planted in the swampy soil" of the Louisiana bayou.[238]

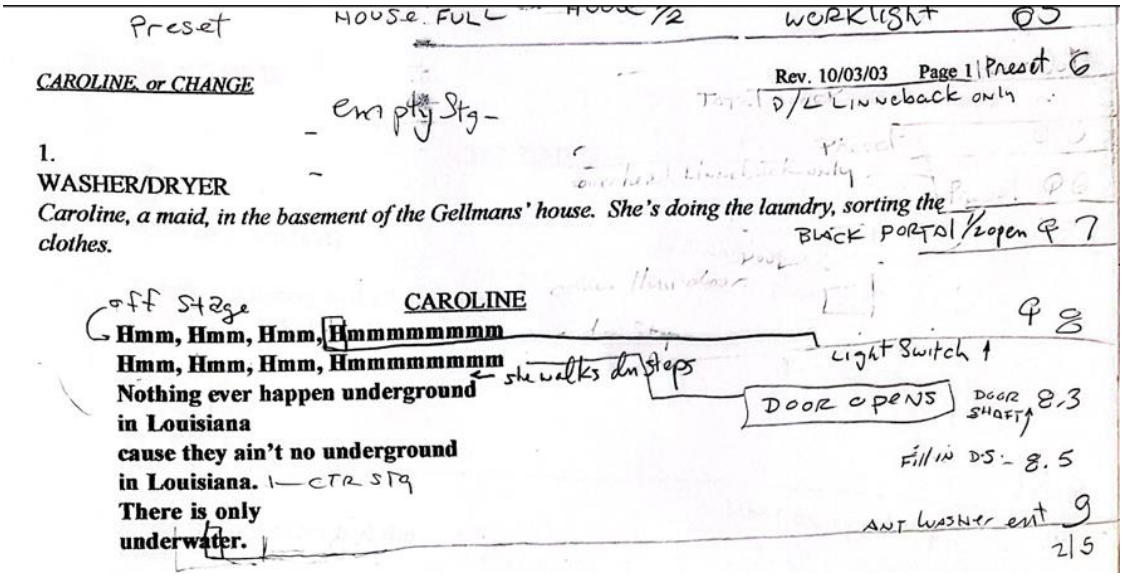

Figure 6.2. Caroline bids the washer alive with the "t" of "underwater. From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 19, Folder 1.

[237] Wolfe has said that Kushner wanted to start with the Washing Machine, but that he couldn't work with that: "You always meet Dorothy before you meet the Munchkins. You always meet reality before you meet the fantasy first" (Lahr and Wolfe 32). Christina Sharpe defines "the hold" as a specific example of the transtemporal tension "between being and instrumentality" that defines American black life (Sharpe 21). "The hold," Sharpe writes, "repeats and repeats and repeats in and into the present" (90).

[238] A "contact zone," following Mary Louis Pratt, is a "social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 9).

In concert with music and lighting, the animation of inanimate objects is a defining hauntological feature of *Caroline, or Change*. Kushner told me that he animated the appliances originally as a kind of "gimmick" to represent Caroline's depressive interiority on stage (*Interview with Tony Kushner* 31:34). But he also said that Wolfe's directorial sensibility was crucial to the distribution of Caroline's personality across several of the machines. In one rehearsal

> Capathia Jenkins, who played the washing machine…said, "What am I doing? Am I machine, should I sound mechanical?"...And I think [Wolfe] made it up on the spot but it was the most beautiful thing, he said, 'Well, this is the Deep South, and there were plantations all over the place. And they had machines in the 18th and 19th century…they had slaves… So you people, are the ghost of slaves, you died in slavery, and you wander around and you find something that you can inhabit that makes you feel sort of at home for you (*Interview with Tony Kushner*).[239]

Critic Stacy Wolf argues that Caroline is "the source of power that brings the appliances to life," but George C. Wolfe—channeling the aesthetics of Hurston—wanted to make clear that these objects were powered by the history behind her powerlessness (Wolf 178).[240] That is: if these objects are haunted by ghosts of the enslaved, they also haunt Caroline. Each of them hails her throughout the scene: the radio is the most outspoken about Caroline's negative affect ("Dressed in white and/ Feeling low/ talkin to the washer and the/ radio!/ Doin laundry, full of woe/ neath the Gulf of Mexico.), while the Dryer beckons her muted sexuality ("Crank my little timer bell").[241] Sianne Ngai writes that variations on this form of racial "animatedness" are some of the most basic ways that affect becomes recognizable in the age of mechanical reproduction: "how the seemingly neutral state of 'being moved' becomes twisted into the image of the overemotional racialized subject" (Ngai 91). Ngai is particularly interested in a kind of "boomeranged" animation—how in the process of animating things, we also animate

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[239] This idea of using the machines to represent interiority is also parallel to the many ways that Wolfe used staging to represent free-indirect discourse in his staging of *Spunk*: masks, speaking pictures, self-narration, and choruses. The first draft of the play, dated 1998, also much more explicitly conveys this hauntological sentiment when the dryer describes the purgatory of the basement: "Fallen spirits that rebel/find their sinful selves in hell/ and the Pit of their abasement/ looks a lot like this old basement" (Kushner, *Caroline, or Change First Draft* 5).

[240] This haunting of black labor by the mechanized objects of their labor is directly connected to Hurston's work. In her play *Spunk* (1935), the eponymous guitar-man comes to town and gets a job at a local sawmill. He quickly becomes the main topic of porch conversation for his ability to tame the dangerous circle saw by speaking back to it. The porch imitates the sound of the saw, its "pitch and hum," but Spunk tells them its more than just "noise." He translates the saw's speech and answers with a fugitive lyric: "You done cut a coffin/ but it ain't my size" (Hurston, *Zora Neale Hurston: Collected Plays* 235). The elision of human body and mechanized object is then paralleled with the objectification of the female body in the dramatization of a "toe party," in which women hide behind a curtain and men choose them for their toes. The object-human relation is then paralleled in the play by the human-animal relation. After a voodoo conjure scene that features a Bishop shedding his black skin to become a black cat that haunts Spunk, Hurston annotates the script in a way that may explain why the play was never staged in her time but instead became part of Wolfe's directorial canon: "Conjure scene can not be fully put on paper. Must be done in direction" (264).

[241] Later in the play, the animated bus is perhaps the most overly political figure ("the president is dead"), and, as Caroline Stevenson has written, the moon—always changing, waxing and waning—is her perfect foil (Stevenson 771).

ourselves.[242] But in crucially animating inanimate objects but also having Caroline refuse to become animated, the play often provides a kind of Brechtian critical consciousness about the legacy of racial animatedness, and the question of labor that these kinds of scenes tend to obfuscate.

The Washing Machine most consistently haunts the stage with the objectification of her labor. In this very first scene, Caroline is charged with taking the dirty laundry and whitening it: like many domestic workers, she is imbuing affect into the clothes at the same time that she is charged with erasing any trace of it. The depositing of Noah's pocket-change into the "bleach cup" will also come to signify the erasure of her affective labor, but in this first scene, the language of the washing machine captures this contradiction:

> Hum hum hum hum
> Round and round I agitates
> while them what does the clothes awaits
> they contemplate and speculate
> in the peace my one-horsepower
> lectric motor's hum creates (Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change* 13)

The erasure of Caroline's labor is paralleled throughout the disciplining of noise within the lyric: non-human sounds become human language; black vernacular ("Round and round I agitates") becomes Shakespearean syntax ("while them what does"); language of political motion (agitation) turns into language of stasis (awaits); mental activity (contemplate) matched with economic activity (speculate); mechanical sound ("lectric motor") becomes a peaceful "hum." The music also attempts to convey this contradiction: this stanza is set to a vaguely blues-like structure, oscillating between a I (D7) and IV (G7 chord) (Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change Score for Voice and Piano* 15). But by the end of this stanza, even the blues are displaced when the radio joins the washer in a "classical cacophony," while Caroline sits on the stairwell listening (Figure 6.3). The first chord of this "cacophony" is both incredibly dissonant *and* harmonious: a second inversion A major triad on top of C major in the bass. The effect is that you have C natural and C# in the same chord—two notes incredibly close on the keyboard and therefore incredibly dissonant (Figure 6.4). But Tesori puts them wide apart—at least two octaves—so as to make the dissonance feel desirable and open (the C# a "sharp 15" over the C natural bass note). This harmonious dissonance becomes a metaphor for the way that proximity and distance might be handled in the play: two notes, or two people, that are too close to be harmonious, but if they are kept at proper distance, they can sound together. But notes are not people, and people are not machines: the play revels, at this moment, in these uncertainties. In the final lyric of the "Laundry Quintet"—just before Noah enters—both the Washing Machine and Radio ask "What shall be? What lies in store?/ In nineteen sixty three? –or Four?" In moments like these, the play risks equating Caroline's relationship to these animated objects with the relationship of an audience to *Caroline:* we too, like Caroline, sit and speculate "what will happen?" But as much as the play invites audience members to identify with Caroline on the axis of narrative expectation, the theatricality—the broken lyrics, the constantly oscillating light, the

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[242] She also connects this to Deleuze's notion of "excessive submission": "It might be said that the excess liveliness produced by [a] particular body part suggests something like the racialized, animated subject's 'revenge,' produced not by transcending the principles of mechanization from above but, as in the case of Chaplin's factory worker, by obeying them too well" (Ngai 117),

cacophonous music, the animation of machines into technologies of black sound—demands an attentive audience check the quality of that identification. The Brechtian aesthetic of encouraging critical distance to identification overlaps, then, with the Hurstonian aesthetic of animating black labor. Bringing the mechanical objects to life is a way of externalizing the interiority, but also a means of making more visible and audible the specters of objectified and dehumanized labor that haunt Caroline's social position.

Figure 6.3. Caroline listening to The Radio and The Washer "speculate" over a "classical cacophony." From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 19, Folder 2.

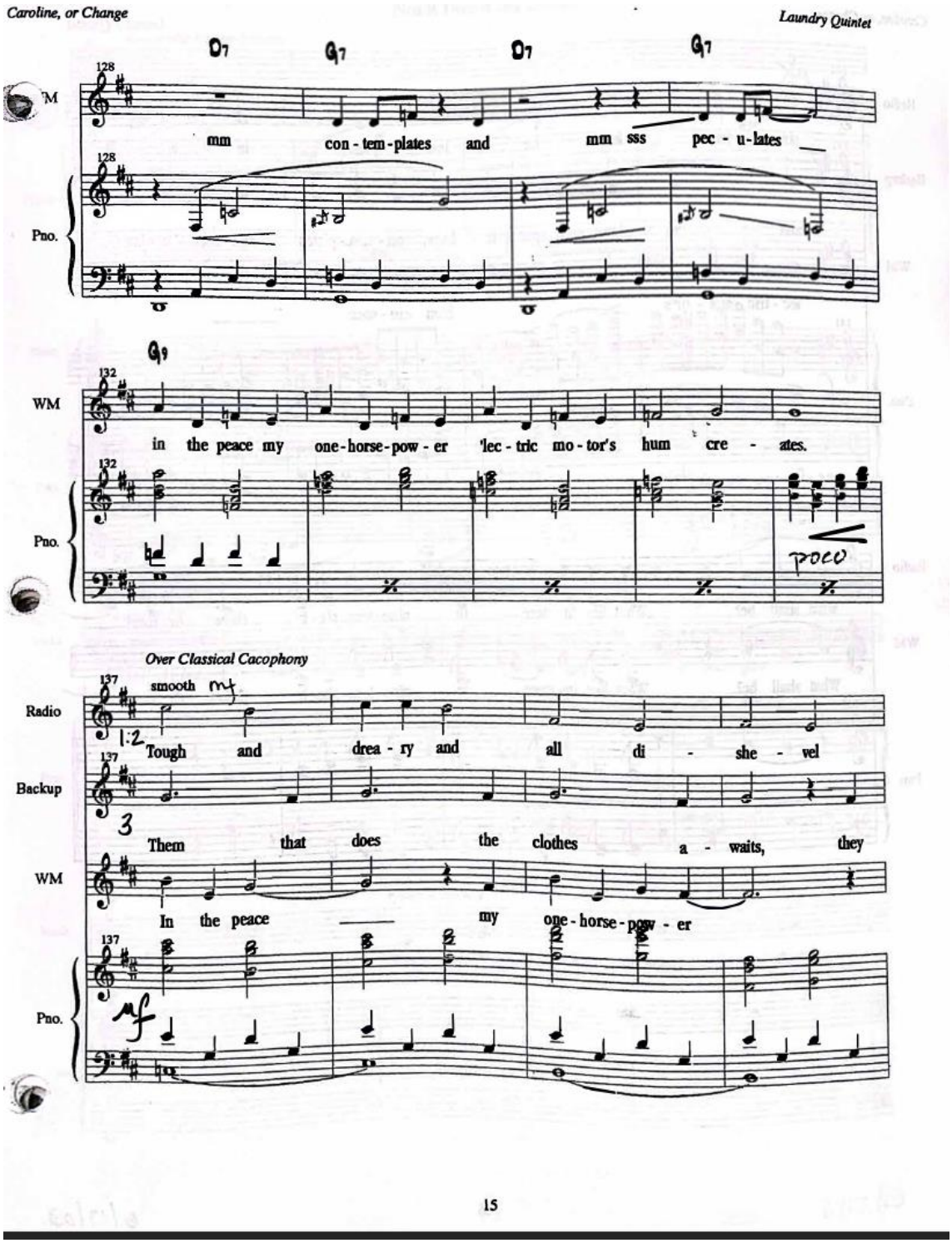

Figure 6.4. From the blues to the "Classical Cacophony." From the New York Public Library New York Shakespeare Festival records, additions collection; T-Mss 1993-028, Box 343, Folder 4.

Unlike The Washing Machine, the Radio is an anthropomorphized mechanical object that already exists as a sound technology. Thus, in its capacity as machine of both transmission and reception of broadcast sound, the radio dramatizes how both personal and societal change haunt Caroline. In Scene 5, for instance, entitled "Duets," Caroline sits outside her home, listening to the radio. Like Belize's "uptown," Caroline's house is one in which we never experience the interior of, though we see her here sitting on the porch, shrouded in blue light (Figure 6.5). Unlike *Angels*, however, this is a distinctly black social space. Emmie, Caroline, and the Radio are never lit directly with white light in this scene: different racialized spaces are lit differently in this play. With no view inside her home, the radio, instead, provides an audible form of interiority. Caroline avoids the news (the previous scene announced the murder of JFK) and listens to the three-person, animated Radio sing a Motown-style ballad:

> No one waiting to warm the dark,
> No one hopin that I'll wear red
> No one wantin to spark my spark
> No one needing to share my bed…(Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change* 41)

There is a particularly dense form of vocalization and listening occurring here: we hear the sound of the voices on the radio in the genre of Motown though we hear the lyrics as filtered through Caroline's loneliness. She's, in effect, both listening and not listening to herself on the radio. But when her daughter Emmie arrives out of the blue-hued void, Caroline begins to duet with the Radio:

THE RADIO	CAROLINE
Nobody's arm to cradle my head	Don't break promises, Emmie
To talk about news, talk about views	Do like you said you do
Talk about change,	Don't give yourself options.
Bout the president dead	Most folks lives without them. (41)

But this is not a typical duet: the volume of The Radio drops subtly, functioning as three background singers over which Caroline talks sternly. The effect is that the play reproduces what Emily Lordi has described as the soul aesthetic of "speechifying," when a singer— notably Aretha Franklin—would "sing the song text like it would be spoken"(Lordi, *Black Resonance* 190). Though Caroline is attempting to teach Emmie personal responsibility as Rose does to her stepson Noah, Caroline's medium is different: the quality of this form of sing-talking derives definitively from the black church. So at the same time that we are getting a window into the kind of music playing on The Radio through the duet between Caroline and The Radio, we are witnessing Caroline become "preachy" toward her daughter. Moreover, it situates Caroline's loneliness and her thwarted desire "to talk" with others as the root of such moralism. Talk can have drastically different meanings when the affective—and here, musical—context that frames it, changes.

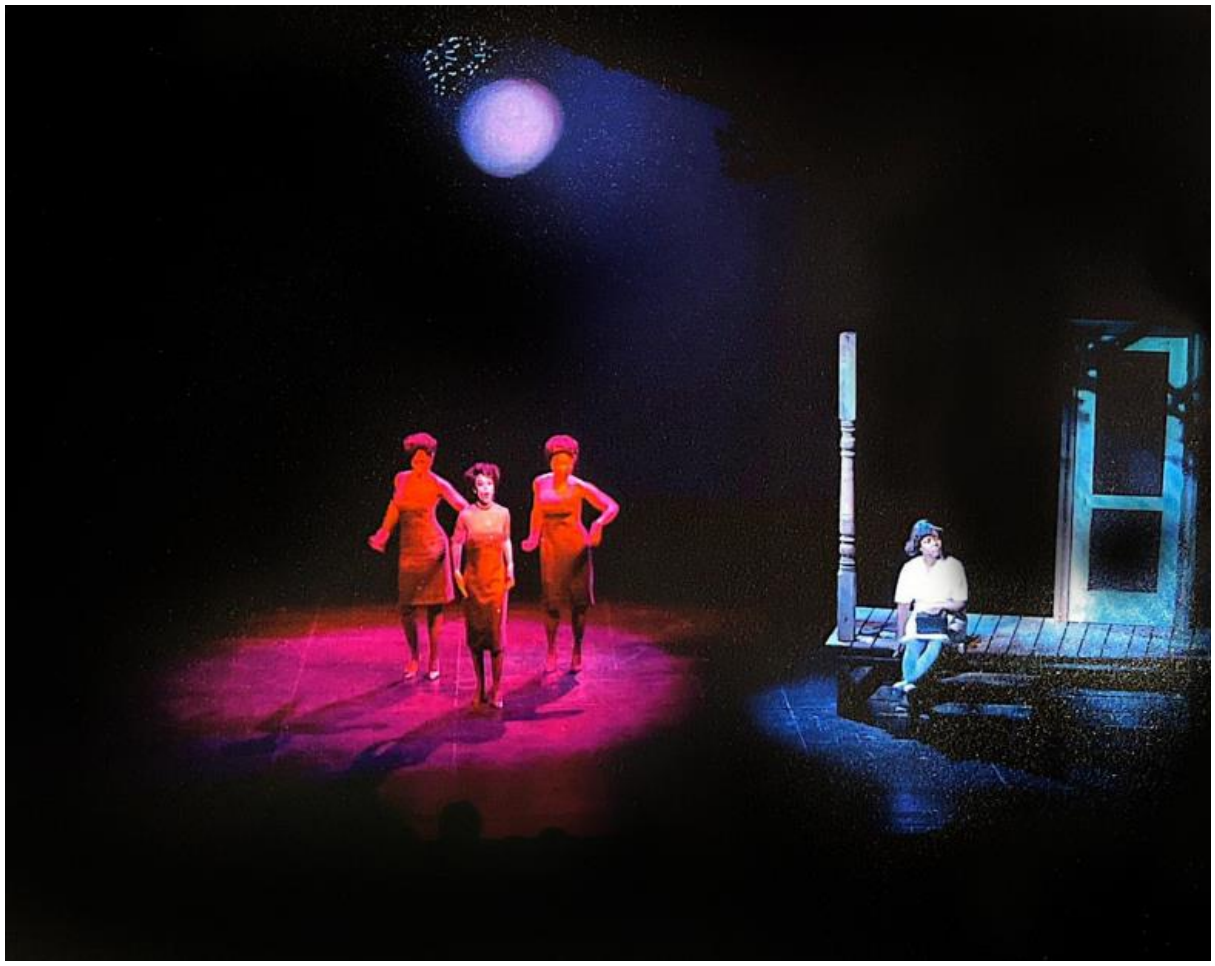

Figure 6.5. “Duets,” with Caroline on the porch. From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 19, Folder 2.

But Emmie contradicts her mother with her own song, and it's the interaction between her, Caroline, and The Radio in this fifth scene that offers an example of how haunting functions at the level of sound in this play. Emmie walks out of the void and over to the porch, where she turns the dial of the mechanical radio and causes the Radio to pick up the tempo. "You remember fun, Mama," Emmie sings, dancing "the twist." But Caroline tries to check her with the facts:

> Caroline (talking)
> The president's dead.
>
> Emmie and The Radio (singing)
> I know, the radio
> Play music anyway!
> Just some old white man
> Sent Larry [her brother] off to Vietnam.
> Sorry he dead.
> I ain't killed him. (42)

Caroline is a source of news for Emmie while The Radio is a source of defiance: she listens to music because she "aint got not tears to shed/ for no dead white guy" (43). Affronted by these belted words, Caroline changes The Radio back to her station, and begins speechifying with The Radio in the background: "whoever put a mouth like that on you/ I know *I* didn't do it, and God didn't do it" (43). Throughout this play in which Caroline is haunted by animated mechanical objects, her daughter Emmie also appears *too* animated: her "mouth" in excess of her upbringing. For Barbara Johnson, who writes in the context of lyric poetry, these moments of figurative language provoke larger questions (Butler, "Personhood and Other Objects: The Figural Dispute with Philosophy" 222): who gets to be human? To what extent? Does language dramatize the animation (the coming to life) of the human or the disanimation (the inability to live) of that human?[243] *Caroline, or Change*, then, is not just a play about Jewish and black "relations" in the south amidst historical change, but also about intra-racial generational change: the political animation of Emmie parallels the suppression of Caroline's emotional life. And it's figurative language, the theatrical animation of inanimate objects, and an oscillating musical frame—what we might call Tesori's "radio aesthetic"—that draw attention to this political-personal axis of change in the play.

When change becomes literalized as legal tender, the haunting of Caroline receives its richest treatment. Scene 7, "Ironing," dramatizes this haunting through four different parts and across at least seven different "songs." The first part of the scene begins the month after the November Kennedy assassination, and like the first scene of the play, Caroline is in the basement alone, ironing laundry. She delights in taking placing money she finds in Noah's clothes into the bleach cup—the melody of "Jingle Bells" sung by the Radio and Washer echoing the jingle of coins. But putting money in the bleach cup is not the same as taking it home. The lyrics clash with the Christmas music as the haunted machines move in and out of the void, again externalizing her inner conflict:

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[243] Judith Butler, writing on Johnson's "Ego Sum Game," reiterates her claim that the"only way for a self to know itself is precisely by becoming an object, and thus not a subject" (Butler, "Personhood and Other Objects: The Figural Dispute with Philosophy" xx).

THE RADIO

Ain't right to take his pennies
They ain't Santa's Sleigh.
Yeah but Christmas is expensive,
You got gifts to buy and bills to pay. (68)

While she seems emotionally to enjoy the act of collecting the money, she verbally resists it, replying to the machines with platitudes like "Can't afford embarrassment" and "money can't buy happiness." Here we see Caroline haunted not just by segregation but capitalistic-Christian hegemony, one that demands she maintain ethical principles of individual self-sufficiency but also partake in the Christmas spirit of gift giving. The question embedded in the scene, as it's presented through the voice of singing machines, is: does accepting the money make her more human or more like a machine?[244] There are hints that Caroline begins to change—that is, to be coerced by both the Washer and the Radio to accept the money. The Radio musicalizes this change to the tune of "Gloria In Excelsis Deo" ("All changes come from small changes/ come from coin janglin in the wash machine, knock you off your routine:"), providing a cutting critique of the capitalist consumerism of American Christianity.

But what could be perceived as change for Caroline turns instead into a flight into memory to the soundtrack of a series of rapid musical shifts. Fisher and Wolfe shift the lights down to an interstitial purple haze—a fuchsia neither red nor white nor blue—as the second part of this scene reveals the history of her own traumatic divorce. The Washing Machine and Radio recount how she married in 1943 before her husband went off to fight in Japan, leaving her to raise her oldest son Larry alone. The cast recording labels this part of the scene as a single track entitled "1943," but that notation erases how Tesori's "radio aesthetic" distributes Caroline's personal story here over at least two different and rapidly oscillating versions of the blues. The loneliness of single-motherdom is sung a cappella before sliding into the first blues style, the "joyous, bouncy" up-tempo blues she uses here to describe her husband's return from Vietnam. But the music then changes into a different time signature, both literally—it's notated as a 12/8 "dirty, dirty blues"—and figuratively, as she remembers the way her husband's body felt (Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change Score for Voice and Piano* 183):

CAROLINE AND THE RADIO

Even now your hand can summon
How his neck, his belly feel
Shoulders, what his breath was like
Hands burn then with happy fire,
Every inch of you, desire,
Longing set your skin aflame. (70-71)

The iron is most visibly a gest of Caroline's servitude—literally, she's flattening out wrinkles in the Gellman's white, cotton shirts as she sings this. But it also imaginatively here becomes an extension of Caroline's bodily expression of an erotic memory. The music then shifts back into the up-tempo blues to provide the effect of a historical montage, as Caroline recounts how her

[244] The 1998 first draft also makes these questions much more explicit: "Every day I iron shirts…Every day I smell the smell/ of burning cotton…I think of my mama/think of my grandma/think of her mama/and her mama's grandma/and her mama's grandma/ironing shirts/scars and cotton/ cotton burning" (40).

husband couldn't hold a job where the union was all white. But then the music drops into a third realm, a dialogic recitative, as the content becomes darker: the machines and Caroline recount how her husband succumbed to drink and hit her. Caroline then breaks out into talk: "Just once," she lies, attempting to avoid the truth by then breaking out into the uptempo "shuffle feel" a singing about her children ("Larry is a gentle baby./Emmie fussy, never sleeps"). But the ghosts refuse to back her: a sonic refusal that makes her attempt to distract from the trauma sound hollow and that forces her to confront an even starker truth ("He gets drunk. He broke my nose"). The music shifts once again to the "dirty dirty blues," the Radio here is singing "Pain is white, remember pain?/ Pain is white, that is its color,/bright as sunshine" (72). These lines elide her past trauma with her current conditions, prompting the audience to see the connection between her present and her past as part of a structural condition of subjection, not (just) of an individual, abusive man. Abruptly, the music shifts again to solo aria as Caroline prays for a better life; it shifts again "poco piu mosso" as Caroline contemplates going out into public with a broken face; shifts again into the uptempo blues as she recounts finding work as a maid; shifts again into solo aria as she holds up the iron up like a weapon demanding he never "ever/ ever/ever hit me again"; and then shifts *again* into a "girl group" style as she continues to think about her children. The effect of these rapid shifts in texture, tempo, and musical genre in the context of a single song is that while we listen to Caroline's recounting of her traumatic past, we are also shuffling through the radio stations, bumping up against the dial. And as the affective context changes, the same lyrics and gestures can have vastly different meaning:

CAROLINE AND THE RADIO
Even now your hand can summon

CAROLINE
What it like to beat his face in.
What his back feel like, his kiss. (74)

Here the gesture of her ironing is not just a symbol of her servitude nor just an imaginative reconstruction of her sexuality, but also—bearing the mark of Wolfe's own grandmother—a powerful symbol of revolt.[245] The gesture of ironing here is again a social gest: an incomplete action that calls attention to unjust social conditions that constitute both her present and past. And the constantly shifting styles of blues that underscore this scene offer another kind of affective brokenness, one that historicizes the memory of this personal injustice as part of larger, social condition of the black, American experience.

The types of haunting that Caroline experiences while working in the basement—Christian-capitalism, domestic abuse—are a not mitigated but exacerbated by the fact of working in a white, Jewish family's home. When Rose comes into the basement, asking Caroline to keep the coin she ironed over on Mr. Gellman's shirt, white light signifies a shift in time, space, and racialized affect. In addition to the light making whiteness visible, Rose's voice makes whiteness

[245] In an interview with bell hooks in 1994, Wolfe described how the iron was a powerful symbol of defiance during his upbringing: "Some insurance man came to collect, a white man, and my grandmother said, "Take off your hat." She was ironing. He didn't do it. So she talked about something else, and then said, suddenly, "Take off your hat." And he still didn't do it, and she said, "You can either take off your hat, or I can throw iron and knock it off. Now which one are you going to do?" He took off the hat. These were the stories that were passed on. The stories of "Go Down Moses" weren't passed on to me. All the stories told to me were stories of defiance" (hooks and Wolfe 47).

audible: she almost always communicates through recitative—a kind of simultaneous singing and talking that is never quite either, always searching for a height or depth that it can never quite grasp. Caroline refuses the money ("I don't want it!/ I ain't some ragpick.") but Rose won't relent "trying to be friendly…trying to be a friend" (78). If money haunts Caroline throughout this scene, Rose's words are also a kind of legal tender, in the Hurstonian sense, in that they are abstractions—certainly legal but hardly tender.[246] Caroline is herself pushed into a kind of recitative, resisting Rose's friendliness by trying to hustle her out of the basement, eventually bursting into full song:

ROSE

Now wait a second, lady---

CAROLINE

I got to iron now
Iron now iron now
It cramp in here and there's no air
So please get out
So my arm can swing
With this hot iron
and not hit nobody (76)

But Caroline catches herself. Her final words "not hit nobody" settle into unaccompanied talk and affectively convey the gravity of what she just did: physically threaten the boss. We can understand Caroline's physical threat to Rose as motivated not only by the fact that she's been haunted by her traumatic past before Rose even entered the basement, but also by Rose's patronizing attempt to play a "game" with her employee. But while there's imaginative space within this basement for Rose to express her disappointment at this reaction from Caroline (*Aside: "*So sue me already, Miss Crabby Appleton!"), the haunted machines emerge again from the shadows to express what she can't under the social circumstances:

THE DRYER

Caroline,
Something else
on your mind sides
jingle bells.
You the queen of keep-at-bay
what-was-once or might-have-been.
Little change and strange to say
yesterday come crashing in.
Small domestic tragedies
bring strong women to their knees. (79)

[246] Hurston distinguishes between white and black forms of speech in "Characteristics of Negro Expression" with this very phrase: "Now the people with highly developed languages have words for detached ideas. That is legal tender…the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics" {Citation}.

To the tune of an a cappella "Gloria, In Excelsis Deo," the Dryer at once summarizes the psychology of the entire scene—in which the prospect of acquiring a “little change” caused a flight into traumatic memory—at the same time that it foreshadows what might be to come. In the final part of the scene, all the levels merge, as Caroline's children appear in white nightgowns at the threshold of the basement--Emmie singing to the tune of "I Saw Three Ships":

EMMIE

Mama there's money!
down in the laundry!
Dig for the money
down in the laundry!
Mama come home. (80)

The rehearsal report from October 23, 2003, a month before the shows debut, suggests that Wolfe wanted the children’s clothing to be simple here, and Emmie’s specifically to represent “the ghost of herself” (Steiger). Caroline is haunted by historical, emotional, and material change in this scene, and her daughter, shrouded in a wispy white nightgown, embodies these hauntings. There is a kind of realpolitik to Emmie's song: *Just take the money and come home*. But there's also a critique here: Caroline hears the voices of her children haunting her, asking her to move past the ethical dilemma that will cause her to lose her job, to see this ethical dilemma as itself a white construction.

What I’ve attempted to do in this section is describe the various surfaces that haunt Caroline—the washing machine, the radio, money, and conversation—but also how those surfaces index various haunting depths—the objectification of her labor, the context of historical change, her traumatic past, and her obligations as a single mother. The rhythms of these hauntings are themselves mediated by the broken visual aesthetic of Wolfe’s void and the broken "radio" aesthetic of Tesori’s score. In a crucial aesthetic revision to *Angels*, Wolfe and Fisher tell a story of segregated America by offering a different visual logic for racial difference: Caroline and her family are never lit with white light unless they are the presence of white people. And there is a distinct sonic logic at play as well: Caroline breaks out into talk when in these white spaces as a way to disguise her interiority, but also when she must disguise it in a way that appears to front as a source of strength for her daughter. It’s only when she’s alone does she begin to explore the spaces beyond talking, between the human and the animated. In the next section, I center the medium of haunting while describing the character of Noah: how is he haunted? Whom does he haunt? And in what ways does his character dramatize the failures of integration, and specifically the paradigm of “black-Jewish conversation,” in a southern US context?

Noah: Grief-stricken Gab

Though it’s not until scene 7 “Ironing” that we learn the personal source of Caroline’s grief, we’re greeted with Noah’s grief as early as scene 2. After the first scene, which Caroline (Pinkins) closes with a powerful dirge (“Nothing happens underground/ in Louisiana/ Cause there is no under ground…There is only/ under water”), Rose enters into the basement to offer Caroline some “stuffed cabbage” stage right, her voice typically straining for an interlocutor. But stage left stands Noah alongside his paternal grandparents:

NOAH (singing)
(In his room:)
My father is a clarinet.

GRANDPA GELLMAN (talking)
(Outside:)
You mean he plays a clarinet.

NOAH (singing)
(In his room:)
I mean he plays the clarinet.
My mama was a sad bassoon:
They played duets. (20)

Noah here confuses persons and things, but it's a different confusion than the way the play animates electric machines. Though the machines are haunted by the historical objectification and subjugation of blackness—enslaved black labor, commodified black music, Caroline's personal grief—the woodwind instruments frequently quote European art music, play entire Jewish melodies, and signify Noah's alienation from his parents. By suggesting that "my father is a clarinet" and "my mama was a sad bassoon," Kushner and Tesori are teaching us how to listen to the play: the bassoon figures as a haunting leitmotif for the absence of Noah's mother, the clarinet a sonic symbol of the father's emotional detachment.[247]

But this scene features as much a broken visual aesthetic as it does a broken musical aesthetic. Set within the context of the void, there are at least four rooms on stage. Kushner writes that Noah is "inside his room" but he's standing right next to his grandparents: the space between them a wall that the grandparents can ostensibly hear through. It's notably one of many scenes of instruction for Noah, as his grandfather tries to correct his singing with spoken facts. Ostensibly unsatisfied, Noah walks across the void—down into basement—where Caroline tells him in straight talk that cancer killed her mother too and that it's all God's plan: "He make this whole world as a test./ Cancer was your momma's test,/ and her death is your test, you been tested too" (21). Knowing her limits, Caroline leaves the basement to the sound of Stuart's clarinet, and the lights reveal two other sets of sets of stairs upstage. Stuart is atop one, practicing his solos from Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and von Webern, while Noah crosses the void to ascend the other (Figure 6.6). But his father beckons him to cross-over to him, offering another form of instruction in how (not) to grieve:

STUART
There is no God, Noah,
We don't believe in God.
In all that corny stuff

[247] They're also teaching us how to listen like a particular (Kushnerian) child: what it's like to grow up in a house where your parents are both woodwind players and the sound of their incessant practicing haunts the walls. In an interview with John Lahr, Tesori mentioned that she was trying to create a soundscape that imitated what it was like to hear this kind of practicing as young child (Lahr and Tesori 34). This, I think, gives new meaning to what Brent Hayes Edwards calls the "practice of diaspora," but as applied to a Jewish American context: hearing your mother practicing the bassoon after her death as a way of affiliating—or disaffiliating—with the music of the homeland. It is the clarinet rather than the bassoon however, that is really marked as "Jewish" in the American imaginary.

> We're scientific people!
> Space is infinite and empty and cold
> people are descended from apes, actually
> and usually act worse than apes,
> and a boy your age should sleep without a light on
> and your mother is dead.
> and there is no God. (22)

Here, Noah is offered, almost humorously, two vastly different modes of working through grief: Caroline's talk firmly urges Noah to have faith, while his father's recitative and Classical—and not explicitly Jewish—clarinet playing urges him to give up on it.[248] We never witness Noah overtly struggle with his emotions or cry; instead, his grief is sublimated into the various staircases and thresholds he must climb throughout the stage. In the rehearsal report for the June 9th, 2003, Wolfe's direction over the set design becomes clear: "[George] has described the house as being fractured and fragmented in its design, just like the lives within it" (NYPL).[249] As in *Angels*, the default presence of the black void is what allows the characters to cross spatial, temporal, narrative and emotional levels.[250]

As much as he is haunted, Noah does a lot of the haunting as well. At the end of the scene five "Duets," where Caroline and her daughter tussle over the radio and historical change, Noah appears in his bunkbed, floating in the air stage right. He asks her, "What're you going to do now that President Kennedy's dead?/ Now you're the only president/ in the United States?" Hearing his idealization of her, Caroline sublimates her political powerlessness into a slow tango about "passing herself a law" that would effect various forms of personal change: affective ("Larry come home"), epistemological ("no woman can be my age/ and not know enough/ to read a map"), parental ("Emmie gonna mind me") and sexual ("Nat King Cole gotta come over my house). Noah again interrupts her political/personal fantasizing to ask if she can wish him good night, and she breaks out into talk: "That not my job." In this moment, Kushner reveals this play to be not just how the past haunts the present, but how specters of affective labor haunt the present for domestic workers. The radio has disappeared, but Noah is another way of externalizing what haunts her internally ("in the nightime, my own time,/ I still think about

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[248] The rapid oscillation between Caroline's faith and Noah's father's atheism produces a distinctly Jewish kind of humor. As Hillel Halkin describes in his introduction to *Tevye and the Dairyman* (1987), there are approximately four "standard responses…to the problem of innocent suffering in the world: 1.) God exists…his injustice is…a legitimate testing of our character…2.) God exists but is not all powerful…3.) God does not exist…and fourth…He is good…he must be just; but he is not just; therefore He owes man an explanation and man must demand it from him. This is Job's response. And it is also Tevye's" (Aleichem xxv). Noah is not so much a Job figure in the play as he is a Jewish child, seeking to fill the absence of his grief. But the play is itself a kind of job like figure—constantly asking: "why change, why?"

[249] Jules Fisher's handwritten notes on a script to the play read "GEORGE: A GAY STAIRCASE" (Kushner and Tesori, *New York Shakespeare Festival Draft of Caroline or Change*). Make of this what you will. Many scholars have attempted to read queer identity into Noah's character. There's not much. In his interview with me, assistant lighting designer Justin Partier used the phrase "isolation and observation" to describe how multiple scenes were staged at once as separate but connected. "I worked for them for four months, he told me, "but I still use this technique" (Partier).

[250] Lighting designer Itohan Edoloyi gestures toward this aesthetic when she says: "light is something that helps us to see; absence of light is something that helps us to feel" (*Darkness and Light* 9:55).

Figure 6.6. “Cabbage,” Scene 2. In this fractured home, the Gellman Grandparents stand with Noah stage right; Caroline and Rose stage left; Stuart Gellman upstage. From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 19, Folder 2.

you—"). In response to his demand, Caroline tells him to go to sleep: "stop bothering the night." Clearly, the night affords her the capacity for a humanness that the day denies her. And for a brief moment, so does the music. The scene ends with a litany of Caroline's children's needs, before she—shrouded in a mood indigo—rapidly shifts register to describe her own desire:

CAROLINE
And I want the night to stay
nighttime forever
so I can sit smoking here, so I never
have to get up, go to work, be polite.
Go on to bed, Noah.
Stop botherin the night. (47)

Like the haunted night, smoking in the play also is a contradiction: it's both the cause of Noah's mother's death, but also a private freedom for Caroline that she allows Noah to share. And the music beautifully captures these contradictions: in these lines, Pinkins switches from a chest to a head voice and the music shifts subtly into what Tesori designates as "*colla voic*e" (follow the voice). The music under "And" and "want" is dissonant and highlights the tension with a series of unstable passing chords—F+/B to Ebdim/Bb—but Tesori gives them, and Caroline, their due time by placing a fermata on each. Unstable as they are, there's a musical and emotional logic to these chords, as they follow a descending bassline, leading the music back into a set rhythm as the character comes back to reality. But for this brief moment, Caroline is finally in control of the (chord) changes, and she can express her desire to exist in a world without pretending to be polite to white people. Noah certainly haunts Caroline in a way similar to the machines, in that he is a symbol of the contradictions of her labor, but he is crucially unbidden—a version of the white gaze that haunts her interiority with an excessive desire to talk.

Talking is, in fact, Noah's strongest medium. Caroline hates it, even when it's an intra-racial conversation: "I'm too tired to talk," she tells her former friend Dotty while they wait for the bus in scene 4. A 1998 first draft of the play develops Caroline's opposition to talk most explicitly:

CAROLINE TIDBODEAUX
Dotty Moffett, not everything a person face
can be fix by talking.
You think when your head tell your jaws to get grinding
it some big news for the whole human race.
I'm going to Church and I'm going to pray,
and from now on, only God hear what I have to say,
cause only God can hear what my-heart means to state:
when I talk to people, all that comes out is hate:
cause I hate
ain't nothing I can do about that. (68)

What we get here is an explicit distinction between talking as a social form and prayer as a religious form. But if anything is sacred in Kushner's plays, it's the talking. In the 2003 version

of the play, what Noah does in the absences of an interlocutor is imagine himself constantly being talked about by someone who doesn't desire to engage.

This desire to be talked about is most pressingly felt in scene 6, "The Bleach Cup," when Rose sets up the "game" that Caroline can keep the change that Caroline finds. Wolfe stages this as a double scene of instruction, with Rose explaining the rules to Caroline stage left and Noah and his father in the practice room stage right. But Wolfe and Fisher's sense of color makes the rooms bleed together. Lighting is a medium of differentiation but also of dramatizing entanglement. Rose enters wearing red pants, and though Caroline is ironing the whites, Fisher projects red across her face to signify a suppressed anger: the color of Rose's clothing literally washes across Caroline' face. Across the void stage right, Stuart says he'll do his part to teach Noah responsibility by giving him an allowance: "Don't you want a chemistry set?" But Noah doesn't want a chemistry set—in fact, what he wants he can't buy: Caroline's affection. Noah starts to leave change in his pockets on purpose, and when it reaches seventy-five cents, she puts some of it in her pocket. And Noah's imagination takes flight:

NOAH
Caroline takes my money home!
Now I know what they talk about
at the Thibodeaux house, at suppertime.
Before it was a mystery.
Now they count my quarters and
They talk about me! (56)

Rose and Stuart's patronizing game with their domestic worker—rather than simply giving her a raise—results in their child's entertainment of another kind of philanthropic fantasy: with his donation, he has purchased a black family's attention.

But Noah's desire to imagine where the money goes is thwarted by what actually happens at the Thibodeaux household—a refusal to entertain the questions of where the money came from. In the very same scene, the setting shifts by virtue of the void to outside Caroline's house, with Noah again haunting the stage in the corner. Caroline puts quarters in each of her children's hands, telling them its "All their own." Her youngest, Jackie, calls out "Hey MAMA! Where'd this money come from, you—" before her eldest, Emmie tells him to zip it: "There was this one boy, he asked his mama one too many questions and he died. He *died*" (58). Caroline now inside her home, Emmie plays the parent, and what ensues is the number entitled "Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw." In it, Emmie tells the story of young Coleslaw, "ugliest child you ever saw," who begged his mother for more and more change. When he eventually got it, he made the mistake of asking where it came from, and Mama Coleslaw–Emmie imitating her voice—"whacked him…upside his head." Coleslaw dies, flies into heaven, turns into an angel, and marries the Moon. The effect of Emmie's fable about "Coleslaw" is somewhat akin to Belize's turn to historical fiction in the *Democracy in America* scene of *Angels*: though she teaches Jackie how to be grateful for what he's got, she also allegorizes the present as an attempt to thwart white, Jewish attempts to scrutinize black life. Noah, who's been haunting the entire scene, bursts out of the shadows in the middle of this scene, singing about himself:

NOAH
Caroline shows each silver quarter
to kids—
she's a divorcee!
"Thank God we can eat now
Thanks to poor crazy Noah,
Who's just a stoopnagle
Can't hang on to a quarter!"
But at least now at supper
They talk about me. (60)

Noah begins singing these lines in what I can only describe as a gospel version of the melody to Yankee Doodle, but when he takes on Caroline's voice, he moves into the melody of Mordkhe Rivesman's "O Channukah." Unlike when Emmie ventriloquizes her mother to teach Jackie a lesson, Noah's ventriloquism of Caroline parodies a certain caricature of Ashkenazic American history, both musically, in its movement between patriotic and religious melodies, and ethically, in its attempt to "speak for" a black person while imagining that person as only interested in him. Noah clearly haunts the stage, here, as a younger Louis Ironson—an emblem of white, Jewish American desire to always be in conversation with, and be talked about by, black people.

And yet, it's not (just) narcissism but grief that motivates this desire. After Noah disappears back into the void, the Thibodeaux children sing about all the things that Coleslaw can buy in a heaven that looks, not like San Francisco, but like 7-11 ("Red-hot!...Sweet-tart…Lemons and limes!...Moon pie, food dye, Tootsie-pop!). The Radio is absent but the aesthetic is present: Tesori orchestrates the song to several African American rhythms and scenes of black hand clapping, what she describes in the score as "front porch style," "four on the floor," and "hambone rhythm." Just as the song switches to the children's' fascination with comic books, so does the music and staging. Bearing the mark of Wolfe's signature style, Thibodeauxs freeze in a tableau, as Noah sings into their ears a fantasy that goes beyond the desire to be talked about:

NOAH
They talk about how my mama died
they talk about my tragedy
they wish that they could take me in
and I could live with Caroline
and Emmie Jackie Larry Joe
…
and Noah
Noah Thibodeaux (63)

Wolfe stages this scene of adoption humorously, having Noah physically step into formation with the stilled Thibodeauxs. But the play then very sincerely entertains this fantasy of finding family across racial and class divisions, at least briefly, at the level of staging and music. Suddenly breaking out of frozen stillness, all four children sing about Coleslaw seeking a hand in marriage, and Wolfe has the animated Moon (Adriane Lenox) emerge among stars shaped like coins—indeed, she shines like a massive face coin herself. Tesori writes "maestoso" into the

score, and it truly is one of the most majestic moments of the play, visually and sonically (Figure 6.7). One would be forgiven for forgetting the numerous contradictions at play here: between the two desires that motivated this scene (Noah's desire to know where the money goes and Emmie's warning not to ask where it came from); between the racial and class divisions (a middle-class, white, Jewish boy fantasizing being adopted into a poor, black family); between the various styles of music; between persons and things. "Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw" may seem like a silly children's song, which it is, but it is also Kushner reminding us here of what Marx says about money as a second order abstraction: money is the "universal measure of value" that represents not just the price of a commodity but the value "immanent" inside of it, which is socially necessary labor-time (188). But we've forgotten all about that at this point, that is, until Caroline—the person whose labor has been most visible to the audience and yet most abstracted in the world of the play—emerges with laundry in hand. Here we are again, by virtue of Wolfe's black void, suddenly thrust into the Gellman basement. Caroline's presence splits the imagined interracial fantasy apart: Noah moves stage right and her kids stage left . Her words, harmonious with the rhythm of the children's tune, simultaneously fragment it: the onomatopoetic nonsense that the kids sing to approximate the sound of money ("Ching! Ching! Ching! Chingalinga!") contrasts with the lyric strength of Caroline's assertion of her underpaid labor: "I am mean, and I am tough/ but thirty dollars ain't enough." The scene ends with a showstopping melisma, as the imaginary's Coleslaw's flight into heaven becomes Caroline's plea for escape from captivity: "Free as the air!" (Figure 6.8).

What I've tried to do on this section is describe how the medium of haunting intersects with the character of Noah across various surfaces of the play—musical instruments, house walls, money, and talk—and indexes the various depths that undergird those surfaces—grief, narcissism, philanthropic fantasy, and class and racial difference. As when the Moon appears in Scene 6, the way that these hauntings are aestheticized can have the effect of creating a universalization, where difference is forgotten. Tesori says that in her compositions, this was at least her partial goal in creating music for Kushner's wildly asymmetrical song structures and rhythms:

> People can share themes. Like the first theme that Tanya sings is the theme the washing machine picks up, which is the final theme that Stuart plays on his clarinet. And people would not know that, but they would emotionally get that on some level, that there is something going through the floorboards (Lahr and Tesori 5)

But as much as musical and literary themes are shared, the staging of the play—through differential lighting, the rapid oscillation of musical style, the breaking out into talk, and the aesthetics of the void—cause difference to resonate. What emerges from the floorboards for Noah sounds different—feels different—than what emerges for Caroline, and certainly for her daughter Emmie, as well.

Figure 6.7: End of Scene 12, “The Bleach Cup,” when Noah, Emmie, Jackie, and Joe watch the Moon accept Coleslaw’s hand in marriage. From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 19, Folder 2.

Figure 6.8: Caroline interrupts the Coleslaw fantasia. From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 19, Folder 2.

Emmie: Consequence Unforeseen

If the Washer in the first scene asks us what "consequences unforeseen" will play out in the narrative, Emmie is one of them. Caroline's daughter is the true revolutionary figure of the play. As Dan Dinero notes, she is not completely unlike her mother: as much as she stands apart from her mother in the quality of affect that she expresses in relation to JFK's death, she shares an affective connection with her Caroline in the refusing to feel "proper" feelings that a social situation demands (292). What interests me is how these oppositional feelings are expressed in conversational contexts quite different than Caroline's, and certainly different than Noah. While Caroline's loneliness manifests as avoidance of talk, and Noah's grief evokes a desire to be talked about, Emmie's relationship to interracial conversational is confrontational and directly oppositional.

Scene 8, "The Channukah Party" most clearly evokes how these different affective dispositions toward conversation manifest inside of this Jewish-American household. The scene follows the one just after Caroline threatened Rose with the iron, and Emmie arrived in the threshold in a ghostly white nightgown to tell her just come home already. Caroline's final note (Db) of Scene 7 suddenly becomes haunted by the sound of the clarinet playing a fifth (Gb) below it. In a classic Wolfeian transition—one that he'll again repeat into the capitulation scene of *Mother Courage*—Stuart emerges from the void through a pinspot, playing a mournful minor tune. The lights slowly reveal the interior of the Gellman household, both front and back of the house: Rose Stopnick, Grandpa Stopnick, Noah, and his paternal grandparents stand center stage around a large table, while Dotty and Emmie are upstage left, shadowed as they work in the kitchen. Like the opening of Act 4 of *Perestroika* and the brief moment in "Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw," we have a Hurstonian or Brechtian tableaux: everyone is frozen still during Stuart's cadenza.

Yet the music never sits still for long, and the bodies often move into spaces they don't belong. As the band kicks in with an uptempo "O Channukah," everyone unfreezes and surrounds Noah, teaching him what Chanukah means ("the Maccabees…they routed King Antiochus…Pooh!") and why it's desirable for a kid in Christian America to celebrate ("a whole week more than Christmas"). The music itself attempts to assert its Jewishness against a dominant culture—comically moving between "O Chanukah" and "American the Beautiful"—while the lights stay definitively white, as if to suggest that this version of American Jewishness is inseparable from the aura of whiteness. But as a candle-lighting ceremony begins, the Jewish characters move stage right; the stage lighting dims, taking us to a quieter, more ancient and sincere space. Noah speaks the prayer and the family sings the "Mi Kamocha"—the Song of Moses from Exodus 15, which celebrates the drowning of the Egyptian oppressors. With the rapid oscillation of music and staging, singing and talking, Noah is being taught how to be a proper Jewish American male subject, one that requires the holding of two opposite thoughts in one's head: someone who remains loyal to a higher imperial power, but also someone who resists imperial control. You pledge (literally, they are holding their hands over their hearts as they sing "America the Beautiful") your loyalty to America at the same time that you celebrate your escape from Egypt. Comically, it's while his family is saying the prayer communally that Noah is able to escape to the kitchen to teach Emmie the symbolism behind all the foods.

Emmie refuses to stay still, too, but in a way that is much more consequential. She and Dotty are in the kitchen cooking, and Dotty tells her they found the Confederate monument's body in the river, decapitated—the head still missing. Caroline stands outside the kitchen,

overhearing the political talk. Furious, she shoos Emmie out of the kitchen to deliver the foods to the front of the house, telling Dotty to quit it: "I don't want my daughter to hear that." Caroline isn't worried so much about the macabre details as she is the revolutionary activity: she thinks the movement is a failure. (Little does she, or we, know that Emmie is partially responsible for the destruction of the monument). Caroline's anger is paralleled by the words of Grandpa Stopnick in the front of the house, both set to a crescendo of recitative. "Dissonance [has] to be housed," writes Tyfarah Singleton, metaphorizing the dialogical tensions between lyrics and music she understands to be constitutive of the radical black and Jewish collaboration of Abel Meeropol and Billie Holiday (Singleton 36). But here, Kushner, Wolfe, and Tesori literalize this claim: though the music brings the front and the back of the house together in the key of D minor, the lyrics clash:

MR. STOPNICK	CAROLINE
(In living room:)	(In kitchen:)
They got to stop looking for martyrdom	We are asking for disaster
Blow the bastards to kingdom come	We'll be ruint fore this is over.
Like the Wobblies used to do!	
Show these rednecks a thing or two!	
(Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change* 88)	

While Caroline thinks the movement is disastrous, Grandpa Stopnick, an avowed Communist from New York ("Down with the filthy capitalist chazzerim!"), openly supports the Civil Rights Movement even as he questions its tactics. Stopnick serves a couple of purposes in this play: he helps diversify forms of white Jewishness onstage, in that he contrasts strikingly with Stuart's parents, who don't want to talk about politics on Channukah ("Such a shonde such a tzimmes!") and instead want Noah to enjoy its sugar-coated festivities (Grandpa Gellman: "It's chocolate money!"). But Grandpa Stopnick also complicates the racist and anti-Semitic narrative that was pervasive in the south during the sixties: that Jewish communists from the North were orchestrating the Civil Rights Movement to attain, as Clive Webb writes, the "mongrelization of the races" (Webb 142).

Instead, Stopnick cautiously supports the movement, and perhaps his greatest role is to serve as a foil for Emmie, who overhears him questioning Martin Luther's King's adoption of Ghandi's non-violent tactics. Finding herself here as a maid-in-training and overhearing Stopnick's criticism, she can't hold her peace, bursting through the barriers of class and race in Bb minor recitative:

EMMIE

I think it's a Negro thing
A southern thing
A Christian thing.
Mister, you don't understand
How Dr. King's got things planned. (90)

What ensues is one of the most heated musical-dialogues of the play, one that prepares us for the outburst of racist and anti-Semitic language between Caroline and Noah at the climax. Unlike that moment, however, it offers us not the clash of two people overtly grieving but from two people who espouse wildly different theories of history. Grandpa Stopnick's voice is consistently

situating past events—and specifically Jewish past events—in allegorical relationship to the present: black people of the south face a similar enemy ("Bull Conner! Pooh!") to the Maccabees ("Antiochus! Pooh!"), and the tactics of nonviolence will only work as well as it did for the Jews of Europe ("Listen, girlie, we have learned: nonviolence will get you burned"). While allegorical thinking served the purpose of thwarting equivalence for Belize with Louis and Emmie with Noah, here it serves a regressive purpose in relation to political change for her with Grandpa Stopnick. Just as not all forms of ambivalence are the same, not all forms of allegory are the same: it depends on who's speaking and to what purpose. The music helps the tension escalate, beginning in Emmie's key of Bb minor, before chromatically escalating into D minor as the language heats up:

Emmie

No I'm sorry that ain't so.
Listen to the radio.
What we're trying's already working!
Segregation's already dying! (90)

Unlike in the scene where she ignores news of JFK's death but escapes into its music, the radio here is a powerful political tool both because of its liveness and localness: it's a mistake to look back to a history of Jewish oppression to understand what's happening with black political activism now. When she bursts into song, the music returns to her key (Bb minor) with Stopnick struggling to keep up underneath:

EMMIE
I'd like to know how you come to feel
You know so much about what is real
Sitting safe and high and pretty,
Way up north, in New York City
…
Now our resistance
Starts to make a difference
Here come your "assistance" (90)

MR. STOPNICK
Is that so?
Why's it so impossible to know,
White or Jew or Negro
If the boss's boot's in your face—
…
A face knows no footrest
Regardless of religion or race!

Emmie now dominates the conversation, rejecting Stopnick's universalism as irrelevant to the particularity of her experience. But Caroline, again, hears Emmie's mouth as in excess of her social position and breaks out into forceful, unaccompanied, talk: "CHILD YOU HEAR ME? HUSH YOUR MOUTH!/ March that tray back to the kitchen." Kushner—in perhaps his strongest lyrical move—immediately moves between the serious and the comic with Grandpa Stopnick's lament to the abrupt end of the dialogue: "Lady, please, since I come South/ she's my first real conversation. Let her stay!" What is a "real conversation," this moment in the play asks us to contemplate, at the same time that Emmie asks us how we come to know "what is real" about historical change. A conversation is real, for the play, in the sense that two frames of

thinking about historical change can clash on the level of politics, not on the level of politeness.[251]

The play also entertains, however, that conversation is not "real" or "fake" in any objective sense but rather—like money—a fungible object that's meaning is measured by the affects that stick to it. After the "real conversation" between Emmie and Stopnick, Grandpa Stopnick gives Noah a twenty dollar bill, but not without a lecture about the meaning of it: "Think of someone who is poor:/ and know you stole this gold from them." Noah stands "frozen, looking at the twenty" (95). Up to this point, he had been (mostly) leaving change in his pockets deliberately, in order to fuel the fantasy of becoming part of the Thibodeaux family. But with this gelt he is also given a vastly different framework of tzedakah—Hebrew not for charity but "justice"—one that demands Noah think not about money's future is but its past. It's a moment when the play attempts to dramatize the American capitalist use of philanthropy as justifying resistance to systemic structural changes. But the play quickly shows us the limits of this scene of instruction. What Emmie gets is not twenty bucks but a literal slap in the face from Caroline. The Moon has arrived and transformed the staging, and Emmie stands not in the kitchen but outside the Gellman house, longing for different material circumstances: "I hate the bus, I want my own car,/ a car with a heater, want a TV set, and more; a big old house like this one, but everything new/ where can't nobody ever/ can't nobody ever…tell me what to do…" (95). Singing by the blue light of the moon, which, again, looks like a massive face coin, Emmy is ostensibly haunted by the absence of purchasing power that could create the circumstances in which she could "live in my house, and I'll make it ok, by myself, all alone" (96). But Emmy is haunted not just by material wealth but by a vision of the future that doesn't include her, one that accepts stillness and status quo: "They's people who freeze/ while they wait on their knees/ and they don't know for what/ and they just been forgot/ but I ain't waitin no more."

At the end of this scene, conversation is presented as a material object, like money, that can be exchanged. Between the moonlight and Emmie is Stuart, who literalizes Emmie's fear of stillness by standing frozen on a staircase. Emmie's song about being frozen in history is thus visually and musically interrupted by the drama within the Gellman family. Rose tries to sing out to Stuart to tell him to check on Noah, who has escaped upstairs, but the bassoon—and thus the haunt of Noah's biological mother—prevents her song from reaching him. Stuart's grief has thus made time stand still:

STUART

Can't go up to see him, I'll only upset
My sad little son; but I can't go down yet.
She needs from me things that I cannot provide
Conversation, support, and a heart…Those all died

[251] This is a version of the distinction between what Frank Wilderson calls the "politics of culture" and "the culture of politics" (Wilderson 202). The "politics of culture" seems to signify a mode of discourse in which we begin with the overlapping and complicated cultural identities of individuals and then discuss the power relations the manifest between them. A "culture of politics" instead starts with the realm of extant power relations--how individuals are seen in the world as structured by often blunt and unequal forces. Here, Stopnick attempts to distinguish Jewishness from whiteness but ends ends up calling for a kind of universalism of experience; this is the inevitable end of a"politics of culture," I think, for Wilderson. But Emmie wants to reassert her experience as a black southerner and reject his philosophy as a form of unwelcome charity. Stopnick, it seems, is out of touch with the "culture of politics" that defines southern black life.

Conversation, here, is treated like a fungible commodity but also a living thing--one needs to be available for trade in the context of a relationship. But Stuart's grief, like money, also causes him to confuse the relation between persons and things:

> "Noah, the moon shone so bright
> when she played her bassoon that last Chanukah night
> o do you remember the way it shone on the house (97).

Stuart, stricken with grief, vocally addresses Noah, but it is the Moon that is confused with the mother, the sound of the latter's bassoon mixed with the light of the former. What we get, by the end of the scene, is Stuart and the Moon and Emmie singing in chorus of voices. It's a musical conversation, I'd argue, that allows for the dialectics of grief, privilege, and longing to mix without flattening into stillness or sameness. The lyrics are about resisting stillness, but the play refuses, through a polyphony of cross-temporal staging, a pastiche-like radio-aesthetic, and chiaroscuro lighting, to let anything stand still for too long.

That includes even things we'd like to stay dead. The final scene of the play, the epilogue entitled "Emmie's Dream," is a monologue given outside of the Thibodeaux house. There is a sudden stillness to the scene when the Moon, after demanding the "world awaken to prepare/ for the consequence unseen," retreats into the shadows. The radio is sitting still on the deck, but what Emmie tells us is nothing that would ever be broadcast. She admits to being present during the decapitation of the statue ("I was there that night; I saw,/ I watched it topple like a tree), and she recounts a conversation she had with it:

EMMIE

> And I said:
> Statue, statue
> You are through!"
> Statue answer: "Well, who are you?"
> I say…
> "I'm the daughter of a maid…
> in her uniform, crisp and clean!
> Nothing can ever make me afraid!" (126)

Emmie reclaims her lineage here, her mother's uniform not racial shame but battle garb. The sound of the statue inside her voice necessitates an exorcism:

> For change come fast and change come slow but
> Everything changes!
> And you got to go!"
> Shou shout Devil on
> Out!! (126)

The phrase "change come slow"—a leitmotif threaded throughout the voices of the machines during the play—here animates Emmie's song. The phrase also features a tritone jump from "come" to "slow," that famed "devil's interval" that haunts Western music theory. The tritone

always offers at least a double disturbance: it's haunting in its dissonance but also the most unstable interval in that it can resolve the chords it outlines in multiple directions.[252]

The way this scene was staged in the 2003 production at the Public Theater was itself one of many kinds of possible resolution. According to the performance reports housed at the NYPL, *Caroline, or Change* opened on November 23, 2003 at the Public Theater, but it was as late as the November 14th preview that the epilogue actually became a monologue. From the very first available draft from 1998, Kushner had devised this scene as a dialogue between Emmie and "The Head of the Stature of the Confederate Soldier." In some drafts, it's Emmie telling her mother about a dream (Kushner, *Caroline, or Change Working Draft Summer-Fall 2001-2002* 89); in others it's Jackie and Joe framing the scene (Kushner, *Caroline, or Change Staged Reading Draft 11/01/02. Revision10/14/02* 104). In either case, up until a week before opening night, the ghost haunts Emmie:

THE HEAD OF THE STATURE OF THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIER

> Wake up, Emmie Thibodeaux!
> Where's the rest of me? You know!
> Tell the folks where my heads hid, Emmie!
> How else can I whistle Dixie?
> From his head to his toe
> John Brown's whole body moulders
> Please put my head back on my shoulders!(Kushner, *Caroline, or Change First Draft* 74)

For reasons that seem both aesthetic and technical, the scene of this more dialogic exorcism was excised from the play.[253] There's a sense that the staging prior to the change included a floating, "birdcrapped verdigris green" copper head that was animated and yet separated from the body of a confederate soldier holding a flag. Wolfe apparently wanted the stars and bars of the flag "muddied and mangled" to signify that the statue had been drawn out of the Choo Choo Bayou. But in its staging on opening night in 2003, the presence of the animated Confederate head was channeled into Emmie's monologue: she ventriloquizes the statue's speech while shrouded in fractured green light (Figure 6.9). Fisher's lighting creates the effect of prison bars, her song an attempt to pry them open. The statue is one of the many haunted surfaces—along with the

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[252] Tesori comments in a 2021 interview about the importance of resisting these abstractions, and having them—as Wolfe says about dialect and rhythm in relation to staging Hurston's stories—anchored in character emotion: "I love the treasure map of looking into a score as if you're singing it into being…So you're not singing 'West Side Story,' you're actually expressing something a character needs in that moment. The tritone in 'Maria' is part of an expression, not a famous motif" (Weinert-Kendt, "Jeanine Tesori's Gift").

[253] The rehearsal and performance reports between September and November 2003 suggest that this scene was a perpetual conundrum: "There is currently a copper head in the Epilogue. What the means yet, we don't quite know." (September 17th); ("Talked about the copper head. Riccardo, Paul Tazewell, and George need to have a discussion. This may be a combination of a small scenic element and costume" (September 20th); Can the Statue head be bigger and more proportionate to the Statue body costume? George would also like for the flag to be more noticeable, muddy and mangled. He would also like to see some of the head" (November 5): George still wants to see more of the Statue head" (November 2); "The statue head appears to be swinging a lot, and out of its life" (November 8); "Hope to install the new-and-improved flying statue head during Thursday's rehearsal" (November 11); Cut the confederate soldier out of the Epilogue (November 14) (Steiger).

kitchen, the polite talk, the face-coin-like moon—unstilled by the haunting depths that lurk beneath—a vision of the future that doesn't include Emmie, the immobility of social and economic structures that oppress her. No wonder then that in the revival of *Caroline, or Change* in October of 2021, in the wake of continued debate over the dismantling of confederate statues across the US south, director Michael Longhurst placed a swampily-lit, Confederate statue center stage in the opening scene. But in the Wolfe, Kushner, and Tesori's collaboration, the unfulfilled legacy of American racial integration is captured poignantly across the play in the fractured aesthetics of the haunt.

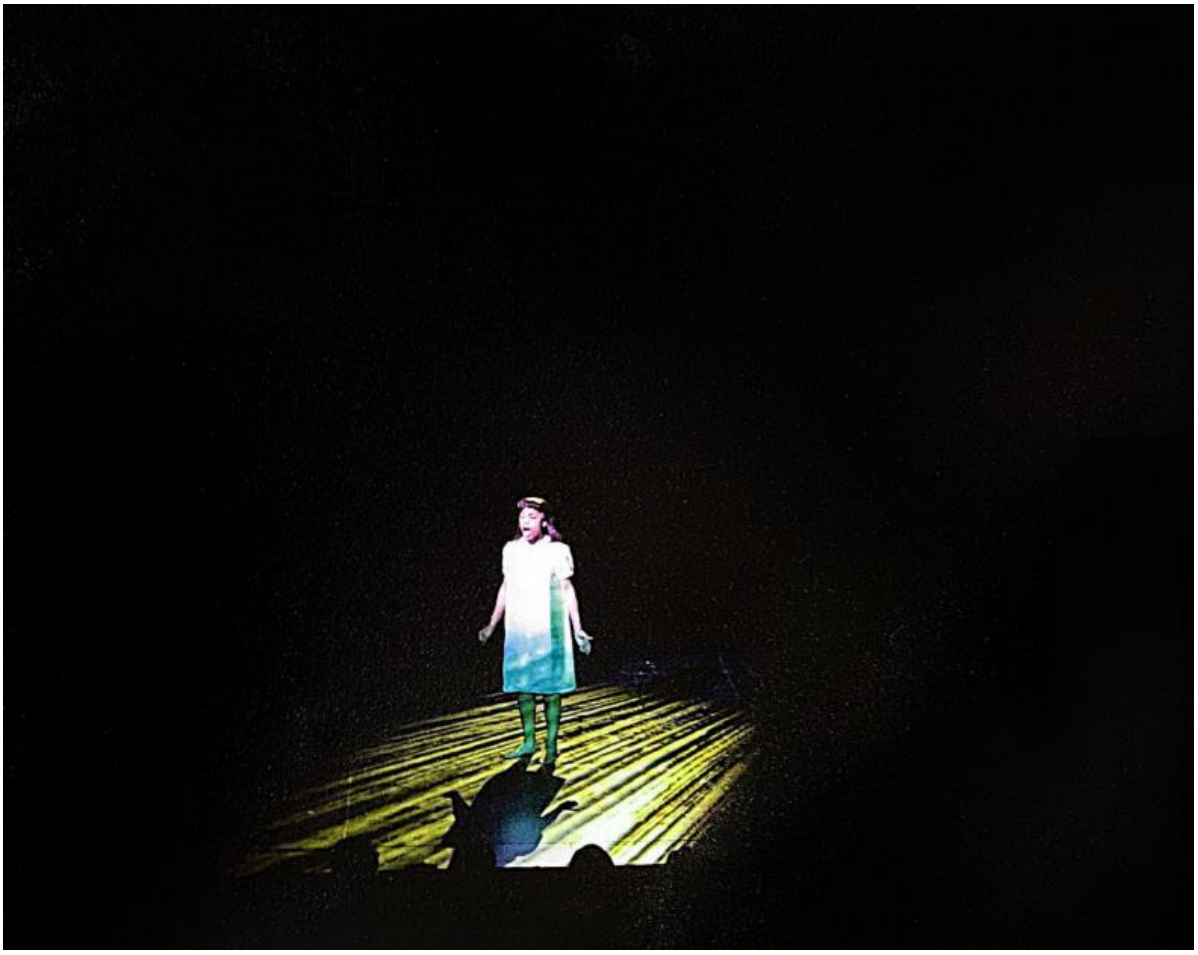

Figure 6.9. The Epilogue, with Emmie in fracture light. From the New York Public Library Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer Papers and Designs Collection; T-Mss 1979-002, Box 19, Folder 2.

Nocturne: "The Stone Speaks," or Daughter Courage

The year is 1636. It's a bitter, cold January night just outside the (now) German city of Halle. It's been twelve years since the beginning of the Thirty Years War and there's no sign of the war ending. Courage and her mute daughter Kattrin have made their tattered way to a tiny farmhouse for shelter. "The Stone Speaks," Brecht writes in the headnote to this climactic scene of the play, a phrase that comes to have a double meaning in the 2006 Kushner, Tesori, and Wolfe production.

The scene begins when Mother Courage has taken a midnight trip into Halle, leaving Kattrin with a Farmer and his family. Catholic soldiers haunt the woods around the town in preparation for an invasion, and coming upon the farmhouse, they put a gun to the Farmer's son's head. He is willing to be martyred, but when the soldiers threaten the family's oxen, he capitulates. As the boy leads them down the quietest path to town, the Farmer uses a ladder to climb upon the farmhouse and lookout: "Everyone's sleeping…They'll kill everyone." The farmer and his wife have a conversation about what to do. Finding nothing, they resort to prayer. "Pray you poor dumb beast, pray," the Farmer's whisper to Kattrin: "we can't stop the slaughter, but we can pray to God, and maybe because you're a cripple, He'll listen better" (96). But while overhearing the prayer for the townspeople's lives, Kattrin escapes up the latter to the roof, and begins drumming. The soldiers return, trying every possible tactic to get her to stop: threats, flattery, even drowning out the noise by chopping Courage's wagon. But her drumming constantly increases in intensity, and the soldiers give up trying to control the soundscape. They shoot her off the roof to the sound of the bells tolling—tolling not just for her death, but also, to signify that the townspeople have been successfully warned against the coming invasion.

In this scene, Brecht asks of the peasants: what does it take for you people to change? Or, as he put it in his notes to the play: what does it take for them to break out of their "frozen…fixed forms" or their "ritualized gestures of self-defence?" (Brecht, *Collected Plays* 318). Fear is offered up as one failed answer, and specifically the threatening of capital: the Farmer's Son cares more about the oxen's future ability of the family to make profits than about his own life. Conversation is another kind of failed solution: here the Farmer and his Wife talk about what to do but end up resorting to prayer. Instead, ethical witness is that which affords the most possible change. Overhearing the impending death of children, Kattrin is moved to action. Up until this moment in the play, her muteness was only an object of envy for other characters. "Be happy you're a mute," Courage tells her daughter: "when you finally got a husband you'll never contradict yourself because you hold the truth, it's a blessing from God, being dumb" (31). And lamenting that he's forced into chopping wood, the Chaplain sees her as the perfect emblem of the kind of listening his sublimated vocal skill was capable of eliciting: "My gifts are squandered by physical activity…God gave me a mighty tongue. When I preach people fall dumb…" (67). But in this penultimate scene, Kattrin's inability to engage in the profit economy and normative forms of conversation directly serve an ethical advantage. Her drumming—"the stone speaking"—offers up a theory of change grounded in material noise, one that resists any origins of individual voice or sacred utterance. But Brecht was also always asking, as he does here, what kinds of ethical witness could cause an audience to be moved. Brecht writes in his notes to the play about the importance of alienated acting in this scene: "if the conversation of the peasants is swallowed up by a general hubbub, the audience will be in danger of being 'carried away'; then they will fail to take note how the peasants justify their failure to act…so that the only remaining possibility of 'action' becomes prayer" (317). In order to foster this kind

of alienation, he had the Farmer and his Wife speak in the third person in rehearsal, having them couch their lines with dialogue tags like “said the woman” and “said the man.”

In the 2006 production, there’s no alienation at the level of conversation: this dialogue between the Farmer and his Wife is played as a genuine terrifying moment for the family. Kushner and Wolfe understand—like *Caroline*—that prayer is not simply apolitical and can itself be a form of refusal. Moreover, they were attentive to the ways Brecht problematically mobilized disability in this scene. Wolfe intervened by having Kattrin (Alexandra Wailes) “speak” for the first time here at the end of the play: while Courage (Streep) delivers the opening headnote to the audience, Kattrin translates it to the audience in American Sign Language. And to incorporate another layer of alienation, the production borrowed from the playbook of *Angels*: when Kattrin is at her most intense drumming, a soldier breaks character, climbs atop the roof, and attaches her to the harness. After she’s shot, she’s slowly lowered—wires as visible as they were for Ellen McLaughlin in 1993—into the mud pit in the front of the stage, where dozens of actors have congregated to play dead. Just one among the many bodies, the production offers her death as not an individual but a social circumstance—the suggestion that we are inevitably socially connected to each other, and that our freedom *is not* just about the individual liberation of our strong voices, but about the “collective liberation” of affect and social movement. Kattrin may not be able to speak in the conventional sense. But what this 2006 production reveals is that she also doesn't have the privilege of "finding her voice” because she exists in a social system—and a representational system—in which, as a disabled woman, she is at least doubly disadvantaged.

Mother Courage, like the other plays on which Kushner and Wolfe collaborated, are to some extent about the role that conversation plays in inspiring and thwarting both historical and personal change. But these plays are also about how conversation is itself a smokescreen for larger questions about power. Kushner writes plays about people who are at the margins of history, who are just to the side of drastic historical change. And in each of these plays, there is a character or set of characters that is skeptical of conversation as crucial to their own liberation: characters who are simply trying to survive in social system that not only disadvantages them but is to some extent predicted on their submission, even erasure. The question is, then, what is the drumming in these other two plays? What are the rhythms that make perceptible what the rhetoric of conversation obfuscates? The rhythms I have tried to track lie within the Kushner-Wolfe collaboration, both at the level of process and product. Kushner’s fascination with the haunt of history, ventriloquism, sound technology, and a lyricism defined by the rapidly oscillating use of vocal register met with Wolfe’s visual aesthetic: lighting the races differently, orchestrating stillness and movement through operatic tableaus, setting the stage in a default void, and literalizing the movement between different diegetic levels—“thresholds of revelation”—by using both physical and light-based doors. Do you believe in ghosts, Kushner and Wolfe’s productions constantly ask us. Together, they understood that the ghosts of history are ever present but highly distinct from one another.

CONCLUSION: A SONIC-ARCHIVAL APPROACH

The ghosts of history continue to haunt us today. On November 5, 2023, *The New York Times* published an article by journalist Jennifer Medina with the headline "Across the Echo Chamber, A Quiet Conversation About War and Race." Appearing nearly a month after the October 7 attacks by Hamas on Israel, the article begins with a white, Jewish woman in Atlanta named Samar Minkin interacting with a social media post made by her daughters' former elementary school teacher, a black woman named Sanidia Oliver. The post expressed support for the Palestinian people amidst the most recent Israeli assault on Gaza, and the article offers interpersonal dialogue as one alternative to doom scrolling: "The face-to-face conversation between the two women — one Black, the other white and Jewish — was the sort often held up as a solution to our polarized, digitized politics. But Ms. Minkin and Ms. Oliver found that connection was no guarantee of communion" (Medina). Though the conversation seems destined to fail, the article offers us a window into what remains unsaid: namely, the personal traumas and cultural stereotypes that haunt both Oliver and Minkin. In one moment of discussing race in America, these traumas risk revelation, even escalation:

> "You see me as white," she told Ms. Oliver. "In that scenario, your lens of the oppressed and the oppressor leaves only one space for me. But I see myself as Jewish in that scenario. It's much more complicated."
>
> Ms. Oliver did not respond directly. She has learned not to be confrontational when discussing race, she said in an interview later. She is wary of being viewed as angry.

Ultimately, the article takes us into the big Kushnerian question: did the conversation produce change in the interlocutors? The answer from them both is no, but that doesn't mean the medium is moot: they both seem to stubbornly believe in the power of talk. Oliver claims at the end that "in order to make anything better, we just have to talk," and Minkin concurs: "Maybe if we're all softening at the hard edges, that's enough?"

Like many of the conversations that stir across *This Feeling Tone*, the one between Oliver and Minkin is haunted by personal and historical traumas. And like Medina in her piece, I have attempted to attend as much to what is spoken as what is not—to give space to those ghosts that might otherwise go unnamed. But beyond the obvious distinctions (*This Feeling Tone* is a dissertation about some of the twentieth century's most notable black and Jewish artists, not a short *New York Times* feature), *This Feeling Tone* diverges from Medina's piece — and from conventional journalistic handlings of 'conversation' — in two ways, both tied to its methodology. The first is archival. An archival approach seeks to historicize conversations: to understand the "black-Jewish dialogue" as a kind of set piece that gets trotted out during moments of interracial conflict, one that necessarily considers questions of liveness and mediation. An archival approach also prioritizes encounters between people who had historical relationships with each other, thereby not only producing richer histories but also more nuanced theories of relationality. The second approach is sonic. A sonic approach suggests that any engagement with the "echo chamber" of mediation or the "quiet" of conversation must be as material as it is metaphorical. A sonic approach privileges the performance of conversation, an experience that is embodied and deeply affective. Together, a sonic-archival approach is a

collaborative methodology that aims to understand the labor that went into each of these artists relationships, and how that labor did or did not leave an archival trace. It means attending to these conversations as historical and aesthetic objects, considering the modes of mediation in which they are documented, the histories of labor that made them possible. These artists, I believe, understood the risks of flattening conversation—the risks of producing any "turning" or "dwelling" that merely *reproduced* an aesthetic or political status quo, any false faith in the form. In closing, I want to review what a sonic-archival approach revealed about these artists' work, and to ask what continues to resonate about their collaborative encounters today.

In part one, I explored how Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde were bonded by a particularly taut form of friendship — a friendship that didn't substitute for difficult political work or settle into poetic sentimentality. Poetry, for each of them, was a means to thinking through the politics and aesthetics that shot through and exceeded their friendship. A sonic-archival approach yielded a series of new avenues of research and several new argumentative claims regarding their relationship, specifically around the word voice. What emerged was not only a rich epistolary history but a relationship deeply connected to performing their poetry out loud. Upon listening to several recordings of their collaborative readings, I found that questions of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity were inseparable from questions of sound. The Astraea Event in particular was a moment in which the entanglements of racism and anti-Semitism were not just explained but performed vocally. These artists engaged questions of diasporic cultural identity, I claim, by using different registers of their voice while performing lyric poems to resist stereotypical notions of "Black," "Jewish" or "Poet Voice." For Rich and Lorde, conversation was a format for the poetry reading and an embodied practice of reading poetry aloud: a polyvocal poetic form inextricable from its role as a social form for exploring difference and disagreement publicly. Together, they forged a queer, feminist counter-public, one that not only challenged normative distinctions between public and private but also revived and revised performative notions of the prophetic. We can hear resonances of the Lorde and Rich performance tradition today especially in collaborative work of Judith Butler and Claudia Rankine, who not only allude to Rich and Lorde in their public conversations but carry on the tradition of interrogating the limits conversation as both aesthetic and social form. And every time a white scholar or activist enthusiastically and powerfully "names their privilege," they call out to Adrienne Rich's work in particular; Rich showed how it was not just morally necessary but also aesthetically desirable to write and perform work that explores one's entanglement with systems of oppression and privilege.

A sonic archival approach to the collaboration between Rich and Lorde also meant hearing the Astraea event against the longer performance histories of the two poets individually. Lorde specifically and black women poets generally are still underrepresented in scholarship about modern and contemporary poetry performance. Attending to Lorde's sonic archive meant exploring the significance of public readings to her career, the prevalent trope of voice in her poetry, and the substantial archive of recordings of her readings (many now digitally accessible). What a "sonic-archival" approach suggested was that there were a series of techniques that became signature to Lorde's vocal style: a shifting between "matter of fact" and "incantatory" registers that Lorde develops in the mid-1970s; a demand that her audiences refrain from applause to facilitate a space of reflection and dialogue in the 1980s; a use of vibrato in the "incantatory" register to sound "diasporic blackness" in the late 1980s; and an increasingly "communal" engagement with black audiences in performances near the end of her life. But what became critical to a "sonic-archival" approach in the study of Lorde's performance career

was also an ethical stance: to consider her not just the object of analysis nor simply a technician, but as a theorist of embodiment, affect, and sound. To do that, I had to navigate a series of methodologies—prose description, melodic transcription, pitch tracking software—to offer a wider sense of both the expressive practices of Lorde specifically and black feminist performance cultures more generally. In a historical moment in which Lorde's voice is quoted on magnets, mugs and t-shirts, the sonic-archival approach helps resist the reification of her identity into an any iconographic, commodifiable emblem of feminist resistance.

In part two, I turned to the relationship between Studs Terkel and Anna Deavere Smith. Theirs was also a friendship, albeit one anchored not so much in the vocal performance of poetry nor in a shared queer identity but rather in a shared interest in theatricality—specifically around embodied and technological modes of listening. For Terkel and Smith, dialogue was not only a literary and social form but a dramatic form: each engaged it as an embodied praxis. The third chapter offered a comparative analysis of their conversational praxes, going beyond the banal claim that she simply does what Terkel does, except that she "acts out the people." Instead, I claim that Smith embodies Terkel's conversational praxis more broadly: his comparativist and digressive penchant, his theory of revelatory speech, his practice of vulnerable listening, and his ambivalent embrace of literal and voiced "recording." Smith, I contend, foregrounds these forms of social and technological mediation constitutive of an ethnographic encounter, making them more perceptible than Terkel ever did or could. A sonic-archival approach to Studs Terkel's writings and recordings meant attending to those hidden mediations but also to his experiences as a Jewish American and radio-drama actor. For Smith, it meant engaging a host of archival recordings of her interviews and performances, as well as with the history of her lived experience as a black actor in a post-Stanislavski tradition. But for both figures, a sonic-archival approach demanded that I attend to the medium specificity of their ethnographic work: how the tape recorder in particular functioned as dramaturgical prop and as an ethical, even spiritual tool for engaging with a structural analysis of racist, capitalist society. While we can hear the resonances of Terkel's aesthetic across contemporary podcast culture, Smith's documentary theater resonates in works like James Harry Monaco's "Travels," which sutures performed interviews with the podcast aesthetic.

As I tracked how Smith enacted and made Terkel's conversational praxis more perceptible, a central paradox emerged across their respective oeuvres: the tape recorder signified the presence of, and freedom from, capture. In chapter five, I explored how this paradox played out in Smith's understudied play *House Arrest*. Though the final version of the play begins and ends with Terkel's character, a sonic-archival approach to that work suggested that Terkel's scene, in combining a scene of listening with a scene of an enslaved person's fugitive escape, *substitutes for* the presence of tape recorders and themes of fugitivity that run throughout the 1998 production at the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, which inaugurated the genre of "headphone theater". Bringing the tape recorder on stage had a double purpose for Smith: not only to test out the fungibility of her method with a multiracial cast, but also to formalize the tension between fugitivity and capture that the play thematizes. At the center of the play in this rawer and more experimental version is the testimony of Paulette Jenkins, an inmate at Maryland Correctional Facility. The performance history of the Jenkins testimony shows how Smith was grappling with the ethics of re-presenting black trauma and questions circulating within black studies. At times, the ethics feel exploitative, as when Jenkins serves as a metaphor for Smith's technique, or when Smith herself seems to suggest that Jenkins experience is a metaphor for the paradoxes of the law. But in the 1998 production, I suggest, the

presence of tape recorders on stage transformed what might seem a value-free mechanical technology into a space of moral action. The recorder was leveraged to suggest a structural analysis: the paradoxes of the tape recorder were used dramaturgically to reveal the social conditions behind the paradoxes of black life in America. Though Terkel's sonic archive has yet to be explored deeply in relation to the history of Jewish ethnography or the field of performance studies in a more comprehensive manner, Smith's work feels particularly resonant today. She not only continues to produce work about mass incarceration (including her latest play *Notes from the Field*), but her career inaugurated questions of theatrical realism, structural racism, and "color-conscious" casting that still resonate within contemporary performance cultures.

In part three, I turned to the queer intimacies of Tony Kushner and George C. Wolfe. They are perhaps the most traditionally collaborative of the three pairs in the sense that they directly worked together on the co-production of three plays, as playwright and director. Yet the aesthetics and politics of the relationship were no less fraught. As in the other two parts, I attend to questions of voice and listening, although I here focus more on a term I consider in an expansive sense: rhythm. In chapter five, I historicize this term by engaging with the rhythmic aesthetics of Bertolt Brecht and Zora Neal Hurston, two diasporic modernists whom Wolfe claimed as his theatrical forebears. A sonic-archival approach toward Kushner and Wolfe's collaboration produced a central question: how did Wolfe reshape *Angels* when it came to Broadway in 1993? Exploring the influence of any director is a difficult, interdisciplinary task. But by conducting interviews, tabulating differences between multiple scripts, and studying the details of photographs and archival video footage, I discovered that Wolfe defamiliarized the play rhythmically at the level of scene, lighting, sound, and character. I moved through these four aspects, exploring rhythm in its more literal sense—the stressing of syllables, the patterning of light—but also more figuratively to index the uneven undulation between various surfaces and depths that flicker through the structure and thematics of *Angels.* I called these rhythms across *Angels* diasporic because they pointed to those moments when the collaborators aestheticized the thematic of migration without ever losing sight of the emotional stakes of a scene. This mutual diasporic aesthetics has most recently been taken up, I believe, in the work of black-Jewish baritone Anthony Mordechai Tzvi Russel, whose music crosses both black and Jewish traditions in an explicit attempt to "to use diaspora as an artistic medium" and to "create an imaginary space where there might have been some kind of historic African American Jewish music" (Kaplan). It has been one of the main goals of *This Feeling Tone* to recover and elaborate upon a tradition of cross-diasporic collaboration, one that meets not solely in the register of music but in the more capacious category of performance. Black-Jewish artists like Russell are essential to the future investigation into Jewish and black cross-diasporic rhythm.

Music has its place, however, in *This Feeling Tone*. Chapter six aimed to continue the investigation of Wolfe and Kushner's collaboration through their production of the musical *Caroline, or Change* with composer Jeanine Tesori. In the capacity that it makes the tensions between black and Jewish American experience central to its plot, critics have seen *Caroline* as *Angels'* most definitive revision. But a sonic-archival approach yielded several new claims. By analyzing recorded footage at the NYPL Theater on Film and Tape Archive, images from lighting designer Jules Fisher's archive, and Tesori's piano reduction from the New York Shakespeare Festival archives, I argued that *Caroline* was a completely different formal experiment than *Angels:* while *Angels* attempts to juxtapose various uneven histories of change through talk and at times approaches the condition of a musical, *Caroline* explores personal and historic changes specifically through the medium of the "sung through" musical. But music is not

the only medium at play here. *Caroline* haunts the aesthetic legacy of the integrated musical artform with the history of American racial integration, and my analysis moved through three central characters in the play, exploring how the history of "integration"—both aesthetic and historical—haunts all three of them, albeit unevenly. Conversation, especially the framework of the "black-Jewish dialogue," is presented across Wolfe and Kushner's collaborative work as a defensive construction of Jewish guilt, an empty signifier, a double abstraction whose value is measured not by the labor put into it but by the price by which it can be bought. But the integration of talk and music across *Caroline* offers not so much hope but as different modes of aesthetic contact, bringing feeling and tone into relation in novel ways. Kushner, Tesori, and Wolfe are still working today, although not collaboratively. But what feels especially of interest to me is to explore how Wolfe's aesthetics engaged a nineteenth-century black radical tradition of what Daphne Brooks calls "Afro-alienation," and how his aesthetics continue to live on the work of his legatees Robert O'Hara, Jeremy O. Harris, and Michael R. Jackson.

Inevitably, the "black-Jewish conversation" will be thrust upon us again in some form or another, whether in journalistic pieces, a new archival find, or a future moment of interracial strife. If we live in an age of hyper-mediation, where interlocutors cannot engage in good faith, and conversation is doomed to fail, are there any conditions in which conversation can be considered a radical act? *This Feeling Tone* answers by suggesting that any answer to this question must engage a sonic-archival approach: it must always historicize, but it must also sound. It must attend closely to the cultural traditions of the interlocutors. And it must attend to the work that is collaboration.

AFTERWORD: NOTES ON DIFFERENCE AND DIASPORA

> "Is anti-Semitism the model for racism, or racism for anti-Semitism? Once more, where does the question lead us? Don't we have to start here, where we are, forty years after the Holocaust, in the churn of Middle Eastern violence, in the midst of decisive ferment in South Africa—not in some debate over origins and precedents, but in the recognition of simultaneous oppressions."
>
> - Adrienne Rich, "Notes toward a Politics of Location" (1984)

> "The task of criticism or—to put it another way—the role of the critical consciousness is in such cases to be able to make distinctions, to produce differences where at present there are none."
>
> - Edward Said, "Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims" (1979)

> "Articulation is always a strange and ambivalent gesture because finally, in the body, it is *only* difference—the separation between bones or members—that allows movement."
>
> - Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora" (2001)

Each critic writes from a location—a specific place and time. The location from which I write is deeply fraught. The place is Berkeley, California, formerly Ohlone land. UC Berkeley students who stand in solidarity with Palestinian freedom c~~ontinue blocking Sather Gate~~ occupy Sproul Plaza in a collection of tents, and ~~a Jewish political science professor occupies his own office as an act of protest~~ counter-protesters demand their arrest on the grounds of anti-Semitism on campus. That's the place, or at least part of it. And the time is one of war: one hundred Israeli hostages remain held by Hamas, and over t~~hirty thousand~~ thirty-five thousand Palestinian people have been slaughtered by Israel in turn. After Iran fired rockets across the Negev, a larger war looms, and yet another currently rages just north between an occupied Ukraine and an invading Russia. As famine visits both populations, the US finances both wars, albeit unevenly: supporting the colonized in one and the colonizing in the other. That's the time from which I write, or at least part of it. Though I write in haste, it feels impossible to conclude this project without even mentioning this location and the genocidal politics that define it. They weigh heavy on my head and heart.

Adrienne Rich encouraged us to think about a "politics of location" as a means of engaging not just a time and place of one's writing but also to the simultaneity of oppressions at play. But Edward Said was a critic, too, that demanded one attune to a politics of location, especially when attending to the relationships between art and politics. In his 1979 essay "Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims," Said engages the entanglements of his own time and place. In just the previous year, he writes, network television produced the TV-miniseries *Holocaust* as a "justification for Zionism" *at the same time* that Israeli troops invaded Lebanon, killing up to 200 Lebanese and displacing up to 250 thousand people (Said, "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims" 14). One might claim as historical fact that it was not just *Holocaust* but *the* Holocaust that justified Zionism, and one might see Israeli aggression in 1978 as a defensive stance by a geographically isolated nation. But for Said, a Palestinian literary critic, representation and reality produce a particular cognitive dissonance: American culture provides the mediatized justification for the state of Israel at the same time that the state of Israel is incredibly repressive and militaristic. And then there is the place from where he writes: the US, which at that time was currently sending warplanes to Israel *and* right-wing Arab states. Said articulates the politics of his location as one that refuses resignation: "To oppose Zionism in Palestine," he writes," has never meant and does not now mean, being anti-Semitic; conversely the struggle for Palestinian rights and self-determination does not mean support for the Saudi royal family, nor the antiquated and oppressive state structure of most of the Arab nations" (14). It's this kind of entanglement that produces a comment about the role of criticism: that it is our job as critics to face these entanglements, and "produce differences where there are none."

In this moment, I am struck by how mainstream liberal cultural criticism fails to heed this call. I'll consider one crucial example, briefly, which is Franklin Foer's article from March 4, 2024 entitled "The Golden Age of American Jews Is Ending." It's a piece that is overtly obsessed with describing the politics of the author's location, which is also the East Bay: we move between a Berkeley High School, for instance, where Jewish students fear pro-Palestinian protests, to Lake Merritt, where we witness anti-Semitic graffiti and a vandalized menorah. As a white, Jewish liberal Zionist, Foer writes from the perspective of those who fear a growing illiberalism in American public education specifically and a waning prestige across civic life more generally. Yet, this experience of heightened anti-Semitism and cultural decline occurs *at the same time* that Israel has killed more than thirty-three thousand people and is in the process of engineering a mass starvation of at least one million people. How does Foer deal with the dissonance here? The piece gestures toward acknowledging differences: "I don't think anti-Zionism," he writes, inflecting Said's 1979 claim into modern parlance, "is a term that should be considered axiomatically interchangeable with anti-Semitic" (Foer 24). Yet, the *acknowledgment* of a crucial difference is not the same thing as the *production* of one, in Foer's hands. In the very next sentence, he writes that the "elimination of Israel, in my opinion, would be a profound catastrophe for the Jewish people." There is a cognitive leap here that I want to attend to: how the move from distinguishing anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism leads him to another conflation, namely, that all forms of anti-Zionism advocate for the "elimination of Israel." And this is one of the many leaps throughout—from the article's visual layout that maps Yiddish culture onto all forms of Jewish celebrity, to its assumption that all Jews are white, to its cursory engagement with "intersectionality" by merely referencing Kimberly Crenshaw's name, to its presentation of a Jewish cultural tradition of "endless debate" detached from its moral and spiritual contexts. It's a critical two-step that, to me, attempts to acknowledge difference but ultimately produces more conflation.

We might think of this tension—between the production of differences and the production of conflations—as the necessary product of any literary form. One might argue that any critical piece, and especially a public facing one, must inevitably produce conflations at the same time that it produces differences. It's a critique to which my own writing would not be immune: that in my choosing, for instance, to describe my location in Berkeley as one of stolen land, campus strife, and global war, itself elides the relative calm elsewhere on campus, the comfortable silence of the cubicle in the library where I am writing, and the relative privilege I exercise by virtue of first amendment protections. This strikes me as largely true. But there are consequences to those conflations: nowhere in Foer's essay does he cite anti-Zionist views—Palestinian, Jewish, or otherwise—that call not for elimination but coexistence. And as I suggested in the "Conclusion," nowhere in Jennifer Medina's article do we get a sense of the liveness that makes dangerous and fraught forms of intercultural encounter productive of new aesthetic and sensorial possibilities. What is silenced are what I would argue are precisely the change making capacities at hand. As a white, male Jewish American critic writing from my specific location, I have tried through *This Feeling Tone* to be keenly aware of this dialectic between conflation and difference that writing, and specifically writing about art and politics, presents. My charge to myself has been to think about how to manage the dissonance, not specifically about Israel/Palestine but about the politics of American black and Jewish collaboration more specifically. The consequences of creating conflations, I have found, have been dire: not just in eliminating minority voices, but it presenting as whole what is partial, as complete what is in fact still in the process of becoming.

With these six artists as my guide, *This Feeling Tone* has thus been an exercise in the production of difference where I previously saw conflations. If, however, the critical production of differences inevitably produces conflations, then it is at least worth acknowledging them. One potential risk across *This Feeling Tone* that I can sense is its binarism, one that most readily persists in the structural form of the dissertation. Considering an analysis of relationships between two artists always risks eliding a host of other collaborative relationships involved in the production of artworks, and relationships. What would it mean to consider, for example, the sign language interpreter Susan Freundlich, who translated live at the Astraea event, as central to the dialogical encounter? What differences could be produced by considering the immense wealth of labor time it takes to turn a recorded interview into an artistic form, whether that's a literary anthology—work that Terkel always attributed to his assistant Cathy Zmuda, "who transcribed hundreds of thousands of spoken words" (working)—or a theatrical monologue--which requires thousands of hours of labor by directors, producers, and designers. What would it mean to consider Jeanine Tesori more centrally to the Wolfe and Kushner collaboration, or to consider her "radio aesthetic" in the context of her larger body of work? Perhaps, as I suggested in the "Conclusion," this binarism is most pressingly felt when it elides those sound artists who identify as both black and Jewish, or even a more thorough engagement with the history, politics, and aesthetics of black-Jewish artists.

A second conflation that *This Feeling Tone* risks is not so much a conflation but a kind of domestication, both of these artist's oeuvres and of the term "diasporic" more generally. Many, if not all, of these artists were, and are, not only internationally renowned but also global activists who saw their work as part of larger decolonial struggles abroad. So what does it mean to think of the work at hand as diasporic even when the analysis is so US centric? Doesn't the use of the term diasporic so loosely risk metaphorizing a term that indexes the lived experience of exiled peoples and refugees? Diaspora might be, like its companion term exile as theorized by Said,

"strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* 173). My response to this charge of domestication would be twofold: diaspora is not the same as exile, and it serves as a more capacious critical vocabulary for how these artists negotiated difference.

On the first point, Ben Ratskoff has written that the term diaspora—in its translation from a Hebrew term meaning political abjection ("l'za'avah" or "become an object of horror") to a Greek word meaning spatial scattering—comes from an entirely different biblical vocabulary than the word "exile." Following the work of Richard Iton, he writes that diaspora does "not specifically predict…exilic dislocation from a territorial homeland but rather [an] unruly and unsettling demographic diffusion...[it] does not map alternative, exilic geographies as much as it improvises, of invades into, and steals within extant ones" (Ratskoff 39). Following Ratskoff, then, my goal has been to *bring the concept of diaspora back* to Jewish and black artwork that seems to be definitely US centric and to ask how this artwork unsettles notions of national belonging, how it "improvises," "invades" and "steals within" conceptions of the nation state. But it's strange to think that a novel usage of "diaspora" is to *bring the concept back.* That hardly seems diasporic, for diaspora is not in the return to origins of homeland or etymology but to the scatterings of separation, and in the negotiation, what Brent Hayes Edwards calls, following Stuart Hall, its "articulation."

On the second point, Edwards reminds us that the term diaspora, though it has origins in the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible, emerges critically in African studies in the 1960s in the work of George Shepperson, who tried to resist the "political overtones" of a term like "Pan-African." "The point [for Shepperson]," Edwards writes, "is not that *diaspora* is apolitical but that it has none of the "overtones" that make a term like *Pan-Africanism* already contested terrain" (B. H. Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora" 54). Among its many other "uses"—its emphasis on becoming over being; its geographical indeterminacy; its simultaneity as abstraction and anti-abstraction—the term also crucially functions both intra-and inter-culturally: "in appropriating a term so closely associated with Jewish thought, we are forced to think not in terms of some closed or autonomous system of African dispersal but explicitly in terms of a complex past of forced migrations and racialization" (64). What makes diaspora such a productive, and useful term for me in the critical period that *This Feeling Tone* concerns is that, like the body that Edwards describes in the epigraph, it is flexible—it offers both a theoretical specificity and capaciousness grounded in the material and embodied negotiation of difference. In this light, Rich's call that we write with a politics of location sounds to me like a diasporic demand—one that acknowledges the appeal of a search for origins and yet refuses to return, one that demands an account of the simultaneity of different oppressions.

I want to close by meditating, again, on the importance of thinking about diaspora in relation to the project's title: *This Feeling Tone*. As Studs Terkel and Lucille Dickerson taught us, the phrase "feeling tone" gets us immediately to the question of black and Jewish relationships, and it helps us move beyond the question of conversation to the question of labor. "If you're going to work with people," says Dickerson, "you've got to have this feeling tone." But what does it mean to think of this interaction not just as interracial, not just as Jewish and black, but as diasporic? To me, it is to understand how the speaking and listening practices of the interlocuters are connected to diasporic cultural traditions, but also to pay attention to the sound of the recording: its "this"-ness. In the introduction, I was attempting to understand these two terms—diaspora and tone—by connecting Sianne Ngai's definition of tone as "orderly noise," a kind of feeling "that is perceived rather than felt and whose nonfeltness is perceived," to what I

called the "productive negativity" of theories of the diasporic. I found this "productive negativity" as theoretically attractive as I did practically relevant in considering these artists work in the light of lived, diasporic cultural traditions that entangle by virtue of their collaboration. But I want to dwell here a little bit longer with Ngai's formulation: this space between perception and feeling, or how it is possible to perceive something without feeling it, but to know that what is perceived is "non-feeling." This distinction in aesthetic theory is what we might simply call detachment, so crucial to the Brechtian aesthetics that thread throughout the project. Thread, but don't fully dominate, I think. These artists are interested in more than detachment, more than the perception of a non-feeling: they are also interested in the felt experience of sound, in the literal tones of an artwork, conversation, or interpersonal encounter. Like taste in food criticism, tone in sonic criticism is not a metaphor: it is a felt experience. As I wrote in my description of playing the saxophone in the "Introduction," tone has always been a sound produced in the encounter of my body with a tube of brass. "Overtones" are not just an acoustic theory or a metaphor for political baggage, but an embodied practice: one that is produced by blowing vibrating air through a horn, engaging a spiritual and embodied practice of listening. I think what Ngai says about tone is true, but it is also possible to perceive this non-feeling of *at the same time* that the sonic tones of an artwork are felt. Indeed, the question these artists pose, I think, is can the tone of an artwork ever be separated from the felt experience of sound? Can perception ever be separated from feeling? Can one ever be truly detached?

And here is where we might once again turn to Said, for he is a critic—a Palestinian critic—who regards detachment as a crucial element of exilic living. In his essay "Reflections on Exile," Said says that "Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one's native place." It is not a desirable condition to be in exile, but "someone who has achieved detachment, someone whose homeland is 'sweet' but whose circumstance make it impossible to recapture this sweetness" can achieve a certain "originality of vision." He calls this originality "contrapuntal": "a plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that…both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (186). Said's reflections occupy some of the shared conceptual space of the diasporic, but I believe that diasporic offers us a slightly different language, one that has roots in the black and Jewish entanglement but also emphasizes an aesthetic of going *beyond* detachment. Diaspora—like tone—has become a desirable concept metaphor, an appealing aporia. But what's been crucial for me, throughout *This Feeling Tone*, is how sound and diaspora are not simply metaphors for the analysis of entanglement, but also the very material of it. To consider the tone of an artwork means to engage with the metaphors and materials of sound and diaspora. *This Feeling Tone*, then, has been an attempt offer a cultural history of sonic, diasporic collaboration—one that highlights the labor of turning about, of constructing a house of difference, with all the danger, vulnerability, and surrender and resonance that process demands.

As I walk out from my desk in Wheeler Hall and onto campus, amongst the tents that limb Sproul Hall in solidarity with the people of Palestine, where the live sound of the helicopters that circle campus mix with the recorded sound of Israeli helicopters in Gaza that the protestors play over speakers, I know that the aesthetic education of writing *This Feeling Tone* has also been a political one. Will I continue to be detached? Or will the sounds of diaspora ask to me to go beyond detachment, to seek out the kinds of collaboration that so interest me aesthetically?

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