UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Crossing The Bar Lines: Locating 20th and 21st Century Strategies of Musical Resistance

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

James Gordon Williams

Committee in charge:

Professor Anthony Davis, Chair
Professor Patrick Anderson
Professor David Borgo
Professor Anthony Burr
Professor George Lipsitz

2013

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

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EPIGRAPH

Living Parable (1972)

Those who are thirsty for wisdom
Will ever move toward the source of the wisdom
That quenches their thirst

~ Sun Ra

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New Jersey Jazz Festival
Duke Ellington Jazz Festival, NYC

Performances At Selected Music Venues

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Village Vanguard, New York City
Jazz Standard, New York City
The Stone, New York City
Lenox Lounge, New York City
Knitting Factory, New York City
Smoke Jazz Club, New York City
Symphony Hall, New York City
Birdland, New York City
Smalls Jazz Club, New York City
Rose Hall @ Lincoln Center, New York City

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Crossing The Bar Lines: Locating 20th and 21st Century Strategies of Musical Resistance

by

James Gordon Williams

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Anthony Davis, Chair

From the 1990s on critical musicologists have used signifyin(g) theory to create a more inclusive, critical discursive that reflects African American ideas and experiences in relation to race, gender, and sexuality as manifested in their musical practices. Because I found this theoretical paradigm incomplete, I explore Afro-pessimism social theory as a way to help explain why African-American musicians use unconventional strategies of music making to forge non-monolithic musical identities that resist hegemonic theories and practices of music. Through data analysis of music compositions, instrumental

improvisations and musician interviews, I analyze how African-American musicians express their racial imaginaries in relation to space, time, center and periphery. Particularly vibrant data examples were found in the improvisations and compositions of pianists Andrew Hill and Stanley Cowell, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire and the music videos of T-Pain.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

My study seeks to discover what strategies of musical resistance black musicians create in response to hegemonic musicology discourses that have produced codified understandings of black musical practice. Musicians from socially and financially marginalized communities have reacted through written text and musical strategies of resistance to music scholarship and market forces that have reduced their creative practice to formulas. The ongoing results of this reduction have been that such forces have misrepresented black musicians' musical contributions to society. A recent Facebook debate among prominent jazz musicians demonstrates the anger and resistance by many black musicians to white appropriation of black music and to historical narratives about jazz that appear not to give credit to black innovators.

In this online thread of a vibrant, palpable conversation about white appropriation of jazz, I discovered a blog post by celebrated African American trumpeter Nicholas Payton. Payton, who in response to criticism from Marcus Strickland and others on the a Facebook thread, emphasized the importance of defending black innovation in improvisation and composition against white appropriation and historical narratives that give short shrift to these contributions. Criticizing and questioning how music histories have framed the evolution of jazz as a collective project between blacks and whites, Payton described how many black jazz musicians in the past have tried to define jazz as "black music," but ceased to do so because they received "reverse racism" criticism from white jazz musicians and the larger white dominated musical critical establishment.

While describing his declaration of jazz as a "black music," and as personal sacrifice, Payton rejects the popular assumption that jazz was a collective invention between blacks and whites. In visceral tones Payton writes:

> I'm putting my ass on the line for you. Not for me. It's you who don't realize what's going on who are my sharpest critics. I ain't angry. I am trying to fight for what Duke Ellington wanted to do for this music years ago, call it Black music. Why? Because he knew back then that if we didn't label it in a way that spoke of its origins, that years later, White folks would try to lay claim to it like it was a collective invention. Don't get me wrong there are some brilliant, genius White cats that have played this music, but it's ultimately a Black art form. What's wrong with renaming the music in a way that puts that argument to bed once and for all? Do you think I'm the only person that ever wanted to do this? Hell no. Miles, Max, Mingus, J-Mac, Dr. Donaldson Byrd and so many others have wanted to do this for a while. They gave up because they got tired of the backlash from Blacks and Whites alike that it caused. Well you know what? As Roy Haynes says, "The time for hesitation is over."(Payton 2011)

This is an old but important debate, whose literary and performative tensions radiate from historical texts, periodicals, jazz education institutions as well as bandstands across the world. The debate between nationalism and universalism has animated the discourse of improvisers since the 1960s (Borgo 2005, 23).[1] On the level of inclusion and exclusion, on the level of making a livelihood from improvisation, the debate lingers not only in the stacks of the ivory tower library; it affects musicians on multiple levels in regards to their quality of life. Payton, and many other black musicians embody oral testimonies and life recordings that stem from experiential lineages of musicians who were wary of whites controlling the jazz recording industry. Blacks making music apart from whites in the days of yore, however, was not reverse discrimination; it was a way to preserve musical

[1] David Borgo's larger point was that the continued hybridization of music in free improvisation has complicated the binary of nationalism/universalism.

heritage against dominant representations of black music culture, those represented according to white fantasies and racial imaginations. John Swzed explains,

> At the worst of this development, black musicians were expected to conform to white stereotypes; at the very least they were handed incongruous models of performance developed in the white community. Virtually every black innovation in the north—whether blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, the novel, musicals, or sepia films—were mediated, controlled, and adjudicated to some degree by whites. And the day-to-day production of black-created entertainment was now being realized within conditions beset with racial anxiety—arguments with club owners and bookers, the tension which came on the road in hotels and transportation, in the hassles of the studio. The modern history of black music was strewn with such incidents. (Swzed 1997, 128)

Some British cultural studies scholars—and some American critical theorists—argue that scholarly discourses about black music have been founded on the construction of an essential blackness that connects all blacks in the diaspora together in an imagined community (Gilroy 1993; Eshun 1998). Gilroy critiques the alleged black essentialism found in William Banfield's argument that black musicians, throughout the black diaspora, speak from a "culturalist view" (2010). Moreover, Stuart Hall argues that experiences peculiar to blacks are important, explaining,

> A very profound set of distinctive, historically defined black experiences that contribute to those alternative repertoires. But we must approach our culture from the point of diversity as opposed to homogeneity. The " antagonisms," which are a byproduct of the diversity of our black culture, refuse to be "neatly aligned"… "they refuse to coalesce around a single axis of differentiation." (1998, p. 30)

In short, black music culture consists of different positionalities. Putting the debate aside, however, the important question is not whether Payton is wrong or right about ownership of black innovation. The important question is how does institutional anti-blackness

provoke and inspire the black music imaginary that motivates strategies of musical resistance? There is a larger subcutaneous debate underneath the surface skin of what many scholars see played out as arguments revolving around musical origin, purity, and black reclamation. This debate questions the existence of a black ontology and black personhood, the very foundations that would allow ownership.

The theoretical conversations that frame this study stem from the discourse of Afro-pessimism and Performance studies. The concept of "social death" is a useful discourse for analyzing the creative practice of black improvisers and composers. Social death, a concept at the foundation of Afro-pessimism, is linked to modern, institutional manifestations of the past institution of slavery, manifested in "the convergence of the private property regime and the invention of racial blackness) which is to say the invention of anti-blackness in the invention of whiteness…" (Sexton 2011, 17). When I attended a recent conference about improvisation in Sweden, I was reminded that theorists write about creative practice from various ontological positions. In addition to feeling resistance from some scholars to my questions concerning music and racial identity, I realized that no other scholar found anything ontologically at stake in the same register as I did. Frank Wilderson has stated "structures of ontological suffering stand in antagonistic, rather than conflictual relation to one another (despite the fact that antagonists themselves may not be aware of the ontological position from which they speak" (Wilderson 2009). These different ontological positions are best represented by what Wilderson calls a "rubric of antagonisms(an irreconcilable struggle between entities, or positions, the resolution of which is not dialectical but entails the obliteration of one of the positions)" (Wilderson 2010, 5). Wilderson's statement articulates theoretical and

performative tensions—between social death (blackness) and social life (whiteness) that frame creative practices. Musicians' work can no longer be seen from the theoretical perch of universal agency, a perch that fuels debates about musical ownership. Rather, improvisational, compositional, and technological practices must be worked through Wilderson's rubric of antagonism because, as I explain in Chapter 6, that antagonism is what creates the conditions for the strategies of musical resistance. Moreover, the practices of African American musicians, historically represented as black male tricksters, should not be seen as questionably heroic performances of black agency that transform and transcends structural racism. These creative practices are a manifestation of non-art made by a people considered non-humans, defined as such because of their ontological placement outside the scope of humanity. This undercuts the notion of black improvisation as representative of the best democratic values of society. Blacks must be accorded full human status in order to represent human democratic values. This study investigates musical strategies of resistance from a different notion of black positionality, which is bereft of universal notions of personhood and ontology. This peculiar positionality does not negate Fred Moten's claim about "the magic of objects" which states cultural production by blacks is always already resistant (Moten 2003, 110). He explains:

> The eclipse of objects by practices is a head, a necessary opening, that vanishes in the improvisatory work of those who are not but nothing other than objects themselves.(Afro-diasporic) performances are resistances of the object and the object is in that it resists, is in that it is always the practice of resistance. And if we understand race, class, gender and sexuality as the materiality of social identity, as the surplus effect and condition of possibility of production, then we can also understand the ongoing, resistive force of such materiality as it plays itself out in and as the work of art. This is to say that these four articulating structures must

> not only be granted historicity, politics and practice but aesthesis as well. This is also to say that the concept of the object of performance studies is (in) practice precisely at the convergence of the surplus (in all the richness with which Martin formulates it—as, in short, the ongoing possibility or hope of a minoritarian insurgence) and the aesthetic. (Moten 2003, 110)

Both Moten and Wilderson regard blacks as objects in relation to "civil society."[2] However, Wilderson and Sexton see limitations on the resistive performance of freedom. Afro-pessimism is a rejoinder to the "assumptive logic" Wilderson defines as "an overvaluation [by scholars and Black Studies programs] of performance art's sociopolitical effectiveness," which creates a "causal link between the performance and the emancipation of the black people who produced and consumed it—as though art was the very essence of, rather than an accompaniment to, structural change" (2009, 121). The assumptive logic Wilderson describes is derived from the construction of a unified monolithic black community. Kodwo Eshun no longer uses the term "black culture" to describe musical practices (1998, 192). For Eshun, black culture is a "free floating" thing, "synthesized" from various elements.[3] Eshun's ideas contradict the notion that music comes out of a unified community. By contrast, Alice Coltrane, in liner notes from her album *Journey in Satchidananda* (1970), writes about the musical aura of her late husband, "I know that there remains to this very day something inexplicable and undefinable about John Coltrane. Something about John Coltrane is set on a d-minor mode, and will not be unfamiliar to John's followers. It is played beautifully." The "d-minor' mode that Alice Coltrane speaks of semiotically, is likely the sound of a disparate

[2] According to Wilderson, blacks are objects in relation to what defines civil society, the possibility of being "subjects of rights and liberties"(2010, 320)

[3] Eshun argues the legacy of slavery and segregation has caused American blacks to see black culture as a monolithic, unified entity due to "knowledge apartheid structure."

community bound together by social death.

In his attempt to clarify the misunderstandings of blackness as tantamount to social death (or blacks having no agency or social life), Jared Sexton has worked to bridge the sematic gaps between Afro-pessimism and Performance Studies.

> A living death is as much a death as it is a living. Nothing in afro-pessimism suggests that there is no black (social) life, only that black life is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized, of all that capital has in common with labor––the modern world system. Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space. Black life is not social, or rather that black life is *lived* in *social* death…that's the whole point of the enterprise on some level. (Sexton 2011, 29)

Accordingly, using Afro-pessimism as a framework to understand musical strategies of resistance does not negate the possibility of musical agency[4] on the part of black musicians; but we might better understand performance of strategies as performances of *living* social death, creating the possibility of Moten's magical surplus. My study's conceptual schema is based on strategies of resistance studied in relation to predefined blackness, a positionality that proponents of Afro-pessimism see as impossible to rescue.

Research Question

While many musicians from different cultural backgrounds have challenged conventional and codified musical and visual practices, socially marginalized musicians

[4] Whereas the discourse of Henry Louis Gates's signifyin(g) theory applied to analyzing improvisation, or musical tricksterism, has sought to humanize the black musician by attributing music to models of largely black male heroism, a different type of musical agency is derived from the position of social death.

particularly African Americans, have had to face down racial norms in discourses about music. Hegemonic racial discourses have influenced how music is composed, performed, and taught in educational institutions. In recent musicology and popular music discourses the terms *agency* and *resistance* have been applied as a universal paste in relation to all musical production. Despite the recent intervention by musicologists using signifyin(g) theory to address black cultural production within its own cultural context, many scholars have unwittingly promoted the very centrality of Western European art music they sought to deconstruct in their musical analysis. In response and as a step toward remedying these blind spots and the overall state of imbalance, I see three primary purposes for this study:

> 1) To develop a conceptual schema that might illuminate compositional and improvisational strategies African American musicians use to express musical resistance to conventional forms of music and media technology
>
> 2) to apply this schema to the musical texts to discover strategies involved in performance, composition and cinematic
>
> 3) to investigate, from an Afro-pessimist stance, how strategies of musical resistance can be understood outside the sphere of universal notions of agency and humanism that are philosophically, culturally and legally attached to institutions of civil society

Defining Crossing the Bar Lines, Defining Resistance

In Western music notation a bar line is defined as "a vertical line drawn through the staff to mark off a metrical unit." While in this form of musical notation, the bar line was introduced so musicians could more easily read and perform from scores (i.e., by compartmentalizing units of musical time within a single bar—or the notes lying between two bar lines), for other musical communities bar lines can represent strict borders to musical values derived from different cultural spaces. Bar lines in this study constitute a

metaphor for expression based on an assumptive Western logic, which at least in traditional European composition, have been structured on quantized belief systems related cultural supremacy and phenotype hierarchy.

I define strategies of musical resistance in the "jazz world" as composing and improvising in unconventional ways through agency while facing social and financial alienation from certain audience communities and the wider music industry. As Alton. B Pollard has remarked, "resistance refers to any form of social agency that holistically challenges human subjugation and oppression. Hermeneutically, the concept takes seriously the everyday quests of women, children, and men for personal dignity and self-respect beyond the expressly or overtly political" (1999,100). Musical resistance may not always be easily identified or "overtly political." However, as I will show in the chapters three, four, and five, in the harmonic overtones, drones, surprising phrases, timbres and voicings, in the irreverent use of multimedia technology, these strategies are evidence of choosing not to conform and acquiesce to the array of prior musical templates that represent codified music reductions on macro and micro levels, revealed in formulaic structures and patterns. The musical resistance I speak of comes from non-ontological space that motivates the phantasmagorical agency[5] that does not read on the radar screen of civil society and its institutions.

Research Design

[5] I define phantasmagorical agency in relation to what Wilderson calls the "historic paradox of Black nonexistence" (2010, 321). While blacks have agency, they remain phantoms because their humanity is not fully recognized.

Data

I used three criteria for selecting data. I wanted to select compositions and recorded improvisations from African America improvisers and composers, I wanted to interview African American musicians about their strategies of resistance, and I wanted to choose artifacts for analysis that challenged the binary between "high art" and "low art."

First, for my semiotic analysis, I selected compositions and improvisations from African American composers and improvisers to see how these artifacts defeat the bar lines. African American musicians have peculiar relationships with music because they have a peculiar relationship with institutions in society. Traditional Western music analysis, largely based on formalism, includes biases of the musicologists.[6] Accordingly, a music analysis can only be legitimate if it respects the social context in which the music is created. Walser explains, for example, that,

> Underpinning all semiotic analysis is, recognized or not, a set of assumptions about cultural practice, for ultimately music doesn't have meanings; people do. There is no essential, foundational way to ground musical meaning beyond the flux of social existence. Ultimately, musical analysis can be considered credible only if it helps explain the significance of musical activities in particular social contexts." (Walser 1993, 31)

A second criterion was that this study must include interviews of musicians in the field in order to see how musicians believe their strategies of musical resistance are manifested in their work. Beyond written scholarship, living musicians—and the

[6] No matter how objective a music analysis appears, all music analysis—and thus all musicologists—have some form of bias represented in their criticism. Biases, which come from my experiences as a black American practitioner of improvisation and composition on the streets of New York City and many different European companies, as well as in the elite halls of academia, exist in my music analysis as well. However, not all biases are created equal due to different power relationships.

recordings of ghost musicians[7]—provide a perspective that gives the study credibility.

The third criterion for data lies in close analyses of improvisations to compile data of how resistance looks in relation to approaches to timbre, phrasing, and rhythm Close semiotic analysis may reveal the intricacies in the musical strategies of resistance. Intricacies in strategies of musical resistance are defined, for example, various permutations of intervals or unconventional uses of harmonic rhythm. Choosing artifacts from different mediums was done with the view of broadening the scope and definition of improvisation, particularly in relation to imagined racial identity. To that end, through identifying data from cinematic strategies (reading film as a representation of sound and image in time), I connect strategies of resistance across media forms in defiance of constructed musical genres.

Data Collection

From the interviews with musicians, information about their compositional and improvisational process was collected and coded according to the type of musical strategy. African American musicians of various age ranges have been interviewed to get a broad perspective on how musicians use resistance in their creative practice. I have used a questionnaire and in-person interviews to acquire data about strategies of

[7] I define ghost musicians as those who have left the living realm, but have left recordings of their experiences as living ghosts. Because of the status of social death, African American musicians have a special relationship with ghosts. For many musicians the boundaries between life and death is arbitrary(this will be demonstrated in Chapter 5). As Avery Gordon has stated, "to study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it. This confrontation requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production" (2008, 7).

resistance. (See questionnaire in Appendix 1) Questions focused on musicians' interpretations of how their strategies of resistance manifest in their creative practice. I also used in-person interviews in cases when musicians were geographically accessible. Interviewees include saxophonists and composers Charles McPherson, Greg Osby and Miguel Zenon, trumpeter and composer Wadada Leo Smith, flutist and composer James Newton, percussionists and composers Charli Persip and David Pleasant. Additionally pianists and composers Stanley Cowell and Joshua White were interviewed. The process I used to select and locate my participants includes person-to-person contact at events and contacting participants through email. Many of these musicians are my colleagues, which facilitated the work of contacting and interviewing them. While the questionnaire was effective in many instances, person-to-person interviews and phone interviews—because they were conversational—gathered more in depth qualitative data in ways that written answers to a questionnaire cannot elicit.

Improvisational data was collected from transcriptions of recorded solos and YouTube video recordings. The transcription of Andrew Hill's recorded solo on "Ashes" from *Invisible Hand* (2000), and the transcription of his solo on "Dance With Death" were used as artifacts for analysis. Transcribed improvisations from Ambrose Akinmusire's "Confessions To My Unborn Daughter" and "My Name Is Oscar," from his album *When The Heart Emerges Glistening* (2011), were also analyzed.

In accordance with the first criteria, and the research design based on artistic strategies, I have selected Andrew Hill's compositions "Ashes" and "Dance With Death," and Stanley Cowell's composition, "Prayer for Peace." These compositions have been chosen as data because they represent various a strategies of resistance in the

compositional process.

Compositional data sought from Hill was collected from various editions. For "Ashes," one edition is the published transcription from Hill's past original handwritten score, the other a lead sheet from Hill's voicings created by Greg Osby, just prior to Osby's Blue Note *Invisible Hand* (2000) session. Hill's composition "Dance With Death," the title track of Hill's 1968 Blue Note album, was analyzed through listening and transcription.

I also collected data from four music videos and songs created by rappers and producers *T-Pain,* Ludacris and Insane Clown Posse. These videos were retained from YouTube, and include excerpts from T-Pain's Can't Believe It, from his album *Thr33 Ringz* (2008), Ludacris's videos "Roll Out" (from *Word of Mouf (My Business)* (2001) and "Get Back" (from *The Red Light District*, 2004).

Collected music examples also includes drum patterns from T-Pain's 2008 composition *Can't Believe It*. Auto-tune, developed by Andy Hildebrand, was designed as pitch correction software. T-Pain's music use of auto-tune is important because it reveals how technology is used to represent space and time.

Significance of the Study

Several years ago I had the privilege of meeting guitarist, improviser, composer and educator Kenny Burrell while waiting in the John F. Kennedy airport baggage claim area. Burrell was on the same return-flight from Europe. On briefly telling him about my graduate music studies at New York University at the time, Burrell urged me to continue on with my studies until I earned a Ph.D. He argued that there was a correlation between

deep misunderstandings and devaluations of African American musical contributions and the small number of black musicologists in higher education. Burrell observed that the field of musicology could be greatly improved if more African American music scholars––who were also composers and improvisers—contributed in the academy.

Guy Ramsey has also discussed the imbalanced scale between the vast musical contributions of African American musicians and the relatively low numbers of black music scholars in the university explicating African American musical practices. Moreover, Ramsey imagines a black musicology with the same appreciation and distinction as Queer and Feminist musicologies. He notes,

> The key is that we need to have true dialogue—that is to say, *that voices that are generally not heard must be afforded a space to speak* [my emphasis]. We will collectively, however, have to confront what I believe is a fear of the "Black other" within the scholarly musical community. (How else can we explain the voluminous contributions of African Americans to this country's musical profile and the embarrassingly small number of Black music scholars in the ranks of our profession?) Why is it that the words "Black musicology" (indeed a strange collision of terms and signs to even my ears) will probably never be employed in field in the same way that feminist musicology or gay and lesbian musicology is today? (Ramsey 2004, 221)

My study is indelibly linked to supporting the creation of a space in musicology where “voices that are generally not heard” might speak. Its significance lies in contributions to black musicology in the following three ways. First, I endeavor to understanding strategies of musical resistance from a politics of pessimism framework; second, my research design is organized by strategies of resistance instead of by a specific era or musician; and third, I use varied data—musical and cinematic—that cross the low-high culture divide.

The significance of my study is in understanding strategies of musical resistance from an Afro-pessimist framework. Building on Henry Louis Gates's well-trodden signifyin(g) theory (Gates 1988) applied to music criticism (Floyd 1995; Walser 1993), this study is a remixing of music analysis with Afro-pessimist theory. To date little or no attention has been paid to improvisational and compositional practices of African American musicians from the vantage point of Afro-pessimism. Prior studies of black musical agency in performance and composition—such as in Gary Tomlinson (2002) and Ingrid Monson (1996)—have situated point of view in universal ideas of agency and humanism. Understanding creative practice within the framework of Afro-pessimism, and outside universal notions of agency and humanism, allows me a different reading of what African American creative practice means. Standing on the shoulders of important scholarly contributions by Gates (1988), Floyd (1995), Walser (1993), Monson (1996) and working through Wilderson's "rubric of antagonism" (2010), the significance of this study lies in confronting and explicating, through semiotic musical analysis, the "grammar of suffering"[8] peculiar to the ontological status—or rather the lack of ontological status—for black musicians in relation to the institutions of civil society.

Thus the Afro-pessimism framework requires a more complicated definition and understanding of resistance through agency. Contributions to black musicology lie not in recreating a *separate but equal* canon; they lie in the power of using, then subverting, dominant music "literacy" models to understand, cite, and document how strategies of musical resistance are manifested in African American cultural production. More to the point, understanding strategies of musical resistance in black music experimentation

[8] Ibid.

should not be narrowly defined as getting revenge against the dominance of Euro-American music culture. Agency in black creative practice is also reimagining the entire narrative of Western history through challenging assumed cultural superiority in its institutions (Benston 2000, 121). The ways in which such a study is structured also determines it effectiveness in subverting hegemonic models of music analysis.

The significance of my study is particularly visible in its research design. By organizing the analysis in terms of strategies of musical resistance rather than it allows us to transcend geographical boundaries, eras, instrumentation, and many other considerations. Studies focused on an era or particular musician have forced a biographical linearity around historical moments or individual musicians.

Disrupting the "serious vs. popular" music binary, the significance of my study also lies in in its use of varied data of musician interviews, scores, unorthodox music transcriptions, and music videos. Thus the boundaries between jazz and popular music artifacts are dismantled. Most musicians I know perform, compose, and listen to music in multiple ways. The study of strategies of musical resistance across different genres and media embraces not only the diversity of representations in African American music, it also reflects the complexity of musicking that happens in the real world.

Outline of the Study

Chapter 1 situates my topic within the literature of Afro-pessimism as a theoretical framework for locating strategies of the musical resistance. In order to argue for the need to evolve beyond signifyin(g) theory as an analytical model for black music, I also review how signifyin(g) theory has been applied to music criticism on black music.

Chapter 2 introduces literature that discusses various strategies of musical resistance in relation to improvisation and composition. I set up the discussion of locating strategies of musical resistance here and also in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Chapter 3 analyzes the compositional strategies—such as approaches to melodic writing, use of harmony and rhythm—in the works of pianists and composers Andrew Hill and Stanley Cowell. These examinations illuminate how the works represent musical strategies of resistance. This chapter includes a close score analysis of Hill's compositions "Ashes" and "Dance With Death," and of Cowell's compositions "Equipoise" and "Prayer for Peace."

In Chapter 4, I continue to use Afro-pessimism as an interpretive lens for radical improvisational and compositional practices. Within this framework I develop my analysis of compositional and improvisational strategies in Hill's *Ashes* and Dance With Death, those in Cowell's work, and the trumpet and spoken-word improvisations of Ambrose Akinmusire's "Confessions To My Unborn Daughter" and "My Name Is Oscar."

In Chapter 5, I examine connections between T-Pain's imaginative, resistive and innovative use of pitch correction software (Autotune), and cinematic strategies in his music video "Can't Believe It." I also analyze Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) representations of blackness—through the concept of social death put forth by proponents of Afro-pessimism.

In Chapter 6 I summarize, highlight, and suggest future directions for research in studying resistance in connection with race, identity and agency—through the hermeneutical lens of Afro-Pessimism theory.

The End of Tricksterism

The goal of this section is to review literature that has used signifyin(g) theory—in tandem with music analysis— of various types of black music. I will also discuss criticisms of signifyin(g) theory as it relates to music analysis. Most importantly, I explain why and how I employ Afro-pessimism as a theoretical intervention into signifyin(g) theory—what I call the musical tricksterism framework—by questioning universal notions of black agency, which I argue is at the basis of that framework. My understanding and application of this intervention leads me to question the effectiveness and relevance of signifyin(g) theory—or musical tricksterism—as a theoretical framework for semiotic analysis of black music and to challenge simplistic understandings of black creative practice as resistance. Before I discuss how signifyin(g) theory has been applied it will be useful to see how agency has been defined in the literature.

Definitions of Musical Agency

Agency in musical practice has been defined in the literature in several ways. In this section I will review agency as universal, agency as related to performance genealogies, perceptual agency, definitions of progressive agency, and rejection of essentialist labels. Much scholarship has defined agency in universal terms. Walter Johnson (2003) criticizes historians who map universal notions of agency onto narratives about enslaved Africans. He explains that many scholars have defined agency as a universal human capacity to act, while they ignore culturally influenced acts of resistance. Because the word "agency" has a complicated history, Johnson asserts the

word agency is linked with notions of nineteenth-century liberalism, which has been imposed on the actions of enslaved blacks. However, such notions work in opposition to the reality of the institution of slavery. Put another way, the common definition of agency is based on a universal notion of liberal selfhood, which is then used to contextualize actions of resistance by the enslaved. Johnson asks us to imagine how the enslaved theorized their own agency (2003, 116). The problem with universal notions of agency, he argues, is in their basis on the principle of natural rights of white men, a version of agency not available to the enslaved. In other words, the actions of the enslaved cannot be defined within the widely accepted definition of liberal agency (115). To be sure, examples of resistance in Western-Euro-American art music abound. For example, Adorno (2002) compares the middle period of Beethoven's work to his late period, drawing the distinction between them in Beethoven's compositional process, in terms of the way he uses rhythms, his prominent thematic elements, phrasing, among other devices, as a direct reflection on Beethoven's subjectivity. Adorno argues that the late compositions of Beethoven do not reflect a kind of subjectivity demonstrated by the composer's prior schemes. Beethoven's subjectivity reflected in his later music becomes more about "mystery" (Adorno 2002,565)[9] Through his use of what Adorno has called "caesuras"—the fragmentation of melody, harmony, and rhythm—Beethoven's later compositional process represents his wish to depart from the traditional forms of musical development. Adorno argues these caesuras and resistance to traditional form are what makes Beethoven's music "eternal." Yet it is important to make a distinction. Radical breaks from traditional music cannot be put into universal terms. Adorno analysis

[9] Ibid., 565

represents research into a different type of subjectivity that fails to consider or reflect Afro-diasporic musical practices. Thus, musicians resist musical orthodoxies from different subject positions and for various reasons; musical agency cannot be analyzed in universal terms.

Some literature has discussed agency as connected to performance genealogies. Joseph R. Roach (1996) defines performance genealogies as cultural remembrances expressed by bodies, images and words. Performance genealogies inform practices of resistance in music and other arts. Agency is manifested in the performances of linguistic, spatial and chronological poetry from informal archives of cultural knowledge manifested. These performances come from what Roach calls the "kinesthetic imagination," which is the transformation of memory into movement" (1996, 26), and they occur in "Places of Memory"—or the artificial loci for performing ethnic and national memory.[10]

Similar to Johnson, Ronald Radano (2003) finds fault with scholarship that makes uncritical connections between the actions of past-enslaved African Americans and modern black creative practice. Radano argues that assumptions about agency in black music are based on the notion that black music has a pure essence unaffected by history and the changing experiences of blacks. Radano calls "presentist" the notion that we could interpret the history of black music by modern values and concepts (2003, 5). He cites Levine (1977), Stuckey (1987) and Gates (1988) as scholars who have sacrificed "a certain critical rigor" (7). Radano explains:

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[10] Roach uses the places of memory concept from Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux De Mémoire* (date).

> Of course we need to make generalizations if we are finally to propose a story arising out of the representations and structures of relations that constitute the "absent cause" of an inaccessible past. But the generalizations we tend to make grow too casually from highly problematic data and monolithic conceptions of slavery, only to serve as the basis for proposing grand, overarching claims about the unity of the black musical past. These claims pervade a popular literature in which the history of black music is still contained. (Radano 2003, 6)

Moreover, we cannot verify claims about black music's essence due to the lack of recording technology ; we face a "sonically absent history" (Roach 1996, 5). Radano argues that scholars have assigned static criteria to black music. His critique here may apply to William C. Banfield, who, in the interest of creating a black musicology, listed typical characteristics of black music in his book *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy: An Interpretive History from Spirituals to Hip Hop* (2010). Radano critiques the common descriptions of black music elements in the literature such as call and response, the soulful. rhythmic nature, and the ubiquity of swing. He notes that musical features are presumed to come from black music's essential nature.

Other scholars have criticized the idea of a genealogy of a pure black musical essence, calling it a mythical basis for agency. Scholars and musicians who have linked revolutionary black politics with music have been taken to task for not acknowledging how other musical influences have shaped African American music. Ajay Heble (2003) tells the story of a white British interviewer who asked legendary drummer Max Roach, How can Hip Hop be revolutionary—or purely black—when hip hop producers and rappers sample non-black musical sources music such as *Led Zeppelin* and *Kraftwerk*? Max Roach, Heble argues, projects his notion of revolutionary politics of his time onto the modern work of rappers to connect their work to his. The anger Max Roach expressed

toward the interviewer, according to Heble, is linked to his idea that black music must be pure to be revolutionary (1996, 246). Heble argues that opportunities for dialogic and inclusive paradigms for interpreting music, and the possibility for more human rights in music, is quelled by such "purist" thinking. He acknowledges that the interpretive frameworks for music have largely been Eurocentric, yet chastises the drummer for narrow views of black music.

Other literature defines agency as the deliberate application of the senses to an event. Ingrid Monson defines perceptual agency as "the conscious focusing of sensory attention that can yield differing experiences of the same event" (Monson 2008, 537). Monson's definition of perceptual agency is based on her general definition of agency, which includes more than simply the freedom to act; agency is what people choose to do from the socio-cultural contexts in which they live. Monson explains:

> My use of the term perceptual agency to describe what the psychology of perception literature calls attention or cognitive control has deliberately deployed agency to index well-known debates in anthropology, ethnomusicology, and social theory about the relationship of individuals and groups to the dynamics of power in which they live. Perceptual agency from this perspective is what people choose to do with musical sounds given the sensory inputs, the manifold cognitive processing possibilities of the brain, and the sociocultural contexts in which they listen and perform. (Monson 2008, 552)

In other words, perceptual agency can be described as listening to different aspects of a performance. For example, an improvising pianist in a traditional jazz quartet—through concentrated listening—can choose to focus his or her perceptual agency on the drummer in order to develop a musical conversation, while also accompanying the bassist and the saxophone solo.

Much literature has sought to define progressive agency against essentialist concepts of agency. Bell hooks (1995) defines the concept of progressive agency as agency that allows a place for theory. Theory, hooks argues, helps make transgressive work possible. Theory should not be a threat to black agency; theory should be a way of understanding and explaining transgressive artwork. hooks explains:

> Progressive African-Americans concerned with the future of our cultural production seek to critically conceptualize a radical aesthetic that does not negate the powerful place of theory as both that force which sets up criteria for aesthetic judgment and as vital grounding that helps make certain work possible, particularly expressive work that is transgressive and oppositional. (hooks 1995, 69)

hooks argues that transgressive art is borne out of transgressive theory. Her understanding of agency contrasts Amiri Baraka's definition, that, according to George Lewis (2009), saying that black artists should not allow themselves to be influenced by white art or theory, and that art should be created exclusively from a pure black aesthetic. Baraka's project was bringing together the working and middle classes through black music. He has been criticized, Lewis explains, for ignoring prior generations of African-American musicians who believed that no musical tradition was foreign to their own cultural production. Indeed, black improvising musicians thrive on hybridities in music (Roach 1996, 209), and as Paul Gilroy (1993) argues, black music cultural forms originating with blacks can no longer be identified as exclusively black.

Progressive agency has also been defined in the literature as action that should not solely be linked with nationalism and ethnicity. Gilroy (1993) has defined progressive agency as agency that rejects Black Nationalism and ethnic particularism. He criticizes English and African American Cultural Studies programs that form their basis in

nationalism, and explains that the Black Atlantic has always been international and transcultural, which undercuts arguments for Black Nationalism. An agency that is linked with Black Nationalism, Gilroy argues, is confined by strategic choices associated with that movement.[11] The crux of the problem with black political culture is the preoccupation with identity as roots instead of seeing identity as a fluid phenomenon.[12] Gilroy's argument appears to align with hooks, who states that adherence to one essentialist critical paradigm for evaluating black music, paintings, and poetry is a mistake simply because it ignores cultural production designed to reinvent and transgress the aesthetic (hooks 1995). A transgressive, transformational black aesthetic is dynamic because aesthetics are affected by historical, social and political changes.[13] Thus Radano's argument is in tandem with hooks' claims that agency does not derive from historical backgrounds—which would represent agential stasis—but is always changing and represents the socio-cultural spheres where agents operate (Floyd and Radano 2009).

Rejection of Essentialist Labels

Some scholars have argued that labeling as essentialist such musical discourses on agency of primarily African-American musicians ignores important cultural qualities that exist in music Scholars, such as Guthrie Ramsey, have challenged those who wish to combat essentialist discourses about improvised music but leave out important aspects such as an understanding of why peculiar cultural qualities in music are important

[11] Ibid.
[12] ibid,. 19
[13] ibid., 70

(2004). In my research on the literature, I have found that the two main tensions in "black" music scholarship revolve around 1) the effort to neutralize what has been called essentialist discourses about agency and 2) the struggle to keep the peculiar qualities of African American music from being subsumed into a larger story about American music.

Herman Gray (2010) states that Radano's critique of black music discourses as essentialist is incomplete. To review, Radano has argued against theories that connect racial sound—or sonic representations of resistance—in black music across different eras. He decries scholars who use the same hegemonic racial logic they seek to undermine. For Gray, Radano's argument leaves out important critiques of social relations of power that structure society. Gray explains that Radano's critique does not allow for tracking a musical distinctiveness in black music based on historical, social evolutions, which are dynamic (Gray 2010, 43). Put another way, Gray's rejoinder to Radano is that arguments about black music's distinctive features in relation to resistance are not necessarily essentialist contrivances. The distinctive feature of black music Gray alludes to has been described as a principle of group sensibility. Guthrie Ramsey defines the importance of "group sensibility," an essence or flavor that defines a culture, as the "Pot Liquor" principle (2004, 215). Ramsey argues that while anti-essentialist discourses are important in terms of not reducing people into biological traits, anti-essentialist discourses have collapsed the social into the biological (214). Ramsey also explains that some notions of essentialism "exist as powerful displays of human agency, intention, and culture building" (214). He argues that musicology should embrace the everyday social experiences of the black other (214). Gray's argument also seems to align with Gerhard

Kubik (1998), who argued that isolated populations are under socio-psychological forces that assign them artificial identities. These artificial identities put pressure on marginalized peoples to behave in certain ways. African American musicians, for example, may demonstrate qualities that have been assigned to them by stereotypes. Gray's critique of Radano's argument may echo Diana Fuss's argument showing how constructionists re-essentialize essentialism by not understanding that essentialism itself is not a fluid construct (1989, 21). In other words, constructionists become essentialist in the way they seek to confine essentialism to specific criteria. Deborah Wong argues postmodern frameworks can be lacking in the way they frame discussions of difference (2004). Mapping anti-essentialist postmodernist frameworks onto music—though useful in making us aware of multiple positions—can be dangerous in the way that those frameworks ignore lived, real experiences of difference. The earlier cited confrontation between Max Roach and his British interviewer perhaps illustrates this tension between theory and real lived experience.

These lines of argument represent a number of subject positions that are often unclear and not monolithic. Radano (2009) argues that belief in the difference between whites and blacks has been the catalyst for African American musical innovation. This may be illustrated, for example, by Banfield's list of African-American musical cultural codes (2010). According to Radano, the motivation among black artists for innovating new musical forms is based on continued racial divisions between blacks and whites. The pellucid interracialism that arguably constitutes black music is hidden by the perpetuation of white supremacy that supports and stresses the narrative of the phenotypical and

biological differences between of black and white.[14] Monson (1994) asserts that literature on improvised music has been divided into black and white camps. According to her, these positions reflect a war for ownership of an improvised music composed of different cultures. For Monson, the starting question should be to inquire how jazz musicians draw on different music cultures while asserting positions that reflect a racial subjectivity. By contrast, Wong argues that scholarly writing about jazz in unracialized terms represents naiveté about the foregrounded and inescapable question of who owns jazz improvisation (2004, 170). Wong asserts that the struggle to own the discourse of jazz is between those who play jazz and those who write about it. Jazz is cast in racial terms because this struggle is symbolic of racial tension (170). Scholars such as Gary Tomlinson (2002) have tried to reimagine jazz discourse beyond racial stances. His construction of Dialogics as a way to de-racialize the jazz discourse is presented, among other things, as a rejoinder to arguments of black musical purity in jazz (Wong 2004). To be sure, several counter arguments complicate our ideas of what an essentialist discourse is.

Now that I have discussed how agency has been defined in the literature I would like to turn my attention to how I was introduced to signifyin(g) theory—the basis for what I call Musical Tricksterism—to review how signifyin(g) theory has been applied to music by musicologists, then to argue why Tricksterism may no longer be a viable discourse to analyze black cultural production.

I was introduced to signifyin(g) theory and tricksterism several years ago when Anthony Davis assigned Gates's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* in a Theoretical Studies seminar focused on analyzing Davis's operas.

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[14] ibid.,6

The point of the class was to examine how the Trickster figure developed as different characters in operas such as Davis's *X* (1986) and his *Amistad*. This class was significant because it was the first time I had encountered the study of music in an academic institution from the perspective of theory developed from a black perspective. That a music student can go through years of schooling and even attain the highest advanced degree without exposure to important non-Eurocentric music theory models was not lost on me. In years past I had often struggled with dominant discourses as it was difficult to find a theoretical language that reflected musical values I could recognize. As a result, I embraced signifyin(g) theory—a literary theory based on musical ideas in black improvisation and composition[15]—as a valuable tool to analyze black cultural production in terms of improvised music and popular music studies. I could also use this discourse to ask questions about the metaphysical reasons—the deeper reasons—concerning why African American musicians make the musical choices they do, and I could ask questions about how agency is manifested in creative practice by African Americans. Davis's course led me to research the foundation of semiotics with the Chair of Anthropology, who introduced me to the writings of Levi Strauss. Eventually, my research led to a quest to discover how the Trickster figure permeates through African American culture. This search, in turn, led me to the research of William J. Hynes and William G. Doty, who had created a heuristic guide on Tricksters to isolate the complex

[15] Gates has stated that "there are so many examples of Signifyin(g) in jazz that one could write a formal history of its development on this basis alone" (Gates 1998, 63). For example Gate's uses the example of pianist Jelly Roll Morton's pianistic and improvisatory signifyin(g) on Scott Joplin's well-known composition *Maple Leaf Rag*. This connection that Gates makes to music no doubt triggered the exploration of signifyin(g) in music by scholars like Samuel Floyd and Robert Walser.

aspects of Trickster figures as they pertain to different belief systems (Hynes and Doty 1993, 45).

Trickster Worlds

As stated above, my primary interest was in finding a theoretical discourse that would help facilitate my discussion of how resistance is represented via black subjectivity in music. However, I needed to understand Tricksterism—the basis of signifyin(g) theory—in a wider context.[16]

Hynes and Doty argue that features of the trickster are similar across various cultures and communities. Their research largely involves looking at "comparative social functions," examining how the trickster relates to systems of religion, rituals and psychology (Hynes & Doty 1993, 2). For example, the Trickster figure is also found in such literature as William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Ben Johnson's *Volpone*, as well as in Spanish and German literature (38). Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant have also written about Tricksterism in the Greek myth of Zeus and Metis.[17] The characteristic of Zeus finally overpowering the other gods through his cunning is

[16] Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* and Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* were also very helpful to me in understanding Tricksterism within a historical context.

[17] Metis, a female deity and daughter of the ocean, is the wife of Zeus and mother of Athena. Metis represents the essence of cunning. Zeus swallows Metis because he fears Metis may give birth to a son who is more powerful than him. Zeus's eats Metis because Zeus does not hold power over the other Gods because of his strength; he is all-powerful because of his metis, which is the personification of cunning, or craft, and his ability to know the past and to see into the future (Detienne and Vernant 1978, 14).

associated with Tricksterism.[18] The Metis myth or character is based on intelligent ability characterized by practical effectiveness and the pursuit of success. "It may involve multiple skills useful in life, the mastery of the artisan in his craft, magic tricks, the use of philters and herbs, the cunning stratagems of war, frauds, deceits, resourcefulness of every kind (11). The take-away from Detienne's study is that tricksters are not exclusive to any racial or cultural group yet they do reflect peculiar cultural codes and practices (24).

Consequently, there is "no one mode of Trickster studies and no one classical model of the figure" (Hynes and Doty 1993, 25). In other words, the interpretive framework for any Trickster must be aligned with the data (27).

Hynes and Doty also state that many scholars create simplistic readings of Tricksterism, often using Eurocentric terms (1993, 17). For example, the Trickster is often linked with the lowest aspects of human nature, including bodily functions; however, the trickster is also viewed as having higher qualities, such as the possibility for transformation. The trickster is a portal to our higher selves, often representing the best aspects of social sharing such as common values and altruism in a community (6). Yet, the liminality of the Trickster—linked to the figure's social marginalization—is also linked to possibilities for deep self-understanding and transforming social institutions (6). The essential nature of the Trickster is the ability to cross binaries or borders (34);

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[18] Greek philosophy is characterized by dichotomous thinking, founded on notions of being and becoming, and between that processed intellectually and that processed through the senses. This binary demonstrates where knowledge is true, definite, and unchangeable (on the one side) and opinions which are unstable, changeable, and multiple (on the other). *Metis* renders this binary unstable and challenges the stability of these concepts. *Metis* is characterized as the fluctuating, unstable power in the situation where the outcome might be victory or defeat (Detienne and Vernant, 5).

tricksters symbolize metamorphosis and shape shifting (35). Their s role as "cultural transformer" is directly related to the nebulous space occupied between the gods and humanity (40). The Trickster cannot be situated in binary oppositions such as the sacred/profane, order/chaos (34). Finding creative solutions to deal with complex situations through transformation of those situations is the defining genius of the trickster figure (42).

Tricksterism as a theoretical and cultural framework for analyzing music appeals to me in its ideas about self-transformation and the transformation of social institutions. After all, tricksterism impales the pristine rationality of the West and is emblematic of the creative universe; these unfixed icons represent the holiness of the quotidian (Hynes and Doty, 21). Eventually—through my understanding of theories of Afro-pessimism—I had to question the limits and even the relevance of signifyin(g) theory applied to music as a hermeneutical tool in order to apprehend the metaphysical reasons behind performance by black agents. The Afro-pessimism approach will be discussed more in detail below. In the next section I review how various musicologists and critical musicologists use musical signifyin(g) theory.

Uses of the Signifyin(g) Trickster

Encouraged by the idea of Tricksterism as a valuable discourse to talk about music, I researched literature that gave insight into how critical musicologists use Tricksterism as a discourse to theorize through black music on the music's own cultural terms.

Numerous music scholars use signifyin(g) theory as a method for analyzing black cultural production. Samuel Floyd has used Gates's theoretical arguments to explicate intertextuality in various genres of African American music, from blues to concert music (Floyd 1995). Floyd begins by analyzing the written texts of spirituals and Blues, for example, using "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" (historically a spiritual that signified celestial deliverance from slavery) as a model for tropology. Floyd traces how the Chariot trope was "anthropomorphized" into a train trope as railroad tracks expanded across the country. The train trope represented independence of movement for newly freed slaves, a certain amount of autonomy and liberation, allowing rapid escape from threatening conditions. According to Floyd, spirituals can also be used as a trope within the same genre, or across genres. Citing the spiritual, "Sometimes I Feel like A Motherless Child," as an example of a frequently quoted trope in various genres of African American music (1995), Floyd explains how the trope of the spiritual is signified intervallically, rhythmically, and melodically in various types of black music. For example, George Gershwin uses a similar minor and major third intervallic structure in "Summertime," from his opera *Porgy and Bess*.[19] Other examples include how the rhythm of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" is augmented in the compositional form of "Summertime." In short, "Summertime" is a revision of "Motherless Child."

In summary, through Gates literary theoretical approach, Floyd traces Blues and spirituals tropes through various genres of African American music. One aspect lacking from Floyd's treatment is an examination of how gender works in the application of

[19] Ibid.

signifyin(g) theory to music. His work is useful because it shows how signifying theory might be used in studying musical artifacts.

As stated above, Gates claimed his ideas of signifyin(g)were derived from musical ideas in improvisation by black musicians. Other writers have used his signifyin(g) theory as an approach to jazz criticism. Robert Walser (1993) has examined Gates's signifyin(g) theory with two goals: 1) to critique how jazz critics interpret improvised music and 2) to analyze an improvised jazz solo on its own cultural terms, albeit from his viewpoint. He sees Gates's signifyin(g) theory as a theoretical intervention to the modernist tradition of music criticism, which holds the view that music is autonomous in nature and separated from the quotidian experiences of everyday life. Modernist music criticism is characterized by applying Eurocentric aesthetic standards to non-European music (Walser 1993).[20] Walser argues that this kind of criticism cannot tell us why the notes were played as it fails to take into account the worldview of the musicians it critiques. In critiquing a jazz musician from the point of view of signifiyin(g) theory, Walser uses Miles Davis's solo on the Richard Rodgers standard "My Funny Valentine" as a locus for analyzing and exploring the possibilities of assessing music within its own cultural milieu. Noting that other jazz critics have tried to explain away Davis's musical "mistakes" as minor idiosyncrasies, Walser observes the aesthetic tension of framing criticism from a modernist point of view, tension among critics who appreciate Davis as an important musician but who remain perplexed because

[20] Walser cites a genealogy of modernist criticism that analyzes jazz from a modernist viewpoint such as Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz*, [20]a book that champions the contributions of black artists such as saxophonist and composer Charlie Parker and pianist and composer Duke Ellington yet analyzes their music from a modernist, musicological standpoint.

he doesn't live up to their standards of what Schuller calls "technical accuracy" (Schuller 1986 and Walser 1993, 347). Walser views Gate's theory as an intervention into such critiques: a way of analyzing improvised music on its own cultural terms through a set of codified standards that engage and describe the process of signifyin(g) in jazz. As Walser explains in his core argument:

> Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s theory is useful precisely because his goal was to create the means to deal with cultural difference on its own terms as an antidote to theoretical assimilation by more prestigious projects… Gates's notion of signifyin' codifies a set of ideas about processes of signification, and in the process offers us a bag of conceptual tools for musical analysis, challenging us to rethink not only the tactics, but also the goals of such work. (Walser 1993, 350)

In his approach to analyzing Miles Davis's solo, Walser's rejection of "theoretical assimilation" is a valuable example of applying this critical approach to the analysis of black music. However, Walser's approach still views black cultural production as equally valuable to that of whites. To be sure, this argument points to what Wilderson refers to as the "ruse of analogy," which I discuss below.

Still other scholars have jumped onto the signifyin(g) bandwagon, trying to work out the value of black music on its own cultural terms through the discourse of Tricksterism, often reifying the same Westernized musical values and theoretical hegemony they were trying to deconstruct. **I**n his analysis of the pianism of Thelonious Monk and James P. Johnson, David Kahn Feurzeig (1997) has defined musical Tricksterism as "deliberate bewilderment" and "purposeful confusion". What many scholars have called "mistakes" in jazz performance, Feurzeig argues, should be

rethought as 'intentional disorientation" (2)[21] He connects performance practices of Johnson and Monk to tropes of "tricksterisms." These tricksterisms have specific musical manifestations, Feurzeig explains, in that "Disconcerting dissonance, surprising harmonic juxtaposition, and manipulations of harmonic rhythm" are all emblematic of the "right mistakes" in Monk's and Johnson's improvisations (4). Feurzeig defines the right mistakes of these improvisers as having positive properties because they challenge our aural perception and challenge "musical norms" (4). Feurzeig contends that his analysis of "wrong notes" in the improvisations of Monk and Johnson may lead to a deeper understanding of syncopation (and other forms of music ambiguity) in the music of Brahms and other classical repertoire, and that theories which evolved in analyzing classical repertoire have failed to understand ambiguities in Western-European art music (83). Feurzeig may not understand that despite his conflation of musical sources among various cultures, musical choices are largely representative of the "community of thought that produces them" (Lewis 2000). Feurzeig's musical analysis of the musical semiotics of tricksterisms is devoid of any understanding of how improvised music is performed from cultural contexts and how these improvisations are a reflection of complex worldviews, imaginations, and ontological sensibilities. In suggesting that syncopation and ambiguity in classical music could be reimagined through tricksterism Feurzeig

[21] Notions of what is considered musically correct do not apply to different cultural contexts. Feurzeig argues that improvisers transform their mistakes into a sound that makes sense (82). Jazz music is both an improvised music and music that is "exceptionally full of tricks." Mistakes are difficult to define in jazz precisely because of the "trickster aesthetic," which sets a stage where "mistakes" are easily redefined and rehabilitated by their context. Echoing Walser (1993), Feurzeig argues that improvisation has to be evaluated in a context apart from the dominant analytical discourse of Western-European art music.

seems to suggest that black and Western European music operate on the same register, or on some universal plane of humanism, whereas the music of blacks would derive from the experience of being "socially dead," and not considered to be in civil society. This argument will be unpacked below.

In his dissertation on the signifyin(g) aspects of African American concert music, Scott Farrah begins his discussion by defining the qualities of black music. He uses signifyin(g) theory as a basis for his analysis. Farrah labels as "Universe of Black Topics" the stereotyped qualities of black music—call and response, repetition, riffs, blue notes, modulations, elisions, syncopations, gapped scales, modal mixtures and stratification (Farrah 2007, 19). These musical terms are the basis of his semiotic analysis as he identifies them as musical acts of signifyin(g). In his analysis of the black music vernacular in the compositions of William Grant Still, Williams Dawson and Florence B. Price, Farrah employs eminent music scholars[22] to support his semiotic analysis of the works (28), in terms of the cultural "bifurcations" among these composers. His goal is to analyze and define "the black musical sound of the symphonies (156)." Listing Still's use of the 12-bar blues form and the 32-bar blues progression (156), and the call-and-response patterns and intervallic motions of thirds (157) as techniques that signify the black musical sound in classical compositions, results in an incomplete analysis. As a theorist, Farrah falls into the trap of codification, believing in essentialized black musical characteristics that have been widely accepted to make a "black sound." Indeed, the question that has raised tension in discourses on improvisation is if one can truly identify "inherently black" musical characteristics, or "purely black." Farrah seems to believe that

[22] Farrah cites Kofi Agawu, Samuel Floyd, Eero Tarasti among others.

black composers were writing European music with black techniques thrown in even as he states they were all college educated and suffered discrimination from the musical establishment (158). His simplistic notion that black composers wrote "concert music with black musical signifiers" as a way of fighting for equal access and an equal society may well be accurate. This view fits within the grander—some would say romantic—narrative of black assimilation to white cultural values as way of achieving respect and equality. Farrah's discussion of signifyin(g) fails to investigate the employment of African American musical devices by black composers as musical resistance to dominant Euro-American musical values. Though Farrah employs various analytical models to investigate the "bifurcations" in classical composition by blacks, though on some level he wants to undermine the hegemony of "purely traditional music theoretical approaches" that include Roman Numeral analysis and voice-leading graphs (155), he never fully escapes the hegemony of the Western-European art music's theoretical constructs he seeks to problematize.

On occasion Farrah discusses the double consciousness inherent in the work of African American composers, where it refers to writing music that meets European standards in terms of compositional forms, harmonic structures, and melodic structures, while also representing the African American experience. For example, Farrah cites William Grant Still's Afro-American Symphony as evidence of "the black musical tendency" to compose pentatonic themes through imitation, or what Farrah calls the "first signs of parody" (56). Yet he seems blind to how this theoretical language or other modes of analysis reinforce the same bifurcations he analyzes. Farrah's analysis appears to be limited by a structuralist view, which Claire Colebrook has defined as "the idea that we

could examine a static structure of difference that might give us some point of foundation for knowing the world" (2002, 3). In this sense Farrah's identification of black musical characteristics, in comparison to Euro-American musical techniques, assumes a static nature of events from which to base his analysis. Ultimately, Farrah's tracking of black musical gestures or devices in the work of Still, Dawson and Price—through the use of Gates's signifyin(g)—is attenuated by his lack of discussion of agency, while falling prey to dominant Euro-American theoretical models he is trying to subvert. Despite presenting a brief salient point—in relation to Still's music about the composer's experience as an African American—while his theoretical door is ajar to entertaining the idea of agency in employing musical techniques, Farrah turns to more comfortable tools of the Eurocentric theoretical tradition, using his tables and charts to locate black musical tendencies or musical tricksterism.

Theories of Tricksterism and Sexual Expression in Music

In her book, *Mutha' Is Half a Word: Intersections of Folklore, Vernacular, Myth, and Queerness in Black Female Culture,* LaMonda Horton Stallings exploits what she calls Trickster polysexuality in order to include in the music tricksterism discourse, notions of marginalized queer, alter sexuality, specifically female black sexualities. Meshell Ndegeocello's trickster musical expressions have even invaded the black heterosexual bedroom to prove to the world that "queer desires can just be as procreative and heterosexual desires" (Stallings 255). My interest here is the methodology Stallings uses to reveal resistance through Ndegeocello's agency, manifested in female, black queer sexuality. Ndegeocello's music, however, is just a stepping-stone for her broader

argument about sexuality. Still, Stallings argument is important for several reasons. Through her particular theoretical cut of Tricksterism,[23] Stallings constructs a theory for how Ndegeocello uses her compositions and performances to "construct bisexuality as an epistemological framework and devise the lesbian phallus/ vulva as an ethical vantage point so as to examine and deconstruct the bipolar frame of gender and sexuality" (255). Stallings' slice of Tricksterism questions strict ideas of black female queer sexuality.

Trickster-troping, the representation of black musical codes through Soul and Go-Go music, also expresses Stallings' unconventional ideas of black musical identity. Her work is important for two other reasons. First, her critique of the literature on Tricksterism focuses on how the Trickster has been based on black male identity. Her analysis of Ndegeocello moves away from dominant masculinist tropes to recognize that Tricksterism can be used to understand complex distinctions of queer sexuality. Second, Stallings links tricksterism with "alternative" spirituality. Black Christianity has long lacked openings for the expression of African American women's queer sexuality. Stallings argues for a broader understanding of black female queer sexuality, citing Hynes and Doty's critique of the simplistic dichotomies in relation to the Trickster. To focus her portrayal of trickster characteristics, so broad across cultures, Stallings bases her formulation of a more fluid, wider, queer sexuality on the shape-shifting, situation-

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[23] I use Anthony Seeger's definition of theoretical cut, Seeger defines theoretical cut in scholarship as the concentration of "the researcher's attention on a single aspect of a complex subject." (187) Music Researches often accuse each other of misinterpreting music–Seeger argues–when in fact they are just taking different slices of a theory that is dictated by their research question. So in this case Horton-Horton-Stallings is taking a theoretical cut of Tricksterism to expand notions of a non-monolithic black female sexual identity. For more on theoretical cuts please see Anthony Seeger, *A Tropical Meditation On Comparison in Ethnomusicology.*

inventing, and sacred/ lewd bricoleur characteristics of the Trickster (Stallings 2007, 10). These aforementioned trickster traits, rescued for her purposes of theorizing a more complicated black female queer sexuality, do damage to constructs that privilege one kind of difference over another. Using Derrida's "difference," a term signifying his critique of logocentrism,[24] the fluid characteristics of the Trickster that "alter time, place or person" allow difference to be read equally and without classifying elements of difference or deviance."[25] Thus black female queerness should not be seen as a deviance; rather, it should be treated as an equal type of difference among differences. Stallings explains, "Tricksterism plays a key role in post modern blackness because it recognizes differences without ranking them…" (27). Her revision of the dominant, masculinist tropes of Tricksterism allows for what she identifies as the striving "for radical black female subjectivities that are just right for them" (11).

Not found in the scientific domain,[26] the field of undecidability in tricksterism presents us with myriad possibilities for defining and representing sexuality, desire and gender (Stallings, 30). Specifically Stallings revises the trickster trope in the following way: She identifies a black female tradition of tricksterism that goes beyond the black nationalist constructs of folklore myth and vernacular largely based on the black male (13).[27] The study of the Trickster traditions has led to black cultural nationalism that has been gendered male, which in turn reflects a patriarchal system (20).

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[24] Derrida's argument formed the basis for his narrow binary oppositions.
[25] Ibid., 10
[26] Stallings has argued that Tricksterism in its spiritual form is no less palpable or powerful because it is not institutionalized in the academy, 30.
[27] Stallings explains that the study of the discourse of Tricksterism has been limited to race and nation building. The trickster trope as a central heroic figure has largely been

Two theoretical tropes run through Stallings' use of the trickster as the representation of fluid black music styles and also as representative of a kind of innate, unfixed sexuality represented in music (2007, 222). Stallings explains, "as we will see, music allows the theoretical liminality of trickster to materialize either in performance or within the cultural product. Since black women exhibit a concern with praxis and theory within their lives, music offers creative artists and critics the option of trickster-troping to address ideological and material needs" (2007, 222).Stallings focused carefully on how multiple, unfixed representations of black female sexuality exist in the work of popular artists like Ndegeocello. Her analysis of Ndegeocello, however, reveals little interest in how the music itself demonstrates resistance strategies, or how these manifest in the music. Stallings primary concern is the revision of male-dominated discourses of tricksterism was to reinvigorate and celebrate the unfixed, fluid space of tricksterism. Her alternative models of trickster" survey how the black female community used such models to express themselves in myriad ways (Stallings, 31).

Using Gates's signifyin(g) theory, Krin Gabbard analyzes performances of jazz trumpet as it relates to subversive performances of black masculinity and locates a trope of phallic signifyin(g) in these early performers (Gabbard 1992). Gabbard argues that black performers were symbolically castrated by their minstrel-like performances, which were thought to be hypermasculine yet unmanly. Black masculinity was not permitted open expression in the early 20th century. As a way to cope with the

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gendered as a straight black male. This historical construction locks out the historical contributions of female tricksters and reflects the lack of research in gender and sexuality. Finally, the hegemony of historical Africanisms has dominated the studies of the Afro-diasporic trickster figure.

suppression of their masculinity (according to Gabbard) African American male jazz musicians circumvented these social restrictions, signifyin(g) the phallus in their performances by maintaining an erect posture and in the way that they positioned their trumpet.[28] Citing specific examples of musicians, Gabbard explains that jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie established phallic authority in the way he "bent the trumpet upward as if to simulate an erection" and Louis Armstrong stood to play his trumpet, in order to express sexual virility while also playing the "smiling clown" (44).[29] Gabbard also maintains that black trumpeters signify phallicism through pitch, speed, and emotional intensity (45). He creates a binary between what he calls the phallic trumpeters and the post-phallic trumpeters. While black masculinity was suppressed in the era of the early jazz trumpeters, post-phallic players have not been concerned with symbolic castration (as theorized by Lacan/Adorno). According to Gabbard, post-phallic players are more affluent, better educated, more class conscious, and thus feel less impelled to demonstrate their masculinity with the provocative gestures of working-class music such as rap or Hip Hop (49): "Without renouncing the romance and sexuality that have always been fundamental to jazz and without completely abandoning speed and high pitch, these trumpeters have substituted finesse and control for theatrics and ostentation" (48). Combining musicology, cinema studies, and Gates's signifyin(g) theory, Gabbard presents us with an interesting hypothesis based on a trope of

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[28] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Thousand Oaks, California, 1997)

[29] Gabbard develops Stuart Hall's argument that black men treated like children often responded by adopting a "macho, aggressive-masculine style, yet this only served to confirm the fantasy among whites of their ungovernable and sexual nature (Hall 1997; Wallace, 1979)

symbolic phallicism among primarily black performers. No doubt black musicians have used a number of strategies to protest a lesser station in life and, to be sure, expressing sexuality was an accepted way they could express their humanity. However, Gabbard's application of signifyin(g) theory also reflects romantic ideas of humanism in terms of black musicians improvising their subjectivity or humanity into existence. And as we will see below, his analysis adheres to a universal idea of agency and humanism that is not and never will be available to black musicians.

Criticisms of Signifyin(g)Theory

Scholars—such as Tomlinson and Meyers—have criticized Gates's signifyin(g) theory as creating a literary tradition that takes subaltern voices into account while establishing a kind of canonic exclusivity and racial superiority that wreaks of the same aesthetic segregation Gates and others have crusaded against for years. For example, Tomlinson (1991) argues that Gates overlooked the possibilities of dialogic aspects of signification by asserting that all texts signify on other texts, and that the dialogical phenomenon must be encouraged so that no theory, Eurocentric or Afrocentric, can take precedent, becoming a dominant canon in the process. He points out the irony of Gates's "Anthology of Black Literature," a black literary canon to combat the dominant white canon(s) of literature, while still appreciating the pragmatic goals of canon formation:

> It is indeed no trivial feat to rob one of the handiest excuses from those who would still excluded African-American literature from university curricula… He can not relinquish the hope that a canon is the "essence" of a tradition that evolves teleologically, with "inherent logic" and "internal rationale" Gates has chosen to move forward in the face of a risk that is no

> doubt obvious to him: in institutionalizing a black canon he is in danger of reinscribing the same monological, hegemonic values—the same arrogance of the Same—that have for so long supported the white, male, European canon to which he would offer an alternative. (Tomlinson 1991, 83, 84)

Tomlinson would prefer a discourse based on the idea of parallax, "a way of knowing in which all vantage points yield a real knowledge, partial and different from that offered by any other vantage point, but in which no point yields an insight more privileged than that gained from any other" (82). He uses the idea of parallax to describe a space where knowledge is constructed in a decentered fashion. Parallax is the anti-canon. Tomlinson's argument is rather utopian and seems to ignore the long-lasting effects of a historical prevalence and dominance of Eurocentric narratives on music.

Other writers have questioned the existence of a black literary tradition and dismissed Gates's theory as theoretically impoverished. D. G. Meyers criticizes Gates for inventing a signifyin(g) theory based on a presupposition that black writers, from various times in history and various regions of America, are linked by an intertextual black dialect trope in literary texts (Meyers 1990, 62). He argues that Gates has not explained how these tropes in literary black dialect result in similar ways of writing (62), and concerns himself less with a theoretical basis then with classifying tropes. Meyers accuses Gates of "casting research findings into the jargon of reconstruction, a.k.a theory" (63). He also views Gates's reasoning behind his signifyin(g) theory as circular:

> To his credit, Gates perceives that it would be an error to ascribe the unique characteristics of Afro-American literature to race. But he is not sure what else to ascribe them to. His reasoning runs in circles. Black writers form a tradition. How do you know? They all use the "trope" of signifying. What makes this trope distinctly black? All black writers use it. (Meyers, 1990, 62)

Meyers explains that Gates has failed to explicate the reasons why signifyin(g) is considered a black cultural practice. Yet Gates *has* stated that signification is not distinctly black cultural practice. If we apply Meyers's argument to analyzing Floyd's master tropes of signifyin(g) in black music (Floyd 1995),[30] we are confronted with the following question: What makes intertextuality—the repeating and revising that occurs in black music—a distinctly black tradition? Are there not plenty of examples of intertextuality in European music, such as the Dies Irae trope used by Hector Berlioz among many others? While this argument may be true on a surface level, Meyers's anti-essentialist stance does not account for how Gates's critical interpretation might be formed from a peculiar Weltanschauung: a worldview starkly different than his. For all of its alleged flaws, Gates formation of a literary theory for African American texts, and Floyd's adaptation of Gates's theory for revealing signification in African American musical texts, were necessary theoretical interventions in a discipline dominated by European concepts of literature and music.

Guthrie Ramsey, describes how "group sensibility" defines a culture and how such "notions of essentialism exist as powerful displays of human agency, intention, and culture building" (Ramsey 2004, 214). The group sensibility that forms the basis of Gates's signifyin(g) theory is perhaps (as Meyers argues) attenuated by certain presuppositions of a literary tradition of African American writing. But as Guthrie has argued, the kind of theorizing Gates has done may be necessary for carving out a space for voices from the margins. I would add that the literary canons that have dominated

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[30] see note 7

musical discourses for centuries were also on and formed on presuppositions—the very Enlightenment presuppositions—that became fixed positions, and those that Gates has challenged with his theory.

So far I have explicated how scholars have adopted signifyin(g) theory for the political purpose of analyzing black music from a different theoretical framework. Part of the project of that scholarship has been to excavate traces of agency in the music of black agents. Tricksterism represents black agency and the term itself contains some elements of optimism. In order to embody Tricksterism, in order to have the *possibility* of writing your self into being musically—as it has been argued that enslaved and formally enslaved Africans wrote themselves in to being through Slave narratives such as autobiographies in literature[31]—one must have an ontology. In order to have ontology one has to be considered human. The critical literature that follows signifyin(g) theory into musicology reveals ways of using this theoretical register to get at the metaphysics behind how and why black people make music; the so-called "aesthetics" behind black performance. This theoretical discourse of musical signifyin(g) has not gone far enough. We need to ask if tricksterism too simple a discourse for understanding black cultural production? Is the discourse of musical signifyin(g) based on notions of universal agency and humanism? If so, is that discourse still appropriate for analyzing black cultural production? Furthermore, what if we were to analyze black musical value outside of Western musical

[31] In Gates's explication of Slave Narratives as the Talking Book, he emphasizes that Black humanity could only be evaluated through the written text. Writing was a "visible sign of reason" after the development of the printing press and the promotion of reason by Descartes, and only by "making the white written text speak with a black voice is the initial mode of inscription of the metaphor of the double-voiced" (Gates 1988, 131).

aesthetics? The discourse of Afro-pessimists is a valuable tool in questioning claims of musical tricksterism scholarship over the last twenty-fours years.

Afro-Pessimism and the Discourse of Musical Tricksterism

The recent Afro-pessimism academic movement in black studies has been a valuable way to challenge reified ideas of music Tricksterism via simplistic ideas of black agency in music. Before discussing how I apply these theories, I consider Afro-pessimism as a construct. Frank Wilderson III has explained:

> The Afro-pessimists are theorists of Black positionality who share Fanon's insistence that, though Blacks are indeed sentient beings, the structure of the entire world's semantic field—regardless of cultural and national discrepancies… is sutured by anti-Black solidarity. Unlike the solution-oriented, interest-based, or hybridity-dependent scholarship so fashionable today, Afro-pessimism explores the meaning of Blackness not—in the first instance—as a variously and unconsciously interpellated identity or as a conscious social actor, but as a structural position of noncommunicability in the face of all other positions; this meaning is noncommunicable because, again, as a position, Blackness is predicated on modalities of accumulation and fungibility, not exploitation and alienation. Unfortunately, neither Black nor White film theory seems to have made this shift from exploitation and alienation as that which positions film theory's "universal" cinematic subject to genocide, accumulation and fungibility as modalities of gratuitous violence which positions the Slave. In this respect, film theory mystifies structural antagonisms and abets social and political stability. Even the bulk of Black film theory is predicated on an assumptive logic of exploitation and alienation, rather than accumulation and fungibility, when regarding the ontological status of the Black. (Wilderson 2010, 59)

Understanding musical Tricksterism as Black agency manifested in musical resistance to the status quo is tied to notions of universal agency and humanism. The discourse of musical Tricksterism suggests that black art is representative of the same type of agency

that is attributed to whites and therefore suggests that black musicians operate within the same humanistic sphere. The idea that self-transforming human agency is available to all people equally is a chimera and as I argue in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, this lack of possibility of universal agency is represented in the music of Andrew Hill and Ambrose Akinmusire. Any theoretical discourse applied to black music cultural production that suggests simple definitions of black agency—as Walter Johnson argues above—is no longer valid and was never possible. Wilderson, the founder of the Afro-pessimist movement, said as much when he talked about "the ruse of analogy," a possibility of creating analogy *between*, meaning between white suffering and black suffering; therefore blacks and whites might theorize about cultural production from the same positionality. Wilderson goes so far as to describe whites as Human and blacks as Slaves, or non-Human, so he might identify with Sun Ra who stated that blacks are living myths.[32] Wilderson sees no analogies between the suffering of, say, whites Jews, Native Americans, and blacks because while the other groups may go through their "grammar of suffering," they still remain human whereas the humanity of blacks does not register in civil society (cite). In fact, Wilderson sees blacks as fungible because of their legacy of being seen and treated as commodities, which has left its residue in our political, legal, and economic systems. The Slave, that is the Black, has an ontological position, which Wilderson refers to as the "grammar of suffering," not as a worker but as an "antihuman" (Wilderson, 2010). For Wilderson, Blacks or blackness exists outside of humanity, and this perpetual outsider-ness is the ontological yardstick by which humanity "establishes, maintains, and renews

[32] See Sun Ra's film *Space Is The Place*.

its coherence, its corporeal integrity."[33] Humanity, which Wilderson argues is tantamount to Whiteness, is defined by the nothingness that is Blackness. Moreover, the definition of humanity is indelibly linked to the counter position of Blacks as emblematic of the antithetical sign of the anti-human.

Wilderson does not dismiss the genocides of the Jews and Native Americans, but recognizes that these genocides did not foreclose the possibility of humanity to those aforementioned groups. Thus, according to Wilderson Native Americans and Jews are still considered human after genocide whereas the Middle Passage foreclose the possibility for humanity of Blacks. Therefore, subjectivity—defined as the root of all actions—is not analogous between all groups because the outcome of that suffering has been drastically different. When theorists, historians and others operate from liberalist notions "that all men are created equal," they are simply perpetuating the ruse. Wilderson explains:

> The ruse of analogy erroneously located Blacks in the world—a place where they have not been since the dawning of Blackness. This attempt to position the Black in the world by way of analogy is not only a mystification, and often erasure, of Blackness's grammar of suffering (accumulation and fungibility or the status if being non-Human) but simultaneously also a provision for civil society, promising an enabling modality for Human ethical dilemmas. It is a mystification and an erasure because, whereas Masters may share the same fantasies as Slaves, and Slaves can speak as though they have the same interests as Masters, their grammars of suffering are irreconcilable. (Wilderson 2010, 37)

Wilderson's "modality of ethical dilemmas" is at the foundation of optimistic theorizations of agency in black music. He makes the point that theoretical constructs based on universal agency, humanity and ontology are not available to blacks. His

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[33] Ibid.

argument that Black film theorist literature shows that, although they are looking for agency, subjectivity and ontology in representations of blacks in black films, such agency, subjectivity, and ontology are not available to blacks themselves. Black musical theorists have also tried to find agency, subjectivity and ontology. Black music theory has promoted ideas of what Wilderson "calls myriads of compensatory gestures." I argue the analogous point, that with musical tricksterism, many musical theorists have fallen under the ruse of analogy. The ruse of analogy is based on the belief that the "grammar of suffering" in black life in analogous to the suffering for other oppressed peoples. Wilderson discusses the flaws of black film theory—and black studies in general[34]—here:

> By aspiring to the very ontological capacity which modernity foreclosed to them—by attempting to "write themselves into being"—black film theorists and many Black films experience as unbearable tenet shared by Judy and other Afro-pessimists that "humanity recognizes itself in the Other that it is not," This makes the labor of disavowal in Black scholarly and aesthetic production doubly burdensome, for it is triggered by a fear of both being "discovered," and of discovering oneself, as ontological incapacity. This through borrowed institutionality—the feigned capacity to be essentially exploited and alienated (rather than accumulated and fungible) in the first ontological instance (in other words, a fantasy to be just like everyone else, which is a fantasy to be)—the work of Black film theory operates through a myriad of compensatory gesture in which the black theorist assumes a subjective capacity to be universal and thus finds" it everywhere. *We all got it bad, don't we, Massa*. (Wilderson, 2010)

Wilderson would likely agree with Avery Gordon's definition of haunting defined as "experiential modality" related to histories of expression, exploitation and

[34] I included critical musicology discourse around black cultural production in this category.

violent encounters that still effect subjects in a direct or indirect way (Gordon 2008, xvi). Gordon's haunting is derived from forgotten historical situations that have seemingly vanished, but manifest and impact subjects all the time. Wilderson would probably argue that Gordon's notion of haunting operates on a different level for blacks, whose lives *embody* haunting. Gordon understands that haunting is never universal: "I have not endeavored to establish transhistorical or universal laws of haunting per se but rather to represent the structure of feeling that is something akin to what it feels like to be the object of a social totality vexed by the phantoms of modernity's violence." However, she argues that haunting creates agency. Haunting is not only about historical specters that rise up and scare you; it also *creates* the possibility of agency. Haunting is also the catalyst for creative intervention from the force of one's own life into systemic oppression. "But haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done" (Gordon, xvi). It produces critical action towards liberation and therefore a catalyst for change, and is a motivating factor for "critical action towards liberation."[35] Wilderson would likely argue that the agency Gordon describes is still couched in universalist terms. He might explain that Gordon's understanding of the necessary critical action toward liberation is not available on the same register to blacks because blacks have not been accorded full rights.. Gordon's idea of agency derived from haunting is located in her definition of complex personhood:

> Complex personhood means that people that suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves. Complex personhood means that even those called "Other" are never, never that. Complex personhood means that the stories that people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social

[35] Ibid.

> worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward. (Gordon 2008, 5)

For Gordon, ghosts represent what has been concealed, but are alive and present. Haunting, then, is "materiality of social identity" that Fred Moten describes and brilliantly argues, and creates the "possibility of production" linked to the work of imagination in black creative practice (Moten 2003, 2). Wilderson's very different definition of the possibilities of complex personhood that, unlike Gordon's link towards universal ideas of agency, he argues is not available to what he calls the Slave. Neither does black positionality have any relation to what Wilderson calls the Human in civil society. He has relinquished all magical, romantic, or neoliberal ideas of what it means to be black, and pessimistic that blacks would be welcome to that sphere of Humanity. Other scholars have used the idea of double consciousness to describe the ontological situation of black musicians with the hope of providing insight into their musical strategies.

Monson (1999) has argued that black improvisation is based on conversation. Riffing on W. E. B Dubois in *Souls of Black Folk*, she views the music of black musicians as representing Dubois's lived double consciousness, which refers to the ability to hold more than one identity as a necessary survival mechanism in a hostile environment where one's culture is considered not standard. Double consciousness accounts for African American jazz musicians unavoidable necessity to speak through the mainstream language of Western European music theory—analogous to Wilderson's concept of civil society—and then switch to the language of metaphors in speaking about their practice of improvisation (Monson, 75). Black identity must be flexible so as to

fulfill the cultural, communicative needs within the black community of musicians, while also code-switching to the hegemonic social (musical) language of gestures of a Euro-American centered society.[36] Accordingly, African American music has "the special power" to exist both within—and outside— western music conventions. Unlike Wilderson who views black positionality outside the sign of the human, Monson reads black musicians as having positionality and that positionality is based on double consciousness in relation to a Western value dominated society. For her argument to encompass a liberal vision she must envision that black musician's humanity and thus their music has value, or "say something" in Civil society. Her book is based on the premise that black musicians have ontology and personhood, and that the way they talk with each other during the performance can be understood in the conventional sense that applies to whites. On this platform she endeavors to describe to the reader the nature of jazz performance. Within the Afro-pessimist framework, musicians are understood to be sentient beings performing their culture. Yet, that performance must not be read within the context of simplistic views of agency and ontology. For if we imagine black performance from the Afro-pessimism founding concept of social death, African American musicians are "saying nothing." In this construct, the only one by which their performance has any type of agency, is in an understanding of agency from a radically different point of view. As Jared Sexton has explained:

> … social death might be thought of as another name for slavery and an attempt to think about what it comprises, and social life, then, another

[36] For example, black slang or vernacular used on a job interview would be considered inappropriate as middle class white English is the standard for conversing in any professional setting. So it is customary for blacks and other non-whites to code switch, or to behave based on certain standardized codes that are considered acceptable.

> name for freedom and an attempt to think about what it entails. Though slavery is an ancient institution with provenance in nearly every major form of human society, we are concerned here with the more specific emergence of freedom—as economic value, political category, legal right, cultural practice, lived experience—from the modern transformation of slavery into what Robin Blackburn terms the "Great Captivity" of the New World: the convergence of the private property regime and the invention of racial blackness (which is to say the invention of antiblackness in the invention of whiteness, which cannot become immediately a more generalized nonblackness. (Sexton 2011, 17)

For Sexton the concept of social death—defined within the context of black quotidian life—should not be seen as a literal social death without the possibility of agency. The acceptance of oneself as socially dead may be a way of enacting agency in powerfully new registers. Sexton and Wilderson attack what they call the "assumptive logic" in film theory and, more broadly, black studies programs and scholarship. Assumptive logic is based on the idea that blacks have access to the accouterments of civil society.[37] Human agency couched in universal terms, when in fact the history of blacks overall bears them out as conceived as less than human. Afro-pessimism is an extension of the discourse that believes that emancipation is an ongoing project needing to be worked out. Thus Afro-pessimists consider blacks as socially dead.

Therefore, black cultural production—such as the improvisation I analyze in later chapters—or the ideas of black musical resistance, those laid out here for the purpose of our discussion, does not occur in the same ontological register as of whites, who represent and define what civil society is all about. Wilderson's definition of the ontological is "the capacities of power-or lack thereof-lodged in distinct and

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[37] Explaining that for white philosophers writing was the sign of the human, Gates argued that blacks wrote themselves into humanity (1988). This statement assumes that blacks could access full right as subjects through literature and other arts.

irreconcilable subject positions, e.g., Humans and Slaves" (14). He asserts that slavery existed for other people but blacks are "always already void of relationality" (18). Therefore, blacks are "socially dead" to the rest of the world, again, based on Wilderson's distinction between the experience of slavery by whites and the ontological position of slavery for blacks (14). Thus, Afro-pessimism is a political statement about the naivety of performance studies that position black resistance in terms connected to the aforementioned universal ideals. Afro-pessimism critiques notions posited by black scholars of performance studies, beautifully described by Moten who states "if we understand race, class, gender and sexuality as the materiality of social identity, as the surplus effect and condition of possibility of production, then we can also understand the ongoing, resistive force of such materiality as it plays itself out in and as the work of art" (Moten 2003, 110). Moten's ideas of black agency are an important framework for interpreting black performance. These ideas are not in contradistinction to Wilderson's Afro-pessimism. What Moten calls the *Magic of Objects* is defined as resistance always already built into Afro-diasporic performances. Blacks, historically thought of as objects of production, resist that object-hood through creative practice. Such resistance to object-hood acts as the catalyst for productive and creative practices. Afro-pessimism and Moten agree that blacks are operating outside the sphere of humanity. Moten explains,

> The eclipse of objects by practices is a head, a necessary opening, that vanishes in the improvisatory work of those who are not but nothing other than objects themselves. (Afro-diasporic) performances are resistances of the object and the object is in that it resists, is in that it is always the practice of resistance. And if we understand race, class, gender and sexuality as the materiality of social identity, as the surplus effect and condition of possibility of production, then we can also understand the ongoing, resistive force of such materiality as it plays itself out in and as

> the work of art. This is to say that these four articulating structures must not only be granted historicity, politics and practice but aesthesis as well. This is also to say that the concept of the object of performance studies is (in) practice precisely at the convergence of the surplus (in all the richness with which Martin formulates it—as, in short, the ongoing possibility or hope of a minoritarian insurgence) and the aesthetic. (Moten 2003, 110)

Moten believes that resistance is always built into black performance Wilderson would agree with Moten but go on to argue that black resistance in the performative operates outside the sphere of Humanity and Civil Society. The magic and pessimism the scholars discuss are interrelated. Recent tension between Afro-pessimism and black performance studies has been couched in the terms of black optimism/Afro-pessimism. However, scholars like Sexton have sought to bridge the discourses by arguing that both camps believe in the anti-blackness of western civilization. Sexton argues that the matter involves theoretical semantics:

> Wilderson's is an analysis of the law in its operation as "police powers and racial prerogative both under and after slavery" (Wagner 2009: 243). So too is Moten's analysis, at least that just-less-than-half of the intellectual labor committed to the object of black studies as critique of (the antiblackness of) Western civilization. But Moten is just that much more interested in how black social life steals way or escapes from the law, how it frustrates the police power and, in so doing, calls that very policing into being in the first place. The policing of black freedom, then, is aimed less at its dreaded prospect, apocalyptic rhetoric notwithstanding, than at its irreducible precedence. The logical and ontological priority of the unorthodox self predicating activity of blackness, the "improvisatory exteriority" or improvisational immanence" that blackness is, renders the law dependent upon what it polices. This is not the noble agency of resistance. It is a reticence or reluctance that we might not know if it were not pushing back, so long as we know that this pushing back is really a pushing forward. So you see, in this perverse sense, black social death is black social life. The object of black studies is the aim of black studies. The most radical negation of the antiblack world is the most radical affirmation of a blackened world. Afro-pessimism is "not but nothing other than" black optimism." (Sexton 2011, 37)

Where Moten is interested in how blacks resist the policing of white society, Wilderson––according to Sexton—would argue that acknowledging that resistance or agency, or the understanding of black ontology, is not possible for people who are socially dead. (This reading takes an understanding of black agency and resistance as outside the sphere of civil society. By negating ideas of black humanity and agency, new possibilities for understanding black performance become available in the theoretical nexus of social death.

Thus the idea of improvisation by blacks emanates from the discourse of social death—or the opposite of social life—disrupting the idea that any performance of improvisation by blacks could fully represent American democracy or freedom. The music itself is informed by experiences that represent no access to full freedom or democracy. Social death is not a denial of the possibility of black agency in music. Imagining black performance through the lens of social death means that it allows us to take the historical and present framework of antiblackness into account as we try to understand how black musicians "defeat the bar lines." The Afro-pessimist framework and methodology allows us to critique the "assumptive logic" of past black music criticism and to develop new analysis based on more radical ideas of black agency. As Sexton explains,

> For Wilderson, the principal implication of slavery's afterlife is to warrant an intellectual disposition of "afro-pessimism," a qualification and a complication of the assumptive logic of black cultural studies in general and black performance studies in particular, a disposition that posits a political ontology dividing the Slave from the world of the Human in a constitutive way. This critical move has been misconstrued as a negation of the agency of black performance, or even a denial of black social life and a number of scholars have reasserted the earlier assumptive logic in a gesture that hypostatizes afro-pessimism to that end. (Sexton 2011, 23)

Summary

I have discussed how agency has been discussed in musicology literature and also examined how I was led to my stance through the study of how Gates signifyin(g) theory has been applied by musicologists to analyze the work of black cultural production. I reviewed and explained how signifiyin(g) theory has been employed in the work of Samuel Floyd, Robert Walser and others, including the criticisms of signifiyin(g) theory by scholars like Tomlinson and Meyer, who have questioned black literary canon formation as a rejoinder to that of the white literary canon.

After witnessing how several scholars have applied signifyin(g) theory or musical tricksterism as a hermeneutic on various levels of applicability, Afro-pessimist theory helped me to understand how tricksterism as a hermeneutic was tied to universal notions of agency and humanism, both tied to the real subjectivity of whiteness. It was important to show how Wilderson situates Black positionality in relation to the discourse of Tricksterism and the discourses of Afro-Pessimism. In the end, encountering the discourse of Afro-pessimism acts as an intervention to noble thoughts of agency.

I have also explained how the model I use for interpreting black cultural production exists outside of the tricksterism model, or perhaps somewhere in between the tricksterism and afro-pessimist models. Finally, Tricksterism is no longer a sufficient theoretical framework to understand the dynamic cultural production whereas social death is a useful concept to explain the improvisational and compositional resistance from African American musicians. The liminality and undecidibility that Tricksterism is embodies has been a useful theoretical tool, but it is more important now to think of

black cultural production outside of simple signification schemes. How black musicians are perceived by institutions, and how they respond to those perceptions, could reveal important motivating factors for strategies of resistance. Music production from black musicians does not exist in the realm of universal agency. Theorizing improvised black music within the void of Afro-pessimism is useful because it allows music from black musicians to be theorized outside of the notion of Universal ontology. As Kyra Gaunt explains "African Americans are embodying 'home,' performing their affiliation and identification with the collective experience of blackness, as a result of perpetually confronting a kind of 'homelessness' in this so-called New World dominated by descendants of Europeans, who themselves embody and imagined 'home' in America at the expense of native Americans, who experience homelessness in a land that was their own" (Gaunt 2006, 49). We must look at black music outside of constructs of heroic Tricksterism, largely gendered as male, as Stalling has shown. The end of Tricksetrism as a discourse is a way toward an agency that exists outside of humanist's philosophical paradigms. As Wilderson states,

> If the position of the Black is, as I argue, a paradigmatic impossibility in the Western Hemisphere, indeed, in the world, in other words, if a Black is the very antithesis of a Human subject, as imagined by Marxism and psychoanalysis, then his or her paradigmatic exile is not simply a function of repressive practices on the part of institutions (as political science and sociology would have it). This banishment from the Human fold is to be found most profoundly in the emancipatory meditations of Black people's staunchest "allies," and in some of the most "radical" films. Here—not in restrictive policy, unjust legislation, police brutality, or conservative scholarship—is where the Settler/Master's sinews are most resilient. (Wilderson, 9)

The politics of black resistance through agency is "enacted on a lower frequency" and expressed in all forms of arts, right in the nexus of a climate of oppression and

marginality (Gilroy 1993, 37). Black cultural production is the outward expression of a counterculture having a separate history and theoretical tradition of its own. Black music then requires a different hermeneutic orientation that can assess and embrace the representations of agency in the semiotics of music and other various black texts based on this peculiar history. Indeed, music from the black diaspora is historically connected with politics of racial justice that effect people in a very direct way. Black music indeed is born out of the "systematic and pervasive relations of domination that supply its conditions of existence" (38).

In conclusion, I have demonstrated how a musical discourse has been founded upon signifyin(g) theory. The application of signifyin(g) theory to music analysis of black artifacts has been a useful and important contribution to critical musicology discourses. We have progressed in this study, however, to ask a larger question about the ontological basis of musical strategies and specifically how those strategies manifest. Defeating the Bar lines requires a different kind of hermeneutical notation that reflects the musical grammar of the socially dead. Black musical resistance should not be romanticized and thought to function in the same register as humanity. Afro-pessimism allows me to understand improvisation in new ways and do semiotic readings that reflect the reality of a cultural production that thrives on the outskirts of the system even while functioning in what Wilderson calls Civil Society. In the next chapter, I review literature that has discussed various types of musical strategies of resistance.

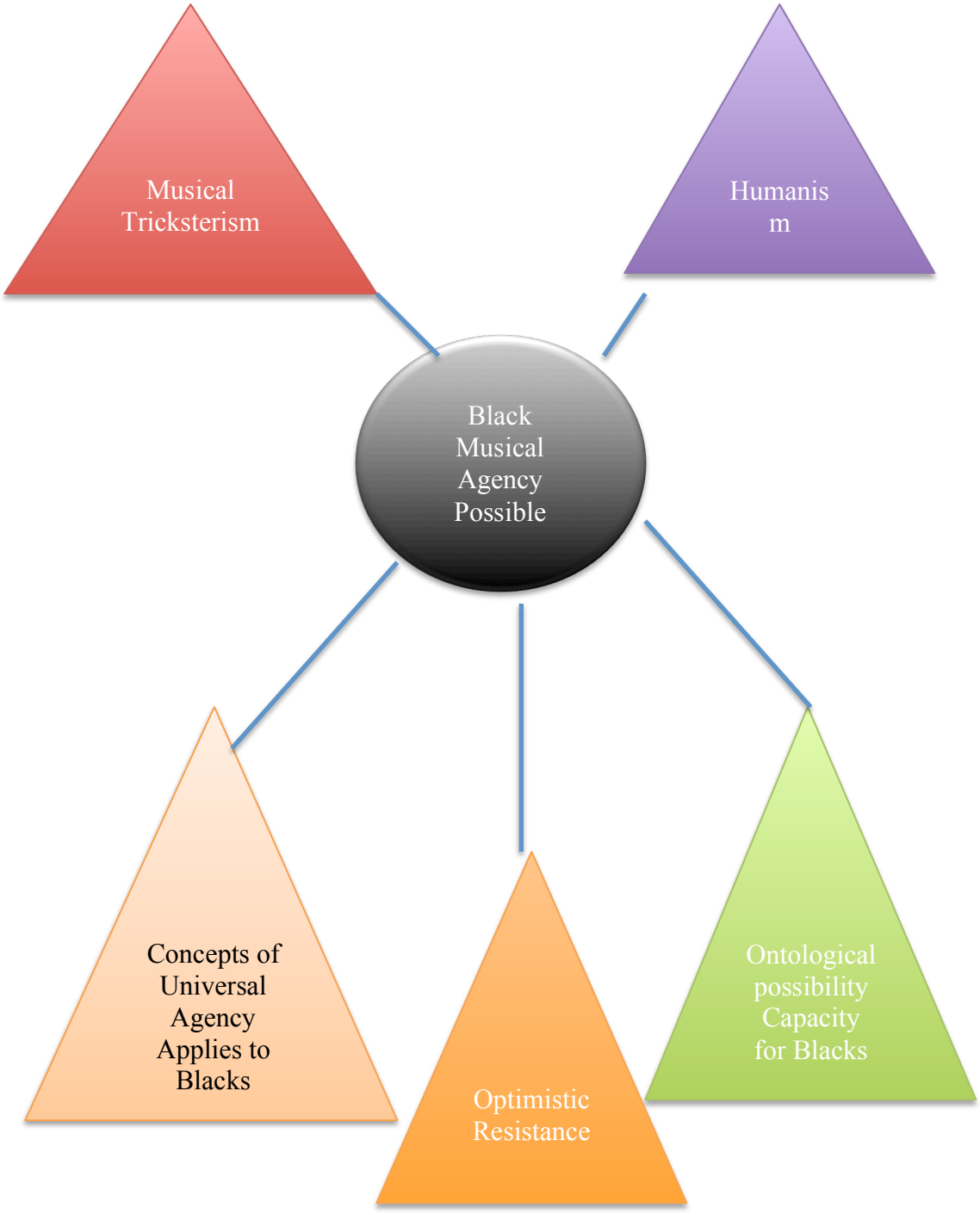

Illustration 1.1.Tricksterism Hermeneutic Model for Music Analysis

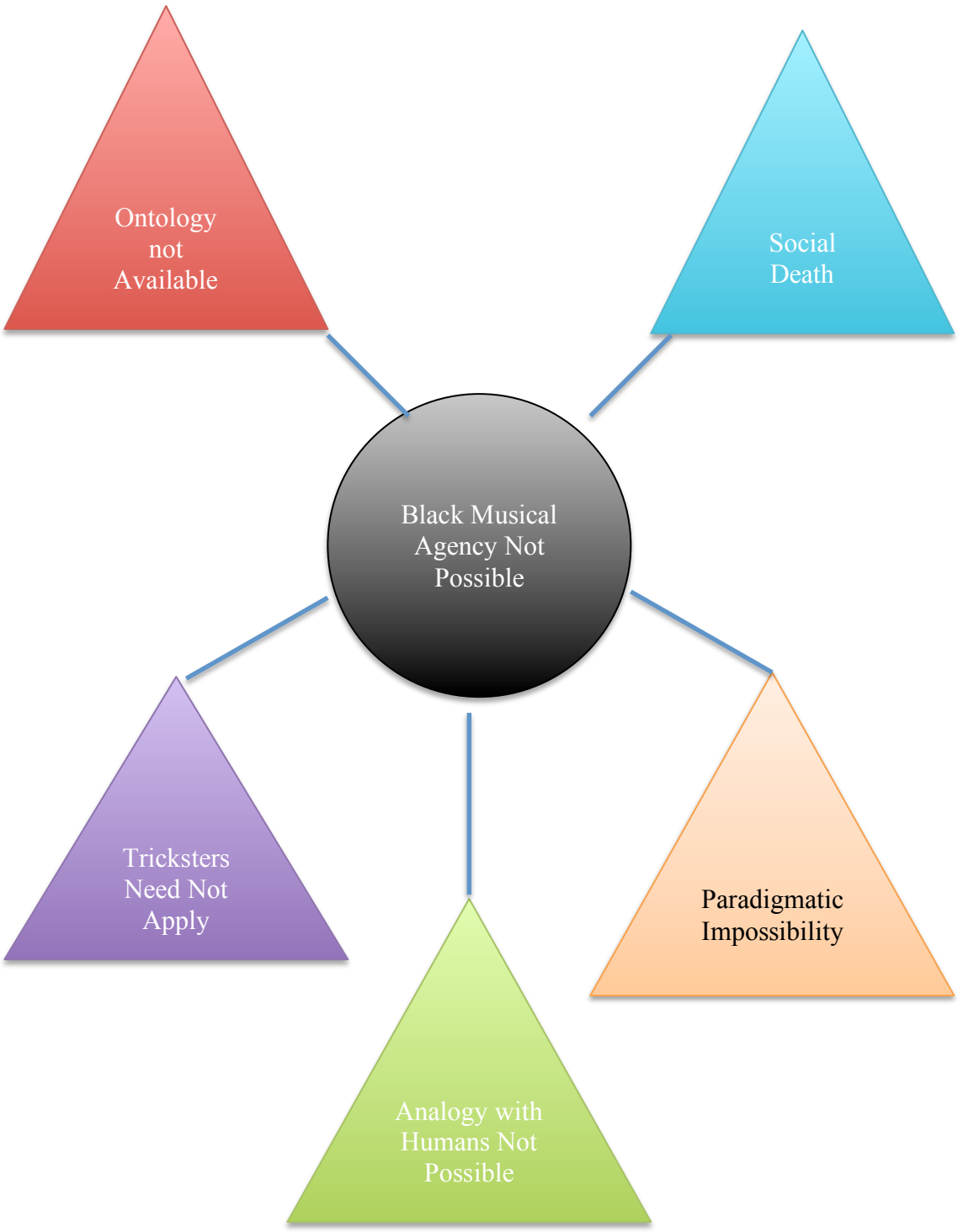

Illustration 1.2. Afro-Pessimist Hermeneutic Model for Music Analysis

Chapter 2:

Strategies Of Musical Resistance

In the literature review of chapter one, I discussed why signfyin(g) theory of Henry Louis Gates (1988) applied to music criticism was no longer an appropriate theoretical model for understanding the ontological motivations for black musical resistance. This finding motivated my use of the afro-pessimist stance for locating African American strategies of musical resistance from an. While this study appears to be solely Amercanist, locating musical strategies of resistance is always already rooted in a global context, simply because strategies of musical resistance are connected with the international institution of slavery and the subsequent, perpetual artistic imaginations of the Middle Passage. Multi instrumentalist, improviser and composer Henry Threadgill explains that in the jazz educational institutions of America, jazz is taught in an isolated fashion because it is taught only in relation to European music. Threadgill argues that teaching jazz in this limited perspective is inconsistent with historical events—such as migration patterns— that brought about jazz. Threadgill explains

> Black music is the result of an interchange between African music and the music from the rest of the world, not just European music, all music. Wherever there's another culture that the African descendants that came to this country came in contact with, that becomes part of the language. Because the language that the African descendants have, they don't have that language anymore; they lost that when they came here. So they set up like a new language. This is a new language that's been created, out of bits and pieces of everything. So that's an important aspect of jazz that nobody talks about. Now when you understand that principle…you should understand that you need to be studying all music, and all people and all

> things, not just this particular genre of music. It's inconsistent with the whole history of it. (quoted from www.criticalimprov.com n.p.)

In the spirit of this above quote, this chapter focuses on a literature review of strategies of musical resistance from a diasporic perspective.

Resistance strategies in musical practice occur in many different ways for many different reasons. There are five areas of literature on resistance strategies in music that I would like to cover. These areas include 1) strategies of political themes and references, 2) strategies of unconventional musical techniques, 3) transnational strategies of musical resistance in song, 4) strategies of reconceptualization of performance 5) and strategies of integration of nonmusical elements.

Strategies of Political Themes and References

From the early twentieth century until present time, composers and improvisers have continually introduced political themes into musical strategies by renaming their musical practices. Renaming musical practices allows artists to define their work on their own terms and to express their subjectivity. Iain Anderson explains the political stances of 1960's African American jazz musicians as represented in how musicians redefined the modernist aesthetic by reframing it from black subject position (2007). Black musicians redefined "modern music" as a type of performance practice beyond the musical ability of traditional jazz musicians (Wong 2004). Jazz musicians who played what was considered codified music—such as American Songbook standards from the 1930s—were considered less "serious" because the music they played was thought too commercial. Sun Ra, in renaming his band "Arkestra" (as opposed to the commonly used

"orchestra") connected his music notions of black identity, history, philosophy and a tradition of mysticism based on his understanding of Egypt (Lewis 2008).

Other musicians have introduced political themes and references into their music by mixing different types of music cultures into their compositions and improvisations. They express their politics by not allowing music genres to dictate which culture should be referenced in their compositions and improvisations. Deborah Wong explains how George Lewis politically frames his creative practice as transcultural (2004). Lewis uses a plethora of styles, techniques and references in his compositions and improvisations. Composer, baritone saxophonist and political activist Fred Ho exemplifies the musician who goes beyond limitations of genre, using blues, Chinese Opera, and Filipino Kulintang in his work; he also makes references to African American and the Chinese Trickster figures. Kelley argues that Ho's work often represents overt political statements in the way he encourages respect for musical traditions within his tradition and without: "[Ho] refuses to appropriate traditions out of their context and instead strives for a real synthesis that is transformative and encourages cross cultural respect and communication" (Kelley 2009, 3).

Musicians also represent political references and themes in the way they challenge traditional performance traditions. Performance models that stress equality among members of an ensemble have replaced Composer- and virtuoso-centered performance formats. George Lewis explains how the egalitarian politics of the Chicago-based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) were crucial to their performance practice (2008). The AACM was against identifying compositions of their group by one composer, thus avoiding each composer's identification with schools

of composition. Lewis as "postmodern articulation of multiperspectivalism" has described AACM compositions because they paid little respect to genre classifications of music (194). (At the 2010 Jazz Composers Orchestra Institute Lewis stated that he would not let "a stupid word like jazz" dictate to him what or what he could not do.[38]) Fink has observed that "music in the black counter public sphere is rarely read as taking the side of the atomized or alienated individual" (2011, 127). As an example, he invokes the Motown drummer and producer Norman Whitfield who, Fink argues, signified on "white hippie music" in his musical arrangements, a critique of "self-indulgent" tropes of hippie culture. Combining the "Motown beat" with the semiotics of "psychedelic alienation," Whitfield's nonverbal musical commentary stated that blacks did not have the luxury of self-indulgence as they had to be focused on other goals.[39]

Strategies of Musical Resistance in Technology

Innovative uses of technology figures prominently in forms of musical resistance. Musicians use technology in ways that prioritize cultural codes commenting on social conditions. Tricia Rose explains that rap producers redefined recording technology critique institutions and ideologies that oppress African Americans (1994). Rap producers use sampling technology to recontextualize older music into contemporary musical frameworks that make alternative political statements about power structures. Rose also argues that samplers allow musicians to expand on Central-African American musical characteristics, such as the breakbeat.

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[38] Lewis was introducing the concert at the Miller Theatre of Columbia University.
[39] Ibid., 127

Maintenance of African American Musical Forms

Strategies of musical resistance also include the maintenance of African American musical forms through creating theories of interpretation for composition and improvisation. These hermeneutics seek to identify specific musical attributes or codes that signify culture. Banfield has prescribed eight suggestions for what he calls "operative modes of meaning (1999, 40)." He suggests several frames for understanding—and maintaining—black cultural production. For instance, the Trickster poet, gestural timing and communal affirmation are all hermeneutic lenses through which to understand and maintain black musical forms. By assigning criteria to black music, Banfield hopes to maintain the importance of that music tradition by separating it from others. Banfield's claims differ from scholars like Matthew W. Butterfield, who seem to discuss improvisation only in universal terms. For example, Butterfield argues that the swing feeling in jazz is not a "specifiable quantity" but springs from the multilevels of the rhythmic, microrhythmic, syntactical and the subsyntactical. Butterfield's definition fails to situate his analysis within the context of cultural contribution (2011).

Maintenance of African American musical forms also takes place in the creation of culture and community through sound. Musicians have used their instruments to maintain a "black sound," by avoiding common improvisation techniques and using timbres that signify a connection with their community and culture. Calling saxophonist and composer John Coltrane's music "the practice of freedom," Herman Gray argues that Coltrane evoked race and black spirituality in sound because he understood his audience. Coltrane's listeners would understand the musical codes, especially the codes associated with the black church (2010, 45). Gray explains that Coltrane's creative practice was

focused on critiquing musical conventions in jazz as well as complicating racial politics and cultural identity. This critique can be found in the oft-cited example of Coltrane's "My Favorite Things." The saxophonist signifies on the original version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's celebrated song by experimenting with harmonic rhythm, compositional form, and modal scales (Harvey 1999).

Maintenance of African American musical forms can also be found in how free jazz musicians perform timbres thought to be associated with black subjectivity (Anderson 2007). Manipulation of timbres to make a political point is found, for example, in the way musicians tune their instruments, use harmonic, melodic and rhythmic colors, perform microtones, and especially ways in which they ignore western notions of "proper" pitch and choose music dominated by melody instead of harmony. Coltrane maintained a sense of African American identity in his music through his continued use of the blues scale in the construction of his melodies, the use of the cry and shout elements of the blues, and performing in particular registers of his saxophone, particularly in "Alabama" to evoke a sense of collective mourning as social commentary on the KKK's bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, which resulted in killing four black girls (Benston 2000). Musicians have also introduced instruments from other countries as a strategy to expand their sound and signify nationalism.

AACM band members called bassist Malachi Favors the "resident specialist" on Africa (Radano 1993). Favors, influenced by Egyptian philosophy and Black Nationalism, in turn influenced AACM members in his encouragement of members to expand the rhythm section using African percussion instruments, thus bringing new timbres into the ensemble's sound. Coltrane's improvisations had musical semiotics also

considered important to black nationalists (Anderson 2007). Coltrane's musical semiotics often referenced the developing world. Anderson explains that on such recordings as *Africa Brass* (1961), Coltrane used two basses to play music invoking Eastern drones, along with Elvin Jones's polyrhythms that often obscured the pulse. "Snorts, gurgles and screeches" coming from instruments also went against Western preferences of stable pitch centers (Anderson 2007). Coltrane articulated multivalent meanings of black consciousness by using "discontinuous repetition" and creating scalar patterns only to break them with inventive restructuring of intervallic permutations (Benston 2000, 123). Calling the phenomenon a "racial discursive," Radano explains how the singing of enslaved blacks maintained the black community by creating networks of black identity and authenticity (2003). The vocal improvisations of singers like Louis Armstrong on *Heebie Jeebies* exemplify this maintenance of black authenticity (2003). Singer Joan Armatrading's deliberately represents racial and ethnic identity, "in what is unmistakably the voice of a black woman," to maintain her status as part of the black diaspora (Hisama 1999, 126).

Linguistic Resistance Through Song

Strategies of musical resistance have included the use of languages by the enslaved or oppressed to mask meaning. The use of language to mask meaning has occurred in different types of songs that include metaphorical references to animals and abstract lyrics.

Deliberate, indirect communication has historically been linked—and integral to––Afro-diasporic musical practices. Before emancipation, enslaved Afro Brazilians used

African words to hide messages and the "resistance role" of *caxambu* dance to make commentary on the planter class (Fryer 2000, 106). *Vissungos*—or work songs of miners—were songs that transmitted secret messages (Fryer 2000, 53). Arguing that that these Kongo-Angola language based songs—many on the Ave Maria and paternosters—had a function of resistance, Fryer explains that these songs were used to demand proper nourishment, told other enslaved Africans when the Master was leaving the house, or marked the different times of day. *Jongos* were work songs that used musical circumlocution. The subjects of jongos were animals used to represent different qualities and living situations of the enslaved African in Brazil (53). Jongos also function as protest songs, terse, and filled with layers of complex riddles yielding more than one interpretation. The success of jongos—which often used African words—was based on the level of opaqueness and brevity. For example, the *canary* work song was code for fugitive slaves, *ill-treated monkey* work songs explained the mistreatment of slaves and the *loose-tongue bird* work song commented on slaves who were informants. Brazilian singer Milton Nascimento circumvented the censorship of the military dictatorship by singing metaphors and abstract lyrics that signified on religious beliefs in songs like "Fe Cega Faca Amolada" (Blind Faith, Sharp Knife) (Galm 2010). Bread and wine in Nascimento's lyrics communicated notions about spiritual rebirth through perseverance of difficult times (81).

Spectacles of Resistance

Strategies of resistance also included open displays of opposition. For slaves these strategies included dancing to mock owners and to reveal intellect, sartorial displays of resistance and white face minstrelsy.

Dancing was historically an overt way of mocking the plantation system and planter class of Brazil. Created by enslaved Africans for poking fun at their Portuguese masters, the Bumba-meu-boi, "Brazil's best known dramatic dance." (Fryer 2000, 55). Bill T. Jones has used dance to show resistance to notions that dancers don't think while dancing (Goldman 2010). In *Floating The Tongue* Jones combats this racialist belief through symbolism in dance, for example, by sending ripples of rhythmic waves through isolated parts of his body. Jones also combines the politics of black male identity in his dance by using the word "nigger" and "step and fetch it" to comment on how he his pigeonholed as a "black choreographer (Goldman 2010, 117)." He has long challenged the idea that dance is primarily about technique and form, by introducing simultaneous commentary on black stereotypes.

Sherrie Tucker has shown how black women jazz musicians used sartorial strategies to signify black uplift during big band performances (2004). While white female musicians accentuated the tension of attractive white women playing "hot" jazz, African American women dressed up in schoolgirl images to signify a desire for upward mobility through education, improved quality of life and a connection to world events.

Moreover, black female jazz musicians, Tucker argues, played jazz in a more masculine style, refusing to sound "pretty" (254).[40]

Joseph R. Roach discusses how Mardi Gras Indians—African Americans who identify with Native American tribes—use beautiful costumes to transform their "neighborhoods into autonomous places of embodied memory" (1996, 14). Roach also argues that another story of Africa is put forth in displays of sartorial insurgency where the "disruptive humor" of whiteface minstrelsy abounds as a restaging of the traumatic scenes of the Middle Passage (21). In these acts European aspects of the Middle Passage are played down and African perspectives of the journey emphasized. Whiteface minstrelsy—part of the spectacle of this musical and sartorial resistance—is the representative critique of the construct of whiteness in a carnivalesque setting (21).

Strategies of Unconventional Musical Techniques

Musicians in Europe have also challenged jingoistic portrayals of their collective memory by defying stylistic expectations linked to fanaticism and nationalism. Jane F. Fulcher explains that French composers communicated complex, political messages by creating music that went against the "orthodox stylistic expectations," which represented ethnocentricity, to create "true French music" (Fulcher 2005). The "semiotically multivalent works" of the French composers—appropriated for political means by wartime critics—created a dialogue between the musical text and the written text (2005).

[40] Women in big bands were not then considered legitimate improvisers and today discrimination against female jazz players continue to thrive. According to Tucker, African American women played jazz in a masculine style in resistance to attitudes that considered them second class musicians simply because they were female.

Composers and improvisers represent agency in unconventional music techniques designed to communicate to the audience. For example, Fulcher explains, when words were censored, French composers such as Debussy resisted nationalism through musical choices related to styles, and symbols as "a mode of criticism or of indirect resistance" (2005, 47). Thus, French composers went against the French music canon because to adhere to the its stylistic criteria would mean to fall into the traps of the nationalist myth.

Some unconventional musical choices are referred to as "extended techniques," or the exploring of unconventional devices and sounds on conventional instruments (Borgo 2005, 33). For example, blues singer Bessie Smith uses unconventional repetition of lyrics in "Thinking Blues" to invoke a sense of community (McClary 2000). McClary argues that Smith manipulates the structure of the blues to musically signify power over her male subject by depicting ambivalence and ambiguity (2000). Other examples of unconventional techniques include Smiths' rhythm section's reaction to her changes of rhythms by using unpredictable harmonic progressions to delay harmonic cadences changing timbres used for rhetorical effect.[41]

Practices of Unconventional Rhythm

Musical resistance occurs through the use of rhythm in strategic ways. Improvisers and composers have used subtle placement of f rhythms against a strong, centered beat. For example, improvisers use uncommon tempos with angular melodic rhythms to create different rhythmic textures. Musicians to create a feeling of goal direction have also used rhythms. Orchestrating instruments to play rhythms normally

[41] Ibid.

considered out of their character, as well as using rhythm to create a sense of transcendence, have also been used as strategies of musical resistance.

Improvising musicians have challenged conventional uses of rhythm through asymmetrical, subtle placements of rhythms against a strong, centered pulse (Dessen 2003). Improvisers swing eighth notes to create anacrusis on the off beats and to create a feeling of forward motion by deliberately avoiding the downbeat (Butterfield 2011). Musicians of the AACM performed Tin Pan Alley repertoire of the American songbook at very slow or very fast tempos as a show of resistance to common performance practices of popular music (Lewis 2008). The complex layers of polyrhythms performed by drummer Elvin Jones on John Coltrane's 1961 *Africa Brass* disrupted notions—and was a critique and deconstruction—of standard time (Anderson 2007). Radano argues that tricksterism and creative agency illuminates saxophonist Anthony Braxton's improvisations (1993). Braxton's goal was to avoid musical representation of coherence or conformity. To accomplish this, Braxton uses different tempi of intricate melodic rhythm that were staccato, legato, and pointillistic. Braxton's approaches to rhythm and wide intervals give an unusual aural contour (117). Radano observes that notions of modernism are also represented in pianist Cecil Taylor's performances of angular, driving rhythms. Taylor's performances are a pianistic, percussive rejoinder to commercialized swing (117).

Unconventional uses of rhythm have been used to challenge audience expectations through resisting common beat patterns associated with a signature sound,

communicating goal direction through orchestrating rhythms in specific ways, and delaying gratifications and creating tension and expectation in musical arrangements.[42] Fink argues rhythm—as a hermeneutic—has not been critically studied for its ability to communicate goal direction in Afro-diasporic music (Fink 2011). Goal direction, Fink argues, has been assigned to tonal harmony and pitch elements. He applies the structure of tonal harmony as template for understanding rhythmic form. The deviation from what Fink calls a tonic rhythm—defined as the structural basis for all other rhythms—was how Whitfield created "powerful structural tension" in "Cloud Nine," while showing resistance to the dominance of the "four on the floor" Motown rhythm listeners had come to expect (Fink 2011, 199).[43] While most Motown songs were dynamically flat, Whitfield would begin arrangements with bass and auxiliary percussion, would build gradations of intensity by adding instruments to each verse of a song, and would imply different time feels, such as double time or half time. Whitfield sought to create structural tension in "Cloud Nine" through creating tension by manipulating expectations and resolving it by returning to common time or the four-beats-to-a-measure pattern.

Whitfield's goal to defy musical expectations of Motown's audience through manipulation of rhythmic form was done by implying and then diverging from rhythmic goals (Fink 2011). As a drummer for the Motown group, the Temptations, Whitfield studied African rhythms in experimenting with time and creating more impact within

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[42] While many composers use unconventional rhythm to challenge audience expectations, Unconventional rhythm should be thought of here within the context of black musical resistance, which happens in a different register.

[43] According to Fink, Whitfield's (re)thinking of rhythm first showed in songs like "Cloud Nine" and was represented by resisting the 4/4 and 2/4 patterns (four on the floor) which was the basis for most up-tempo Motown songs (2011, 199).

common time signatures. Thus, Whitfield's innovative creative practice reveals deliberate acts of resistance to common ways of creating rhythmic motion in a song. Whitfield wanted "to delay musical gratification" (Fink 2011, 198). To delay musical gratification he assigned a 16-beat pattern on the high-hat to one drummer at one time and a contrasting rhythmic pattern to another drummer on the bass, tom, and snare at a another part of the same song, in another recording session. Whitfield, in this way, achieved intricate percussion arrangements that could not be reproduced.[44]

Resistance strategies are also represented in the way a composer might deny listeners a sense of compositional form by omitting, delaying, or augmenting rhythms. Assigning unconventional rhythms to orchestra instruments is another strategy. Banfield as composer discusses rhythmic concepts in his composition, *Spiritual Songs for Tenor and Cello*. Spiritual reflection and protest are portrayed in his music through orchestrating instruments in uncommon roles. Banfield asserts that, by denying the listener a sense of the downbeat and reversing the rhythmic characteristics associated with the main instruments, he illustrates his message of "holding on" when times get rough. He explains,

> Then, midway into the composition, rhythmic characters of both instruments are reversed where the tenor voice is the anchor for the verse and the cello is cast in rhythmic syncopation against the tenor, offsetting the listener's sense of the downbeat. I illustrate the black rhythmic and philosophical concept I have been discussing by creating a musical landscape that says even though the surface may be bumpy and the waters may roll rough, nevertheless, HOLD ON. The multiple meanings of spiritual reflection and social and political agitation and protest can be seen side by side. Even the social function of a piece of art such as "Hold On" has multiple uses and meanings and supports my understanding of the

[44] Ibid.

> way rhythmic conceptions evolve their totality in black art. (Banfield 1999, 39)

Creating a message of hope by resisting the standard Western musical codes of writing, William Banfield has created programmatic music that challenges traditional principles of orchestration and compositional technique. Banfield was likely influenced by bebop music because he argues that the expansion of rhythmic concepts originated in the changing role of drummer in the Bebop rhythm section. He explains that bebop drummers began "riding" the ride cymbal, used more of the bass drum, and more snare drum accents, or "dropping bombs" (2009, 30).

Creating performances that use rhythm to suggest a different sense of space and time is also a strategy of musical resistance. Improvisers often innovate new styles by using time and space in new ways (Borgo 2005). Radano has discussed how composer and saxophonist Joseph Jarman's "As If It Were the Seasons" gives members of the rhythm section equal responsibility[45] in the formation of spontaneous group composition. Through constructing performances that are rhythmically in and out of sync, innovative musicians suggest floating in space, representations of transcendence, and different spatio-temporalities beyond common notions of earthly time (Radano 1993).

Manipulation of Compositional Forms

Strategies of musical resistance also include manipulation of compositional forms. Musicians seek through the creation of new compositional processes to represent their

[45] Harmony and melody are usually prioritized over rhythm in Western Euro-American art music.

subjectivities through music in a way that challenges dominant aesthetic forms. Strategies include combination of free improvisation with arrangements of popular music, the creation of unconventional melodic lines to suggest a kind of aural geometry, suspension of melodic pitches and avoidance of mainstream jazz vocabulary. Strategies also include avoiding the use of harmony or harmonically centered instruments, creating harmonic progressions that never resolve, altering the original significations of European religious harmonies to signify other ideas that resist colonialism, minimal harmonic movement, and avoiding Western systems of timbre and tonality.

Combination of Musical Forms

Musicians have experimented with combining free improvisation with popular music since the late 19th century some have wanted to reach a wider audience while others believed a larger audience could understand and appreciate free improvisation. Ian Anderson explains that mixing "outside improvisation" with clever arrangements of popular music was a way for Sun Ra to critique popular music while gaining a wider audience. Free improvisation exponent and saxophonist Albert Ayler, made the melodies of his challenging compositions accessible in order to reach a wide audience (Anderson 2007, 27).

Melodic Resistance

In the history of Afro-diasporic music, creating melodies through singing—as well as storytelling and preaching—was a way to "create a localized wisdom" (Radano 2003, 14). African American singing was "an audible social force that served to construct

group networks and structures of meanings," singing was a political activity that challenged the "master-owner" power structure.[46] Composers have demonstrated resistance to commercial jazz idioms, such as commercial swing, cool, and hard bop, by using innovative melodic lines (Anderson 2007). Anthony Braxton believed using innovative phrasing and manipulation of melodic lines to create unexpected shapes were most important to an artist's spiritual, original, and creative expression (Radano 1993). For Braxton to access his truly creative self, Radano argues, he had to transcend memorized melodic licks, which came from the common vocabulary of mainstream jazz improvisation.

Melodic resistance also occurs in popular music performance. Traditional African American song forms have been used to critique white American hegemonic notions of sexuality and to create powerful feminist statements (Coloumbe 262). Joan Armatrading has used her "compositional abilities" to represent a complex identity through a "liberating vision" of what it means to be both black and British (Hisama 1999). Armatrading accomplished this by resisting the way notions of race, gender and sexuality typically are communicated and represented in popular music. Singer, songwriter and pianist Tori Amos sings pitches that suspend outside of the associated harmonies for dramatic effect. She might sing a pitch before the associated harmony arrives or hold one after the harmony has passed. Evidence of this "deviation from convention" appears, for example, in how Amos avoids doubling the melodic line of the guitar, which was orchestrated in line with the vocal melody (LaFrance 2002).[47]

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[46] Ibid.
[47] ibid., 82

Timbre

In the 1960s refusal to perform timbres associated with Western music was a way of asserting cultural identity. Anderson asserts free jazz musicians sacrificed qualities of intonation and coloration—prized by European art music—to perform a timbre that reflected the black imaginary (Anderson 2007, 111). Free jazz musicians have also ignored pitch and chordal restrictions, which has led to a wider variety of timbral effects. For example, in playing in the instrument's high register saxophonist Pharoah Sanders imitated human crying.

Musical Disharmony

Treatment of harmony in compositional and performance practices has played a central role in resistance strategies. Traditional compositional forms have been challenged by musicians of the AACM through the emphasis of melodic lines and "in the form of chordless and pulseless group compositions" (Radano 1993, 106). The avoidance of harmony also allowed the AACM to pool their creative minds in improvising compositional forms on the spot.

The contrast of parallel and non-interactive performances was other techniques the AACM have resisted the confines of conventional harmonic structures, such as the 32-bar AABA format, ubiquitous in American songbook standards. Radano has argued that "the rejection of harmonic and tonal practices in the name of spiritual and ideological freedom" was at the heart of the free jazz movement (Radano 1993, 108). AACM's Roscoe Mitchell has discussed how one relies on the spirits instead of chords or changes

in free music (Radano 1993). Mitchell has made clear how bebop players relied on the chords or harmonic progressions—and what is commonly referred to as changes—whereas he and the AACM have relied on spirits instead of harmony. Muhal Richard Abrams stated that harmony represented a stultifying emotional state whereas melody was the portal to "mind expansion" (1993, 105). Harmony was associated with "white cultural dominance and oppression" and stifled "African spiritualism," whereas melody and rhythm represented the "communal, multi-linear orientation of West African music." Thus, non-musical elements represented in the composition and improvisation of the AACM, brilliantly stated by Radano here: "Aesthetic and social concerns would be joined in a compositional procedure that made group awareness a fundamental part of successful music making" (105). Chicago's AACM reflected in their creative practice a departure from western notions of tonality (Radano 1993, 108). Projects like the AACM's were not atavistic but reflected linkage with past practices.

Other examples include Tori Amos's avoidance of typical harmonic cadences, non-resolved chromaticism, and repetition of harmonic cycles that disrespect tonal conventions. Amos's strategies show evidence of agency and musical irony (LaFrance 2002).

As a resistance strategy musicians often use harmony to signify spiritual transcendence. Minimal harmonic movement in the form of musical drones brought on the feeling of spiritual incantation, in the work of Coltrane (Heble 2003, 115). While maintaining a "tonal center," Coltrane mimicked the tamboura Indian drone with repeated bass lines, choices of non-western scales and extended improvisation (Heble 2003). Coltrane's choices demonstrate an example of how musicians express vulnerability and

soul searching in their compositional process and improvisations by creating harmonic schemes that never resolve [48]The restrictive harmonic function of the piano caused it to be used less in groups—or pianists simply had to "lay out"—when saxophonists sought to create microtonal melodies and the well-tempered tuning of the piano interfered with increasing nuanced melodic expression (111). Other musicians have recontextualized musical harmonies associated with foreign religions and colonialism —such as Christianity—to create a feeling of community among formerly colonized people.

Collective Memory in Music Through Harmonic Strategies

Resistance strategies also include using music to signify and induce collective memory in communities that have bonded through tragic events such as apartheid and colonialism.

Music encourages communities to dream about new possibilities while creating momentum towards collective goals (Heble 2003; Pratt 2003). This collective memory is an important component of what Clyde Woods calls the "blues epistemology" (Woods 1998, 20). Composer and pianist Abdullah Ibrahim's music operates as a "mnemonic device" that encourages his community to come together and become empowered by a shared subjectivity (Lucia 2002, 137). Ibrahim reinvents the white Christian hymn as what he calls the "hymn blues" to create a feeling of collective loss while activating a new dream of a post-apartheid South Africa (2002). The semiotics of collective loss is in Ibrahim's harmonies, melodies, and rhythms, and also signified in the title

[48] Ibid.

(Lucia 2002,139). Ibrahim uses chord progressions that recall the structure and harmony of church hymns to create a sonic environment of collective memory that signifies, congregational singing, family histories, and community rituals.[49] The politics in Ibrahim's performance is located in how he supplants the original significations of the hymn chords—in the music of the English, Dutch, German and North American—and infuses his own meanings representative of his community. The tonic, submediant, and dominant chords, or the I, IV, and V chords, are symbolic of various historical levels of modernizing Africa, through encounters with colonial entities.[50] The protest in Ibrahim's work is the co-optation of missionary music to create new compositions that critique and deconstruct the colonial values embedded in the songs, while shoring up his community. Abdullah Ibrahim uses of religious chord progressions associated with hymns for the deliberate obscuration of playing jazz is what Christine Lucia (2002) has called "decentering" or "remastery." For every verse of a twelve-bar composition, Ibrahim subtly increases the amount of rhythmic variation. He infuses new meaning into well-worn hymnal, harmonic permutations of the I, IV, V chords or the tonic, subdominant, and dominant areas. Ibrahim has taken these common church harmonies and infused them with new political and musical meaning. The tonic chord, Lucia argues, is associated with heaven, the IV subdominant chord symbolized the child, and the V7 chord was associated with a pregnant mother. These harmonies, brought to colonized nations through missionaries, were transformed by Ibrahim's' compositional process

[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

which removes the original significations in the church harmonies and transplants them with an ontology related to his own quotidian life of black south Africans.[51]

Transnational Strategies of Resistance in Song

Strategies of musical resistance become transnational when musicians employ historical references connecting past and contemporary political movements, when agents use music to comment on international plantation societies, and when agents use music to criticize colonial legal systems.

Brazilian bands have been able to signify various temporal spaces through song (Galm 2010). Galm explains that they made contemporary messages more powerful by creating multivalent songs that simultaneously reference both resistance against the 1960s military government in *bossa nova* music and against the era of slavery in colonial Brazil. Defying time and space, these songs are able to invoke "multiple sites of resistance."

Transnational strategies of musical resistance have been connected in the form of work songs that protest plantation systems while creating a collective gender identity. *Hole hole bushi* songs, sung by Japanese women workers, were collective musical critiques of the planter class and plantation society, and an artistic rejoinder to larger forces of "systematic oppression" (Asai 2009, 275). Comparing the *hole hole bushi* songs to African American spirituals, which functioned as tools of protest in the American south, Asai argues that these musics are connected by transnational plantation oppression. In similar ways, the plantation labor system in Hawaii is related to the plantation system of the American South. Asai argues that the Japanese American women's struggle to

[51] ibid., 133

forge a collective female identity is connected to the enslaved African Americans who struggled to create a collective identity in the South. The musical culture of Japanese American women became an expression of both and emerging Japanese American identity as well as resistance to class, racial, and gender oppression (Asai 280).

Strategies of musical resistance also become transnational when music comments on colonial legal systems that grew out of transnational slavery systems. Alton B. Pollard III has shown how Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) songs played an important role in the democratic movement for South Africa (1999).[52] He observes the detailed commentaries on white oppression and the importance of black liberation in the lyrics and melodies of PAC songs, and has called them "counter-hegemonic models of peace, justice and empowerment" (1999, 100). Pollard has also noted that these songs "allow for improvisation to describe, explain, and map the currents of social change."[53]

Strategies of Reconceptualization of Performance

Strategies of musical resistance also occur when musicians perform in nontraditional venues and in their refusing to work in exploitative environments. Harvey has explained how the nature of Coltrane's music caused the musicians, promoters and audience to reimagine performance in other places besides churches, lofts and community centers (Harvey 1999). Thus the use of nontraditional venues for jazz performance challenged the idea of black music as a commodity.

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[52] Pollard refers to these songs as war songs.
[53] Ibid.

Many musicians refuse to work in jazz venues or other environments that exploit musicians and their audiences. Fred Ho, for example, has refused to work in jazz clubs in the US due to widespread abusive practices from owners. Ho calls clubs "carcinogenic" environments and argues that they exploit both the musicians and audiences that respectively work and enjoy music in the nightclubs (Ho 2009, 152). Ho prefers to work in colleges, concert hall, community centers and other nontraditional places to perform music. Ho encourages musicians to understand the labor management relationship between venues and performers. Ho advises musicians to "never be desperate to perform" because in so doing they put themselves in the position of "working the door" or performing music simply for exposure to mainstream institutions (153). Performing for exposure, Ho argues, sets up a bad precedent and creates a situation for subsequent abuse of other musicians.

Strategies of Resistance and Integration of Non-Musical Elements

Musicians' use of nonmusical methods often inspires strategies of resistance. These strategies might include visual art to reconceptualize improvisation methods, or use of facial paint, and creating innovative notation to inspire innovative improvisation. Musicians have also used storytelling, poetry, and Trickster mythology to inspire resistance strategies. AACM musicians used painting and drawing as a way to understand improvisation through different disciplines (Lewis 2008). Radano explains that Malachi

Favors' use of facial performance make-up was an expression of atavism, as well as an expression of his commitment to the nationalist philosophy of his era.[54]

Musicians often use innovative music notation to reconceptualize improvisation and composition. Braxton was influenced by comic books from popular culture (Radano 1993) and also integrated nonmusical elements by "replacing serial rows and chance procedures with a mix of squiggly lines, star-like asterisks, and connect the dot directions" (1993, 122) Braxton's use of alternative notation was meant both to represent his flexible attitude and as a critique of traditional compositional techniques.

Oral traditions are often reflected in the performance practices of improvisers. Braxton based innovations in melodic phrasing and rhythmic concepts on the "African American legacy of storytelling."[55] Literature often influences the musical strategies of Cecil Taylor. Radano asserts that "contemporary black poetry" and the theoretical literature on contemporary composition influenced Cecil Taylor's modernistic approach on the piano (Radano 1993). Taylor's use of written as well as musical texts "suggested a complementary oral discourse" (110)

African American trickster references have often inspired the work of creative musicians. The cunning trickster figure is considered the embodiment of resistance to hegemonic forces that oppress the marginalized. Radano discusses how the Trickster bird reference—discussed in Ralph Ellison's *Shadow and Act*—was used to inspire musical expression. Ellison defines the reference as a "jazz community joke, musically an

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Storytelling is arguably a musical practice and I surmise Radano is arguing that the narrative and phrasing structure were arguably influential on Braxton.

extended ‘signifying riff’ or melodic naming of a recurring human situation, and was played to satirize some betrayal of faith or loss of love observed from the bandstand” (Radano 1993, 106*)*.” In the 1930s the *Blue Devils Orchestra* often played the song “They Picked Poor Robin” (Ellison 1964), its nonmusical element, the trickster bird figure, emblematic of the signifying riff that comments on human loss of love. More importantly, the signifying riff represents creative resistance to mainstream music. Abrams’s “Bird Song (Levels 2/1)” also makes ornithological references and references to Charlie Parker (often referred to as “Bird” or “Yardbird”), multi-instrumentalist Eric Dolphy, and French composer Oliver Messiaen with “a wash of percussion effects and instrumental imitations of bird sounds”(Radano 1993, 106).

In this chapter 2 I have reviewed literature from the perspective of musical strategies of resistance. Topics discussed were the incorporation of political themes and references, uses of technology, maintenance of African American musical forms linguistic resistance and spectacles of resistance. Additionally, a number of unconventional music techniques were also discussed. Now we turn to Chapter 3 where we will focus on compositional strategies.

Chapter 3:

Compositional Strategies Of Musical Resistance

True creativity in music is deeply connected to redefinition of the word "music." Unlike "light" and "water," the word "music" has no fixed meaning. As men and society change, so music changes. This is why I believe that the act of composing challenges the very nature of music, and this challenge asks us to redefine ourselves as human beings.

~Joji Yuasa.

Innovative Use of Intervallic Patterns In Melodic Writing

Approaches to melodic writing in composition can be grouped into two basic categories. Melodic approaches that are formulaic and conservative and melodic approaches that challenge conventions. The innovative usage of intervallic patterns in melodic writing falls into the second category. The strategy of innovative use of intervallic patterns in composition is defined as composing intervals that have the following characteristics: unconventional intervals that are non-vocal because they do not proceed in stepwise motion.[56]. In contrast innovative melodic patterns move in unpredictable permutations. Innovative melodic patterns are iconoclastic due to the way these patterns relate to the underlying harmonies, or what is commonly called chord changes. The following examples I have chosen to demonstrate innovative melodic patterns in the compositional process include music from the repertoire of two pianists and composers, Andrew Hill (1931-2007) and Stanley Cowell (1941-).

[56] An example of conservative melodic construction can be found in American Songbook standard "Bye Bye Blackbird." Blackbird's melody moves in stepwise motion due to the composer's wish to make the song accessible to vocalists and memorable to the general public

Andrew Hill's compositional and improvisational choices reflect a commitment to musical nonconformity. The evidence of Hill's musical resistance is in his avoidance of conventional jazz clichés in his compositional process. Early in his career—and perhaps for most of his career—Hill's music was, and still is, an emotional and financial archive of personal struggle to maintain a lifelong devotion to creative integrity. Evidence of Hill's personal struggles is in the liner notes of a late 1970's solo piano recording:

> At the zenith of my Blue Note recordings, I found that fame and fortune were not my reward, but fame and poverty. This was hard to believe, for I had seen artists like Miles Davis, Maynard Ferguson, Oscar Peterson, etc., pass through Chicago. They weren't' t surviving but living…at the top of my promotion, the English Rock groups were storming America. I had two alternatives: go commercial, or find a way to maintain my lifestyle. I was born with the ability to play anything I heard, so music would be with me regardless of what road I took. At first I became bitter and hurled insults at those who were keeping me alive; since then I have found that I could live without condescending and create a work of art. This record is proof of that. (Hill 1979)

These 1979 liner notes *From California With Love* documents Hill's financial frustration. With the onslaught of British popular music, Hill had to decide whether he would become a commercial musician or commit to his artistic vision. The toll of his professional struggles reverberated into the sphere of his home, likely creating havoc with his loved ones. What makes these liner notes so interesting is that Hill was either oblivious to the Avant-garde nature of his music or he believed his chosen way of composing and performing should have had a wider audience. Hill explains,

> While making this record I had a fear–had I lost the energy and conception that New York City is allegedly supposed to give an artist? While editing my tapes I had an opportunity to hear current tapes of more promoted pianists. I must say this record is equal to or superior to anything on the market. This record should give the listener many great moments. [57]

While other jazz musicians embraced the music of the British Invasion through Jazz covers, Hill chose not to conform to the standards of the commercial music market. Hill took a deliberate path of nonconformity and never looked back. Several years ago as a resident New Yorker, I had the opportunity to see Hill's group perform several times at Birdland, a jazz club in Times Square. On one occasion, I had the opportunity to speak with Hill about his musical concepts while he was on break between sets. In his typical laconic and mysterious fashion, Hill told me "don't conform." As concise as Hill's words were, they spoke volumes about his musical philosophy that informed his compositional and improvisational strategies. Noticing a large book under his right arm, I wondered what relationship the text may have had to his creative practice and inquired into what he was reading. Hill showed me his book, which was Total Freedom by Jiddu Krishnamurti. I decided I would not press Hill in regards to the connection between the text and his music. However, I purchased and researched the book—not as an academic exercise—but for passages that might relate to his statement about resisting musical conformity. I found this particular passage that could reasonably be said to represent Hill's commitment to musical nonconformity:

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[57] Ibid.

> Conformity leads to mediocrity. To be different from the group or to resist environment is not easy and is often risky as we worship success. The urge to be successful, which is the pursuit of reward whether in the mental whether in the material or in the so-called spiritual sphere, the search for inward or outward security, the desire for comfort–this whole process smothers discontent, puts an end to spontaneity and breeds fear; and fear blocks the intelligent understanding of life." (Krishnamurti 1996)

These words could very well have been the regenerative point of departure, the thematic mantra that permeated all of Hill's projects. My task is to investigate the specific strategies Hill used that represented his commitment to musical nonconformity.

Andrew Hill's melodic conception stands out as an approach that is resistant to formulaic melodies in jazz composition. There are no bebop licks or patterns in his writing. Robert Witner defines a lick as,

> A term used in jazz, blues and pop music to describe a short recognizable melodic motif, formula or phrase. Improvising jazz and blues musicians have at their disposal a repertory of licks, some of their own invention by which they can be identified, some borrowed from other players, and a solo may be little more than the stringing together of a number of such fragments. In some styles (e.g. slow blues) and for some ubiquitous chord progressions (e.g. I–II–V–I in major or minor keys) a common stock of licks in circulation. (Witmer, Oxford Music Online, accessed on October 27, 2012)

Licks lack the vitality of the bebop originators musical agency and purpose for developing bebop.

"Ashes"

I have chosen to analyze Andrew Hill's *"*Ashes*"* to illustrate his innovate melodic writing. My first encounter with *"*Ashes*"* was on a 2005 European tour with alto

saxophonist and composer Greg Osby. In a two-week tour of jazz festivals across Europe we performed *"*Ashes*"* several times in a quintet configuration called the Greg Osby 5 (or GO5). We also performed the piece at a one-week engagement at the "Village Vanguard" that same year. Because Hill wrote "Ashes" in memory for his late wife Laverne Hill, I had a recent personal connection to the piece. The 2003 passing of my father was still very fresh in my mind, which made the performance of the piece more personal.

Hill's melodic innovations reveal his motivic writing, which includes the repetition of intervals within and across bar lines. His melodic patterns reveal nonconformity to melodic writing found in conventional or formulaic jazz composition. The melody in *"*Ashes*"* has a pattern of descending intervals, for example, in m. 1, a descending M7 shape from C♯ to D. The E on the fourth beat of m. 1 functions as a passing tone to the second falling interval pattern in m. 2. In the second measure a M6 interval descending pattern occurs from B to the same D in m. 1. The upper quarter notes of C♯ and B create falling patterns to the target lower half notes of D, the eleventh tension in relation to the chord, and which creates sonic tension between the C♯ of the Amaj7. There is also a pattern of major seconds between mm. 1–2. For example, C♯on beat one of m. 1 and the B on beat one of m. 2 two create a pattern of a descending M2. The M2 interval between D and E in m. 1—or the target note and the passing note of E—facilitates the next shape of a falling M6.

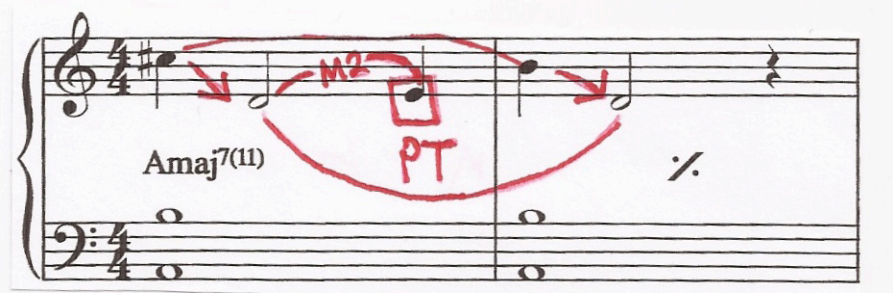

Illustration 3.1. Andrew Hill, "Ashes," mm. 1-2, Intervallic Patterns of M2's and m2's

In m. 3 the melodic fragment from D to C is hidden as a falling M2 within a M2 dyad on beat 1 between the quarter-note D and the dotted-half C. Again we see the pattern of the interval of a second relationship between the upper voices, D descending to C. Perhaps this smaller interval on m. 3 prepares the listener for the wider shape of a falling P4 from A to E. Again half-note E on beat 2 is the target note from the quarter note A. Thus the three target notes in mm. 1-4 are D, C, and E. As stated before, these target notes have greater weight due to their rhythmic value, and that all notes descend on the second beat.

Illustration 3.2. Andrew Hill, "Ashes," mm. 3-4, Example of Target Notes

In m. 5 another melodic shape and new time values are introduced, as well as a new chord quality of Bmin7♭5. The melodic shape of A to E—a P5—to a m3 (E-G) and from G on beat 4 descending to D on beat 1. of m. 6, a falling P4, followed by a descending P5 from D to G, constitutes the new intervallic contour of this new pattern.

The new two-measure intervallic pattern in mm. 5-6 represents a melodic question, answered in m. 8. In m. 7 a passing measure of B♭7 (♯11, 13) has no function except to delay the temporary resolution to the Amin7. The B♭7 (♯11, 13) is a preparation chord to the following Amin7, itself a temporary resolution. In the melodic line of this quasi resolution, for the first time a melodic phrase ascends stepwise. In m. 8, the melody ascends from quarter note C to D to a half note of E. Using just quarter, half, and whole notes to construct an unpredictable melody, Hill expresses his innovative thinking in his approach to creating innovative melodic patterns.

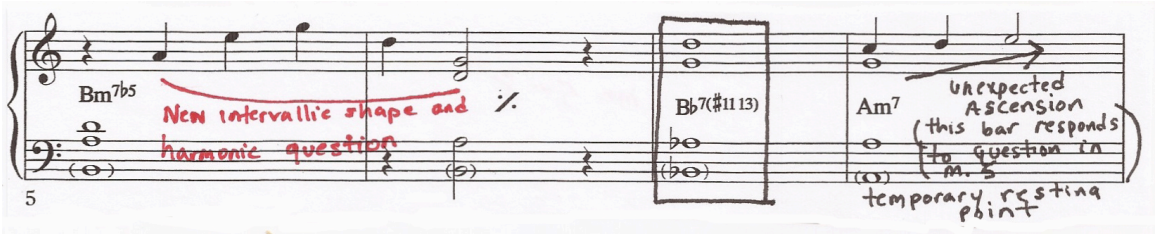

Illustration 3.3. Andrew Hill, "Ashes," mm. 5-8, Harmonic Question and Answer

Permutations of Major and Minor 2nd Intervals

As the composition progresses, increased permutations of intervallic patterns develop. In mm. 9-13 a set of recurring melodic intervals of seconds displays a melodic patter in the 5-bar motivic pattern of a mixture of major and minor seconds. Hill has designed this intervallic tension to be released in bars 14 and 15, another temporary harmonic resting point. These patterns of major and minor seconds begin in m. 9 with a m2 ascending pattern from quarter-note G to half-note A♭, followed by a quarter-note rest. Bar 10 is a continuation of the m2 pattern. The upper melody voice of half-note C ascending to D♭ returns to a passing quarter-note C, which emphasizes the E♭ and D♭ in

m. 11. (I refer to quarter-note C♭ in m. 10 as passing because it falls on beat 4 and its function is to emphasize the M2 of E♭ to D♭ in m. 11.) In this 5-bar sequence intervals of m2s are prevalent with the exception of m. 11 where the M2 between E♭ and D♭, or what I call an *intervallic anomaly*. In m. 12 Hill returns to the ascending pattern of m2 from F quarter to half-note G♭ with a quarter rest on the 4th beat. The same m2 pattern happens in m. 13, from the E♭ quarter to half-note F with a rest on beat 4. In the 5-bar pattern of second intervals from mm. 9-13, both m. 9 and m. 13 act like melodic intervallic bookends of m2s that enclose the longer motivic second phrase occurring in mm. 10-12. In other words, m. 9—with the shorter m2 interval—prepares the space, or the opening gate, for the longer phrase in mm. 10- 12.

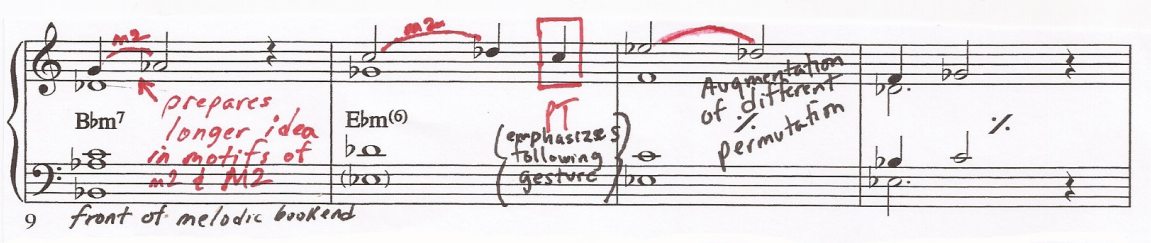

Illustration 3.4. Andrew Hill, "Ashes," mm. 9-12, Preparation of Longer Phrase

This phrase seems complete in m. 12 but really ends in m. 13 where it extends, giving the piece a feeling of contemplation on mortality.

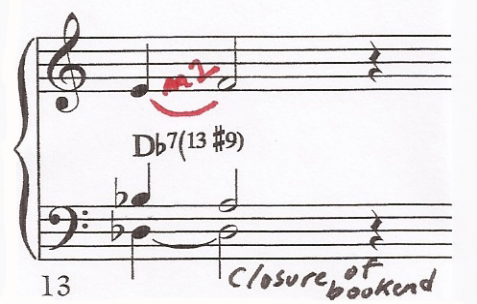

Illustration 3.5. Andrew Hill, "Ashes," m.13, Closure of Harmonic Bookend

The difference between m. 8 and mm. 14-15 is that the temporary resting place idea is extended even longer in mm. 14-15. The trope of melodic interval of a second happens in m. 16 from the half note B to C, returning to quarter-note B in m. 16. In m. 17 from dotted-half D, drops an octave to D, the largest melodic leap. This octave drop sets up the final "resolution" in mm. 18-19. In m. 18 E rises unexpectedly a P5 to B, which then descends an interval of a major seventh to C. C moves to D creating the last motive of a m2 interval.

Illustration 3.6. Andrew Hill, "Ashes," mm. 14-19, Temporary Resting Points

The dominant melodic shape of "Ashes" is the major and minor second intervals, in mm. 3, and 9-13 and m. 14, also beats 3 and 4 in m. 18. The stepwise figure of two quarter notes plus a half note (mm. 8, and 14), and the inverse of those rhythms (mm. 10 and 16) is the reversal of those shapes. Other shapes include what I call the teardrop melodic shape in mm. 1–4. Conceivably, these teardrop melodic shapes could indicate mourning. For example, the first teardrop falling from C♯ to D, creates a M7. A small teardrop shape occurs in m. 3, from D to C, and a P4 teardrop appears between A to E in m. 4. The final

teardrop shape of an octave appears in m. 17. These shapes constitute a range of different permutations of intervals. Thus, in this 19-measure form, Hill composes a manipulation of melodic intervals, harmonic shapes, and rhythmic inversions to create a musical statement about mortality.

Angularity in Melody

Zora Neale Hurston argued that angularity was an integral part of what she called "negro expression." For Hurston, avoiding asymmetry was indelibly linked to a range of black cultural expressions.

> After adornment the next most striking manifestation of the Negro is Angularity. Everything that he touches becomes angular. In all African sculpture and doctrine of any sort we find the same thing. Anyone watching Negro dancers will be struck by the same phenomenon. Every posture is another angle. Pleasing, yes. But an effect achieved by the very means which a European strives to avoid. The pictures on the walls are hung at deep angles. Furniture is always set at an angle. I have instances of a piece of furniture in the middle of a wall being set with one end nearer the wall than the other to avoid the simple straight line. (Hurston 1998, 301)

Hill's melodic writing in "Dance With Death" (1968) shows resistance to asymmetrical writing technique. The title track of his October 11, 1968 session, "Dance With Death" (track four on the self-titled album), the composition moves between two chords, D7 (♯9) and C7 (♯9). For example, in terms of the predominant rhythmic patterns, the melodic lines do not have characteristics of bebop writing. For example, we see the use of eighth-note triplets, eighth-note lines, and phrases that start at the end on the fourth beat. Additionally, eighth notes with off-beat sixteenths and triplet figures abound. But what distinguishes the melody in "Dance with Death is its angular melody.

There are six melodic phrases in this composition altogether: four phrases over D7 with♯ 9, and two phrases over C7♯9. Hill's melodic line oscillates between these chords. The melody in mm. 1-2 outlines an altered diminished scale over the D7♯9. However, the last eighth of m. 2 is an interruption of that scale's composition as C♯does not belong to the scale. C♯is placed at the end of the phrase where the sound would be at its most shrill. The C♯ is more noticeable because an eighth rest follows the note at the beginning of m. 3. This melodic line is not vocally easy to sing, its intervals larger than conventional vocal lines. For example, Example shows the first interval, a P4 from C to F, moving to G♭ then to F-B♭-E♭. These unpredictable, non-triadic sounds continue with the quite angular sounding m7 descent, and the tritone of G♭-C-G♭, another striking shape visually and audibly.

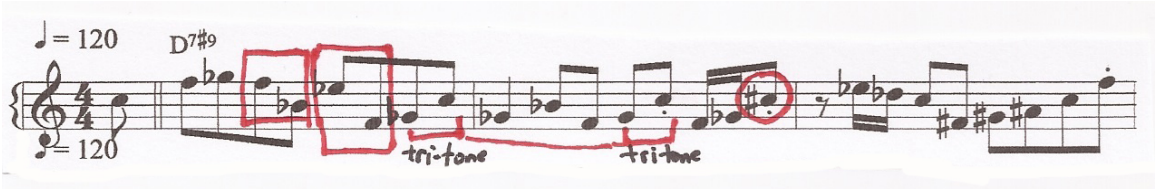

Illustration 3.7, "Dance With Death," mm. 1-3, Unpredictable Melodic Lines

In just mm. 1–3 we see Hill's resistance to standard melodic formulas. Hill's melodic line is unpredictable, avoiding stepwise motion. The line begins with a pick-up of C to F, a P4, then up just a m2. What makes the melody in the first measure so vibrant are the three consecutive eighth-note leaps on beats 2 and 3. Two downward leaps appear on beats 2 and 3 and an ascending leap on beat 4, but on beat 2 an unexpected leap of a P5 is followed by beat 3's downward leap of a m9 (of E♭ followed by tritone G♭- C). The shape of the line is skewed by Hill's two consecutive downward leaps on beats 2 and 3, and again on beat 3, with the eighth notes E♭-F, the dissonant m7 immediately followed

by a tritone, which continues into m. 2. The tritone is also emphasized on the beats 1-3 of m. 2.

The same tritone that occurs on beat 4 of m. 1, the G♭- C ♯,occurs on beat 3 of m. 2. This echo is made more pronounced by delay of the quarter note G♭ rising to eighth-note B♭, then descending a P4 down to eighth-note F on beats 1 and 2. This 3-note figure has the function of sonically attenuating the tritone on beat 4 of m. 1, to perhaps prepare us for the tritone again on beat 3 of m. 2. Thus, we are immediately distracted from the tritone on beat 4 because of the appearance of the non-tritone melodic figure on beats 1 and 2 of m. 2.

The 2-measure phrase in mm. 1-3 I mentioned before indicates that dancing may not only be represented in the repetitive rhythmic pattern played by the rhythm section but also represented in the dramatic leaps. For example, a change in melodic structure of an ascending minor second of F-G♭(enharmonic F♯) - C♯represents this dramatic leap. The feeling of dancing with death is represented by the heartbeat rhythmic patterns in the rhythm section, but is also evoked by the dissonant intervallic leaps in the melody.

The next melody, E♭-D♭- C-F♯-G ♯-A♯ outlines the altered diminished scale traditionally used to improvise over a D7♯9 chord. The scale reinforces the quality of the chord. The angularity of the melodic line in terms of sound and shape derives from the construction of the melody; Hill uses large dissonant intervals. The feeling of angularity is also caused by the structure of the rhythm. The melodic line should be performed avoiding the stereotypical feeling of swing rhythms largely characterized in triplet eighths.

In the third phrase of mm. 5-6, Hill shows resistance to the concepts of tonality. From the C, the and of 4th beat in m. 4 and the pick up of m. 5, Hill writes a line that outlines a D♭maj7 chord that clashes with the underlying harmony of D7♯ 9. Yet on beats 2 and 4, the eighth notes spell out a D7 (♭9, ♯9,♯5) chord, with added notes, not unusual tensions but derived from the scale that goes along with the chord. This phrase continues in m. 6 for the first three beats.

Illustration 3.8. "Dance With Death," mm. 4-6, Unexpected Interval

The C and F on beat 1 of m. 6 and the eighth triplets of B♭, G♭ and E♭ continue to outline the altered scale. However a surprising interval of M7 (D-C♯) occurs on beat 3, followed by a quarter rest. The interval is "inharmonious," and "out of character" because the preceding notes fit with the D7♭ 9 chord. This is followed by a M7 interval (D to C♯) clashing as well because of the m2 between C and C♯. The quarter rests after the interval, and the staccato attack by the blended trumpet and saxophonist on the C♯, render this interval all the more noticeable. The last phrase, before m. 4 of C7♯9, is the fourth melodic phrase over D7♯9 in the composition.

In mm. 7-8 a 2-measure phrase of eighth notes begins on the upbeat of beat 1 in m. 7, ending on the first beat of m. 8, outlining the C7♯9. The phrase begins with a ♭5 on A♭ and moves to the ♯9, followed by a 3rd (F♯) and 7th (C), back to the 9 (E-natural) an octave below.

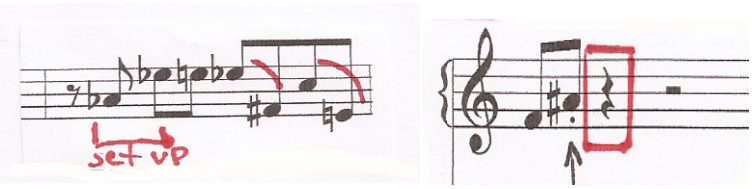

Illustration 3.9. Andrew Hill. "Dance With Death," mm. 7-8, Phrase Angularity

Measure 8 is a continuation of the phrase on beat 1. The F, or the ♯9 and A♯ (♯5), make up the first two eighths. The angularity of the phrase, using unpredictable intervallic construction and accentuated key chord tones of the alleged altered scale, demonstrates this melody's resistance to jazz writing conventions. The A♭ in m. 7 goes to P5 to E♭ which sets up 2 downward leaps on beats 3 and 4 of m. 7 and the unpredictable leap of a tritone on beat 1 of m. 8. The beginning of m. 7 begins with a P5 that sets up the downward leaps of E♭to F♯or a MA6, immediately followed by a downward leap of a min6 from C to E. These consecutive downward leaps of different intervals are then followed by a tritone on the beat 1 of m. 8. In this line of mm. 7-8, there are similar ideas in terms of melodic shape in m. one. For example in m. 1 on beats 2 and 4, the P5 from F - B♭, then a m7 (E♭- F), is cut sharply by the ascending tritone G♭-C. This same pattern occurs in mm. 7 and 8 as the phrase ends with the tritone. as opposed to in m. 1 where the melodic pattern is followed by another that delays the introduction of the other tritone on beat 3 of m. 2. This pattern begins on beats 3 and 4 of m. 7 with a descending M6 from E♭ to F♯ another descending mi6 from C to E♭ on beat 4 followed by an ascending P4. Indeed, all of the intervals are different in both measures, but the rhythms are the same, the melodic shape in terms of how the line descends in wide

intervals for two beats and then ascends with a dissonant interval is also similar. Therefore, the notes are different but the shape of the line is similar.

This pattern of descending intervals also occurs on the 3rd and 4th beats of m. 10, although modified. The descending M6 from E♭to G is followed by a tritone from B♭ to E♭, tied to a quarter note. This pattern indicates that tritone's significance as it emphasizes the sonority of the interval, and ends the phrase. The beginning of the phrase, on the upbeat of beat 3 with an E, changes into a tritone of E to B♭ on beat 4. Then on the first beat of m. 10, a m2 to E♭-E on beat 1 is followed by the masquerading interval of a M6 (E♭- G♭),and another, the aforementioned tritone (B♭-E). The last phrase over the C7♯9, consists of consecutive tritones on beats 2 and 3 in m. 12. For example, in beat 2 G♭-C followed by B♭-E, the same interval occurs on beat 3 in m. 10 . The tritone could be said to represent resistance to any defining tonality in this composition. The tritone is prominent because it is the essential structure of the chord; it is what gives the dominant-7th chord its tension.

"Dance With Death"

"Dance with Death" has seven tritones in the melody. These tritones represent sonoric instability as well as the mystery of death. The tritone between G♭ and C occurs four times. The tritone between B♭ and E occurs three times, largely over C7♯9. It is no surprise that we find so many tritones in the melodic content of "Dance With Death." The two chords in this composition are D7♯9 and C7♯9, both dominant-7th chords where the tritone is integral. The tritone between G♭ and C occurs four times in this piece and the tritone between B♭ and E occurs 3 times in this piece. Hence, these melodies show

resistance in how Hill uses permutations of the tritone to represent tonal instability, harmonic ambivalence, which creates tension to our inculcated ears.

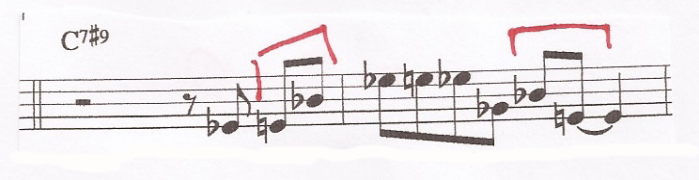

Illustration 3.10. "Dance With Death," mm. 9-10, Permutation of Tritones

Table 3.1. Andrew Hill, Dance With Death Tritones

Section of Composition	Measures	Beat(s)	Direction	Notes
D7♯9	1	4	Ascending	G♭, C
D7♯9	2	3	Ascending	G♭, C
D7♯9	7	2nd half of beat 3 and 1st half of beat 4	Ascending	F♯, C
C7♯9	9	4	Ascending	E, B♭
C7♯9	10	3 & 4	Descending	B♭, E
C7♯9	12	3	Descending	B♭, E

These oscillating dominant-7th chords, played repetitively, represent Hill's musical depiction of death as an unstable place. It may also reflect the killing of many civil rights leaders at around the time the composition was recorded, as many musicians expressed resistance through their music. Stanley Cowell explained his resistance in the following comment, "During the 60s, some of the music I played was full of rage and anger during the civil rights struggle–a note was a bullet or a brick–propelled by high energy, with disjunct melodic material, clusters of notes and dissonant chords."[58] In any case, Hill's piece is not a representation of death as peaceful and serene. It is a sonic representation of death as pulsating and intense, with no clear boundaries and never a

[58] Stanley Cowell, telephone interview with author, June 8, 2012.

sense of resolution. The recording of the piece may use a fade-out to emphasize the lack of harmonic resolution: to resolve the piece would be antithetical to the ongoing cycle of tension before. Thus Hill's strategy of resistance here is in composing chords that never resolve. If death is "X," then the unresolved chord tensions, or a chord pointing to a resolution but never resolving, might be a semiotic depiction of dancing with "X" or the unknown. So the function of these two chords over the twenty-bar form—eight bars of D7#9 and four bars of C7♯9, eight bars of D7♯9—is to keep us suspended in space, unsure and unclear about where this piece will take us.

In that last melodic line in mm. 11-12, the ♯ 9 (E) is emphasized in relation to the C7♯9 chord in the B, or contrasting, section of the piece. The ♯9 occurs on the second half of beat 4 (m. 11) and the upbeat of 1 (m. 12) where the syncopated off-beats, emphasize the sound of ♯ 9, especially since the upper note is used for the gesture. Hill uses ♯9s on syncopated off-beats to emphasize the tension, the sound they bring. So, the first example of this emphasis begins in m. 11 from the B♭, a P4 down on the upbeat of 3. Though the B♭ is repeated twice, the ♯9, because of its pitch range and tension, is prominent. The next occurrence happens on beat 1 of m. 12. The♯ 9 is the upper interval of G♭a M6 down. A clear pattern appears in the formation of the melody, which ascends from larger intervals. For example, the P4 from B♭ to E♭ constitutes another ascending pattern from G♭ to E♭. This emphasis on ♯9 is proven in the way Hill writes the ♯9 on the upbeats of 4 and 1, followed by the last tritone of the 4-measure C7 phrase. On beat 2 of m. 12, the tritone from G♭to C (on beat 3) B♭to E, is followed immediately by an eighth rest.

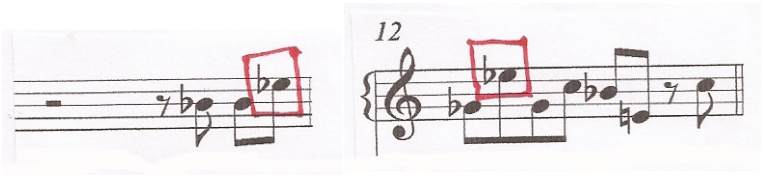

Illustration 3.11. Andrew Hill. "Dance With Death," mm.11-12, Emphasis on ♯9

"Prayer For Peace" and Innovative Melodic Structures

Innovative use of melodic structures need not involve the surprising intervallic leaps demonstrated in Hill's compositional process. Stanley Cowell's1971 composition, "Prayer for Peace," demonstrates using less complex—largely pentatonic—melodies within a complex rhythmic scheme. The melody for "Prayer" is vocally accessible, and words were later written to it. Cowell's writing shows how less complex melodies might be complex, rhythm phrases. Thus the piece begins with a riff common in big band and blues performances, but in 5/ 4 meter is rendered more complex. The intervals in m.5 from D-F-G-D–F, demonstrates this common melodic movement. A quarter rest appears on beat 5, but the figure has the sound of a partially pentatonic circular riff that folds back unto itself. At m. 6, the melodic shape changes, the last note of the phrase now B♭, the M7 echoes melodic shape of m. 7, however in 6/4, where another variation on the melodic shape, the ascending m3 relationship D and F-D-C. The largest interval between these four bars is a m3, which makes the melody more *eargestible*[59] to the listener, despite the complex rhythmic scheme.

[59] *Eargestible* is a term I use to describe music created for the purpose of being more easily and sonically digested by the ears.

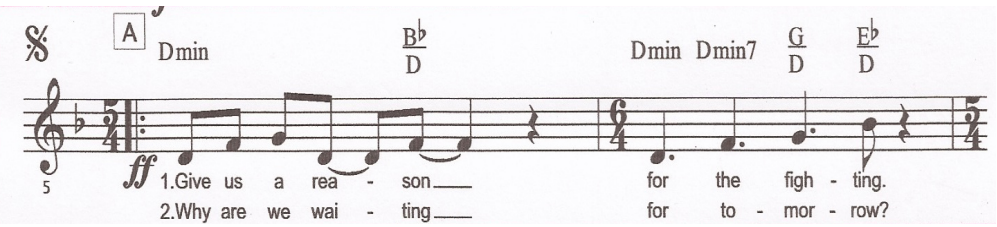

Illustration 3.12. "Prayer for Peace," mm. 5-6, Variation on Melodic Shape

Employing Resistive Textures

Textural resistance might be defined as employing compositional or improvisational techniques that create a variety of timbral ranges defying Euro-American aesthetic standards. Such techniques can be applied to a single note, a melodic line and various chordal constructions. Portia Maultsby has explained that timbre or sound quality is a musical characteristic that distinguishes African diasporic music from European music.

> The unique sound associated with black music results from the manipulation of timbre, texture and shading in ways uncommon to Western practice. Musicians bring intensity to their performance by alternating lyrical, percussive, and raspy timbres, juxtaposing vocal and instrumental textures; changing pitch and dynamic levels; alternating straight with vibrato tones; and weaving moans, shouts, grunts, hollers, and screams into the melody. (Maultsby 1990, 191)

Hill emphasizes dissonance by staccato markings on key notes of the melody. Beginning in second measure of the piece, we hear staccato C, the upper end of a tritone, the upbeat of beat 4 from the lower G♭. Then in m. 3 on the upbeat of 4, there is a staccato F. In m. 6 on the upbeat of 1, F the last note of an eighth-note triplet, the E ♭and the C♯ on the upbeat of beat 3. All of the notes, the ♯9 on F, the♭9 of E♭and the M7 dissonance are emphasized with staccato markings. Hill's patterns of placing dissonant

notes on the off-beats show a deliberate pattern of emphasizing strategically placed notes with such markings. These may reveal a desire to resist creating music that is more eargestible. Undoubtedly, Hill's compositional process reveals a willingness to resist the creation of formulaic and commercial jazz.

Illustration 3.13. Andrew Hill. "Dance With Death," m.6, Offbeat Dissonant Notes

Use of Ambiguous and Innovative Harmonies

I define the use of ambiguous harmony as a compositional strategy as composing harmonies that lack a clear harmonic function in relation to the system of tonality. Tonality—as taught by the late theorist and composer Wallace Bower—is a system of musical planets that revolve around the tonic in a hierarchical order. The system of tonality is based on clear harmonic functions and harmonic ambiguity disrupts tonal functions. Notating harmony ambiguously can be seen as resistance to dominant systems of tonality. Such harmonies might not be easily identified through intervallic relationships; for instance they might often be composed of formerly "dissonant" intervals such as the perfect fourth or minor second. Ambiguous harmonies can be said to reflect no style as the challenge stylistic conventions of jazz. Saxophonist and composer Steve Coleman's philosophy of "composing without composing" relates to Hill's technique of creating ambiguous harmonies,

> I don't think in terms of styles and I don't consider myself as having a style. Creating with no style in mind, playing without playing, composing without composing…so far as I am concerned there is no "nexus" between

> the dynamic language (meaning always changing) that I am currently involved with and so-called "Jazz," because I refuse to accept that "jazz" exists. Jazz for me is the not-so-creative part that most people relate to when they hear some forms from the past…I have never considered the music of people like Duke Ellington, Don Byas, Charlie Parker, Art Tatum, John Coltrane, Muhal Richard Abrams, Henry Threadgill-I have never considered this creative tradition "Jazz." Coleman 2007)

The creation of ambiguous harmony I refer to is related to this philosophy. The subject position of the African American composer and improviser often reflects a ghostly ambiguity not founded on predominant notions of clarity or purity associated European cultural production. The following is an analysis of ambiguous notation of harmony in Andrew Hill's "Ashes."

The first chord of "Ashes" is Amaj7 with the tension of the ♯11. The 11 indicates the tension of D in the melody which clashes with the 3rd scale degree C♯ in the Amaj7 chord. This is a deliberate harmonic clash devised by Hill between C♯ and D. Yet From the notation of the A and B in the bass clef, and the melody notes of B and D, this chord does not overtly seem to have a M7 quality, an example of harmonic ambiguity as a result of notation. The evidence of harmonic ambiguity is also indicated in the sparse representation of written harmony. For example, the repeat symbol in m. 2 is supposed to represent a continuation of the Amaj7 (11) chord, in bar 1. Yet the notation conflicts with the chord symbol. What is written in m. 2—even with the absence of the defining 3rd—could be read as Amin9 chord or Amin11. Other examples include m. 13, where a D♭7 (13, ♯9) is indicated in the chord symbol. The spelling of the chord as written out conflicts with the chord symbol. For example, D♭7 chords are not spelled with B ♭but with B naturals.

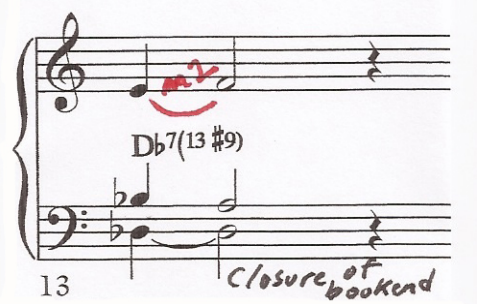

Illustration 3.14. Andrew Hill. "Ashes," m. 13, Ambiguous Harmonic Spelling

"Ashes" has three statements or harmonic phrases of what I call the "functional nonfunctionality" of Hill's harmonic scheme: Phrase 1 (mm. 1-8), Phrase 2 (mm. 9–15) and Phrase 3 (mm. 16-19). These three phrases are indicated by the phrasing of the melody as well.

How does Hill communicate a sense of functional nonfunctional harmony in those first eighth bars? While the first 4 bars represent very little harmonic movement, the B mi7♭5 in m. 5 creates the harmonic tension that is resolved in m. 8 eight with A min7. In its traditional usage, B-7♭5 is followed by the E. The harmonic movement goes from A♭maj7/11 for two bars to a minor 9th chord. The root motion stays the same but the color of the chord changes dramatically. The harmony then moves down a M2 step to Gmin 9th, to a chord of similar quality. A Bmin7♭5 chord a M3 from the Gmin9 follows. This Bmin7♭5 chord asks a question in this melodic phrase in mm. 5-6, answered in m. 8. Measure 7, with the B♭7 (11, 13), forms a passing chord as it delays resolution to the Amin7 at the end of Phrase 1. This is what is considered a functional pattern. In common jazz harmony usage, the min7♭5 chord, usually is on the scale degree 2 or in supertonic function of a key, and moves to the dominant seventh chord, which resolves to the tonic.

In this case the B min7♭5 goes directly to a minor 9th if we are considering the aforementioned B♭7 (11, 13) as a passing chord. So Hill establishes an ending to Phrase 1 by using the B min7♭5 in m. 5, which resolves in m. 8, using "functional nonfunctional" harmony.

Illustration 3.15. "Ashes," mm. 1-8, Functional Nonfunctional Harmony

From mm. 9-12 uses very little harmonic movement or variation compared to the first eight bars. Hill has written one measure of B♭min7 in m. 9, followed by E♭min6. This rising P4 between B♭min7 and E♭min6 are the only two chords for mm. 9-12. In this notation the E♭min6 chord is prolonged for three measures, according to the score. Yet in m. 11, the chord notated is ambiguous as a continuation of the E♭min6, shown, or example, in the absence of the 3rd scale degree, essential for defining the quality of the chords. In the bass clef the E♭ and C appear, with the M2 interval of F and E♭ in the treble clef, with top melody descending a whole step to D♭. The whole note C in the tenor voice clashes with the D♭. At best, we can describe this chord as a hybrid of an E♭maj6 and E♭7. But perhaps this is Hill's point: that chords, both in notation and

performance need not be definable. A stronger case for calling the chord E♭min6 would be in m. 12 where the inner voices of the chord—the 6th of C in the bass and G♭in the treble clef—move to define the chord as an E♭min6. The deliberate uncertainty of the E♭min6, prolonged through harmonic ambiguity over 3 bars, is Hill's way of suspending time or extending harmonic tension until bar 13, labeled in the sheet music as D♭7 (13, ♯9). As mentioned previously, the chord symbol is notated as a D♭7, but with B♭in the upper voice, not B ♮. Is writing incorrect chord symbols Hill's representation of nonconformity ? Indeed no B♮ appears for the entire bar. The inner voicings of the chord instead go from B♭ to A♮ in the bass, to E♭- F in the treble clef. According to Frank Kimbrough, "Ashes"… is one of only a few tunes we have in Andrew's distinctive hand" (Kimbrough 2010, 4)," which indicates that Hill notated not only the music but the chord symbols as well; thus the book represents original notation. If so, Hill has a pattern of "incorrectly" labeling the music he writes, and we might ask why he labeled the chord in such a way. Is he showing resistance to jazz nomenclature? The ambiguous chord in m. 13 lacks the ♯9 or E, and 13th indicated by the chord symbol. But with no B♮ we cannot convincingly label the chord as a dominant 7th.

In many ways, this chord functions like another resting point, primarily because of the similarity in the rhythmic motive in mm. 12-13. And also the melodic patterns of a m2 movement, and perhaps the descending whole-step motion in the conventionally labeled D♭7 (13, ♯9). But such writing does not read as nonfunctional resolution. That resolution occurs in mm. 14-15 in the G min7, where the nonfunctional resolution at the end of the nonfunctional progression, as Hill emphasizes the tied fourth beat, F over to the half note in m. 15. The G min7 is a tritone away from the incorrectly labeled D♭7.

Again this is a temporary resting point before we get to Statement 3. Bars 14 and 15 are similar melodically to bar 8, but last twice as long.

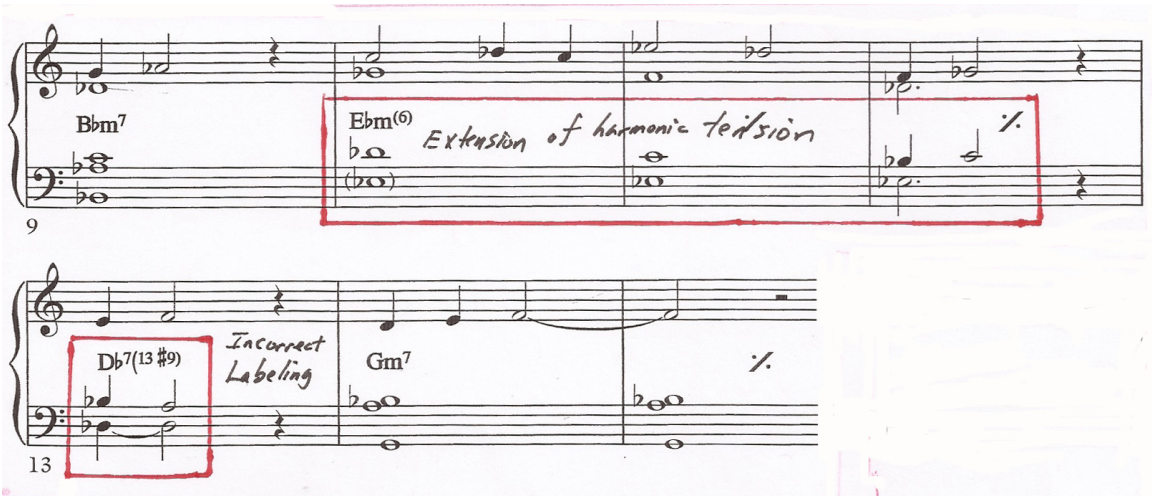

Illustration 3.16. "Ashes," mm. 9-15 Extension of Harmonic Tension

Harmonic Statement 3, mm. 16-19, holds the last phrase of the 19-measure form, beginning with Fmaj7(♯11) in m. 16. This is the only melodic phrase or statement not broken by rests. Thus, the phrase begins on m. 16 and ends in m. 19. Harmonically the Fmaj7(♯11) in mm. 16-17 is designed as a set-up to the harmonic and melodic conclusion of "Ashes." The essence of the Fmaj7 function is to give a feeling of harmonic suspension before the ultimate resolution in mm. 18-19. The chord on the first two beats of m. 18 could easily have been interpreted as an enharmonic 2nd inversion of a C♯min7, the chord thus labeled as an A♭but not spelled as A♭maj. Instead A♭and D♭ in the bass clef, two half notes, spell a P4 with a quarter-note E in the soprano voice. Again no 3rd appears in this chord, lending it an undefined, ambiguous quality. In regards to the enharmonic spelling—as stated before this chord—can be identified as an enharmonic spelling of a 2nd inversion of C♯min7. The bass note A♭would be considered an enharmonic 5th (G♯ - D♭), or the enharmonic equivalent of C♯, the displacement of the

root. The E in the first beat would be the 3rd of the C♯min7 and B, on beat 2, the 7th. Again, the A♭ appears to be the incorrect spelling of the chord. Amin9th appears on the last two beats of m. 18, which I would call an A min11 because beat 4 indicates a D is the 11th above the root, and by virtue of its placement on this beat and its syncopated anticipation, D is prominent and final.

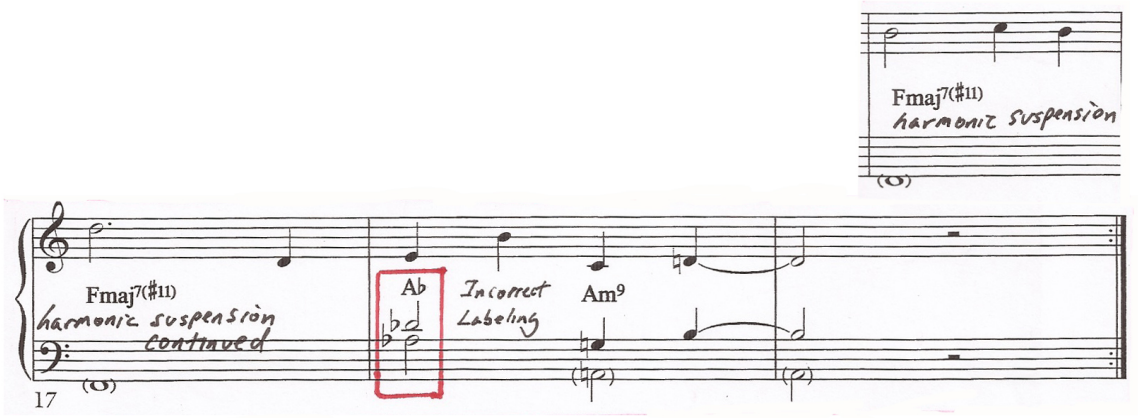

Illustration 3.17. Andrew Hill. "Ashes," mm. 16-19, Harmonic Suspension Labeling

The two musical strategies focused in "Ashes" are 1) the use of nonfunctional harmony to create a feeling of suspension and 2) resting points in the 19-measure form to create a sense of harmonic flow that relies on unconventional progressions that are harmonically ambiguous. Ten different chord qualities in this form have a logic of their own, which, en masse, create a sense of mortality while acting as temporary resting points in this very short span. The melodic motives of M2s and m2s become very prominent, particularly in mm. 9-13. They also function as stepwise ascending melodic patterns.

“Prayer For Peace”

Similar examples of innovative use of harmony are found in Cowell’s “Prayer for Peace.” The compositional form is AAB, the harmony based on pedaling devices that have shifting colorful chords that enhance the largely pentatonic melody. In mm. 5-7, Cowell uses a harmonic scheme of a pedal on D, lending the piece a D minor sound. With all of the harmonic shifts in this piece demonstrate that Cowell avoidance of establishing a key in any traditional way. Instead, “Prayer” evolves by moving to different harmonic areas, or sections. These harmonic areas create variety and build excitement through the performance. The contrasting sections become important especially as the pedal of D minor returns from mm. 21-33, which represents a type of chanting.

“Prayer for Peace” has three sections, demarcated A (mm. 5-8), B (mm. 13-16), and C (mm. 17 -20). Measures 9-12 stand out in the piece as anomalous. This is where quick changes in the harmony occur without the use of pedal points. The resistance to resolution presents an understanding of harmony that fits only problematically into conventional Euro-American understandings of harmony.

In the A section, the D minor pedal appears until m. 8, which measure functions as a bridge of harmonic transition. Several chords pass through the measure over the D minor pedal, creating different harmonic colors: B♭maj, Gmaj and E♭maj. The major quality adds color to the piece and prevents pedal on D from becoming monotonous.

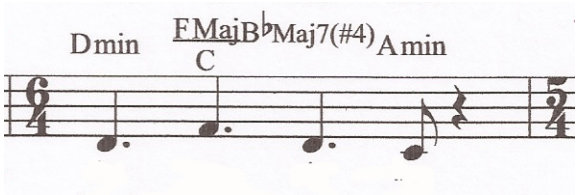

Illustration 3.18. Stanley Cowell. "Prayer For Peace,"m.8, Transition Bar

Measure 8 acts as a transition and gives temporary relief from the pedaling motion, the chords serving this purpose. The chord in m. 8 includes the slash chords of Fmaj over C to B♭maj7(♯11), to Amin on the second eighth note of beat 5. So, m. 8 as a transition measure descends stepwise to the Amin in m. 9. The chordal scheme in mm. 9-10 has no pedal function. In m. 9 the A min chord moves to Bmaj, a motion extended harmonically and melodically in the following 6/4 four measure by the A minor chord moving to B major, then G♯minor. These chords disorient the listener in their contrast to Cowell's previous pedal motion in the harmony.

Illustration. 3.19. "Prayer For Peace," mm. 9-10, Relief From Pedaling

Measures 13-16 reintroduce the harmonic pedal device. Some music scholars may refer to this device as vamping. Vamps have been frequently used in jazz for different reasons. The vamp played in the Acknowledgement section of "A Love Supreme" (created by John Coltrane and his band on his much-praised album *Love Supreme*) connotes religious meditation. Charles Mingus's use of the vamp in "Fables of Faubus" is becomes a representation of political protest to ridicule the Arkansas Governor Faubus, who supported segregation. Herbie Hancock, in "Maiden Voyage," uses vamps over suspended chords to indicate no clear harmonic direction. Vamping has been defined as:

> Improvising a simple, harmonized piano accompaniment, usually of octaves in the left hand alternating with chords in the right. The word, said to date from the early 18th century, was used in the early days of music hall, when 'vamp till ready' indicated that a progression was to be repeated indefinitely until a soloist entered. Piano schools in the early 1900s advertised simple vamping charts for the amateur pianist. (Gammond, 2012)

Cowell, however, uses vamping technique in more sophisticated ways. The pedaling motion occurs over F♯. The chords Bmin7 and E7 alternate in chordal versions over F♯ in both the 5/4 and the 6/4 bars. The F♯ has two different positions in relation to the chords that oscillate over it. F♯ is both the 5th scale degree in relation to B and the Bmin7, and the second scale degree in relation to the E7. Viewing how different chords or harmonic colors pivot over a single note is important for showing how that technique creates a sense of motion within a state of repetition. The pedal on two chords in different inversions on F♯ the bass note becomes a way for Cowell to create a sound of non-harmonic resolution. This technique may also serve to giving the listener a sense of urgency, as Cowell's musical plea. In Cowell's tactic of musical resistance, this type of pedal technique creates a sense of harmonic motion not focused on arrival.

Illustration 3.20. Stanley Cowell. "Prayer For Peace," mm.13-16, Pedal Technique

In mm. 17-19, another kind of harmonic direction is employed to contrast the preceding pedal point chords over F♯. No pedal points appear in the four bars, 17-20. The harmonic motion in mm 17-18 moves through Gmin, Amaj and B♭maj, then descends a half step to A7. This progression mostly repeats in mm. 19-20. However a C7 replaces the A7 on beat 6. This change to C7 could be mostly about surprise, or to set up the whole-step harmonic transition to upcoming pedal points for D minor in the following measures. This change of harmonic direction, veering away from the pedal point device, keeps the piece interesting for the listener—by now accustomed to pedal motion in the music.

Illustration. 3.21. "Prayer For Peace," mm. 17-20, Change of Harmonic Direction

The largest repetitive vamp happens in the B section, which contrasts with as long pedal vamp on D. There are only two chords that vamp over the note D. Those chords are Dmin7 and C7. These chords alternate in different versions according to the demands of the melody note. Thus, the structural melody or the main notes emphasized in this vamp is one comprising F, G, A, and C. This 4-note figure lasts over four bars and is derived from a pentatonic scale. The melodic figures and vamp occurs until m. 35. These repetitive vamps over D continue to be in 5/4 measure. The absence of the 6/4 and focus on the 5/4 measure emphasizes the feeling of musical chanting or prayer.

"Equipoise"

"Equipoise" is a response to poem Cowell read describing the sun and moon as being in equipoise (S. Cowell, phone interview, June 8, 2012). Cowell cannot remember the name of the poem; however, he stated that "Equipoise" was inspired by a "lunar phenomenon, a cosmological phenomenon or a momentary perception of a cosmological event" (Cowell, June 8, 2012). The lunar event Cowell discusses is about the rare balance of forces between astronomical events. According to Cowell, this poem's topic around balance for him becomes an analogy for the potentiality for social peace and justice. His analogy for social peace develops into a radical composition, "Equipoise," written because Cowell believed that extreme positions in politics were dangerous. It is a "political" expression in the sense as a critical response to what Cowell considered the extreme events of the times (Cowell, June 8, 2012). Cowell gave examples of the Vietnam War, or the Civil Rights struggle, as topics that inspired his work. The

composition demonstrates musical resistance to the extreme violence that killed many Civil Rights leaders.

Ambiguous harmony can be found in Cowell's construction of harmonic patterns in "Equipoise," where rocking chords (F♯min9 to Gmaj9 [♯11]) in the introduction contain the same melody, harmony and rhythms as that in the B section of the composition. The piece opens with a five-note phrase beginning on Gmaj9 (♯11) on the second half of beat 4, repeated three times until the F♯min, which is held three beats in m. 4. The central melodic and harmonic figures of the composition begin on m. 6, for example, the melody of E -F ♯ through passing note C♯. While this figure is mostly chordal, the "Equipoise" effect —which is based on hemiola patterns—relies on its repetition up an octave. The across-bar-line figure becomes unstable because, while the same melodic figure is repeated an octave above, the harmony changes. Thus the first figure occurs over an F♯ min chord moving to C♯min, but then recurs over Dmaj7 to E7(13), the opening chord figure.

Illustration 3.22. Stanley Cowell. "Equipoise," mm. 5-8, Hemiola Patterns

"Equipoise" is based on a repeating cycle of two chords. For example in the harmony the cycle begins with the chords in a M2 relationship in terms of harmonic movement from Dmaj7 to E13, followed by the F♯min and C♯min7 (in P5 relationship). This is important because it demonstrates a consistent cycle throughout the composition. A Dmaj7 to E 13 recurs, then again F♯ minor to C♯min7; thus mm. 5 and 7 echo harmonically mm. 6 and 8. Repetition of these chords at various moments of the composition creates a harmonic scheme of alternating harmonies. This harmonic device occurs partially again but in a minor 2nd relationship between A♯7(♯9) to Bmin7 and from C♯min7 to Dmaj7. This intervallic motive is followed by a false resolution from C♯min7 to E7sus 4 to Amaj7, false because the ii-V progression from G♯to C♯7 sets up the F♯ min7 in m. 14.

Illustration 3.23. Stanley Cowell. "Equipoise," mm. 9-14, False Resolution

In the next series of harmonic movement Cowell's chords avoid the idea of "progress," in the sense of moving towards a goal; instead they are cyclical. The transition from the repeated harmonic cycles happens on beats 3 and 4 of m. 13 where a release from the repeated cycles occurs in a downward harmonic movement. Here the F♯min7 changes to Emaj6.

The Use of the Rest to Emphasize Dissonance

The use of silence to emphasize dissonance is a strategy that includes the placement of rests after dissonant intervals or tone clusters. The immediate space after

such intervals calls attention to unconventional melodic gestures that came immediately before the rest. If we invoke Joji Yuasa's writings several decades later across cultures, this strategy is similar to what is referred to in the Japanese tradition as "substantial silence" (1989, 183). Yuasa explains the idea: "Substantial silence has a value equivalent to sound. It is not to be confused with a pause or rest, that is, with merely the absence of sound (183). In the melodic and harmonic plan of "Dance With Death," Andrew Hill uses rests to emphasize dissonance of particular notes. Dissonant intervals are given emphasis by the placement of rests afterward. There are many examples in "Dance With Death" where rests give emphasis to the dissonant intervals and the tensions.

The following example shows 5 occurrences of dissonant intervals followed by rests.

Illustration 3.24. "Dance With Death," Emphasizing Dissonance

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Innovative Use of Harmonic Rhythm

Cowell's "Prayer for Peace" is also notable for its performance anomalies. Whereas most compositions inspired by the idea of prayer tend to be slow, performed in solemn fashion, Cowell's performance of "Prayer" is up-tempo, suggesting anxiety and exasperation. The lyrics that were adapted to the melody suggest a protest song against violence in the Vietnam War but Cowell's commentary on violence extended beyond the war. He explained:

> When Debbie Randolph aligned "Prayer "with lyrics some years after I composed it, she probably was referring to the Vietnam War. But when I composed it, the meaning of the song would have been for not just soldiers (any and all), but also for casualties of and during the so-called "civil rights era," King, Malcolm X, Kennedys, Schwerner, Chaney & Goodman, Huey Newton, including the persecutions of Angela Davis, and many other civilians. (S. Cowell, personal communication, August 19, 2012)

Cowell's comments confirm that his composition was a protest against violence in all war zones regardless of location and also suggest that his resistance to violence superseded and outweighed any nationalistic feelings. Perhaps this is why he performed "Prayer" up-tempo, in order to express the urgency and a dire need for peace in the moment.

"Prayer for Peace" shifts between the time signatures of 5/4 and 6/4, combined in a fluid way. From mm. 5-20 the meter moves from one measure of 5/4 to another in 6/4. Thus, an alternation occurs between any two bars. Even as Cowell exploits these unconventional time signatures his writing prevents the shift from five beats to six beats per measure from feeling disjointed through connecting of the melodic line. Rather, these alternating time signatures suggest an off-balance urgency, prevalent in the cultural spirit

at the time of writing. Eventually, the composition settles on 5/4 in mm. 21–38, leaving off alternating between 5/4 and 6/4 from m. 21. The unusual time signatures are less noticeable because the melody consists of simple phrases.

"Prayer's melody is accessible, composed of intervals that are singable, easy to hear and understand. That lyrics to the piece were created testify to the vocal quality of the melodic arrangement. All phrases of the piece begin on the first beat, which gives the piece a grounded feeling. Had Cowell written the composition with phrases beginning on the second beat, for example, the syncopation would have been more complicated. A call-and-response pattern is created by the rhythmic variation of the melodic lines between the alternating bars of 5/4 and 6/4. For example if the 5/4 measure of m. 5 primarily eighth notes alternate with the next 6/ 4 bar with dotted quarter notes, an augmentation of the melodic line which continually ascends to B♭. Given the various divisions of rhythms, the change in time signature, and the unusual melodic shape, the alternating pattern demonstrates African American cultural codes of call and response.

Illustration 3.25."Prayer For Peace," mm. 5-6, Augmentation of Melodic Line

"Equipoise" Rhythm Examples

Cowell's "Equipoise" might easily be described as based on syncopated rhythmic ideas. Yet defining the work as simply "a syncopated composition" misses the deeper

significance of the musical and sociopolitical ideas that inspired Cowell.[60] Hence, the definition of syncopation relies on the belief in the hegemonic idea of standard rhythm. Cowell's compositional process does not fit into these standard definitions. "Equipoise" is a study in hemiola patterns or shifting rhythms.

Illustration 3.26. Stanley Cowell. "Euipoise," mm. 6-7, Shifting Rhythms

The form of "Equipoise" is AAB. Cowell deliberately departed from the standard AABA (32-bar) form found in traditional song forms from Tin Pan Alley and Broadway. When I asked how resistance manifested in his compositional practice, Cowell stated that:

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[60] There are numerous definitions for syncopation. The origin of the definition is likely related to "temporary loss of consciousness caused by a fall in blood pressure."[60] However, musical syncopation is often described as a rhythm that creates tension with the regular beat. The Oxford Music Online dictionary has defined syncopation as: "The displacement of the normal musical accent from a strong beat to a weak one. In mensural music beats fall naturally into groups of two or three with a recurring accent on the first of each group. Any irregularity, either brief or extended, that has the effect of rhythmic contradiction when introduced into this pattern may be termed syncopation.[60]

Another definition refers to syncopation as shifting "the regular accent as by beginning a tone on an unaccented beat and continuing it through the next accented beat, or in the last half of a beat and continuing it through the first half of the following beat…" Syncopation is also defined as "a common device in all periods of Western music, from the 13th century to modern times. It is also a characteristic feature of some non-Western musics, particularly African-American, hence its importance to ragtime, jazz, and other popular music cultures."[60] Most musical definitions of syncopation confine themselves within the context of "normal musical accents." These definitions imply the existence of abnormal musical accents, which represent the "irregularity" and the "rhythmic contradiction."

> Resistance to the status quo is a must in personalizing one's music. To paraphrase Lester Young, "You can't join the throng until you play your own song." That requires experimenting with musical elements and performance practices to create something personal or reflective of the conception you want to present.(S. Cowell 2012)

Cowell gave specific examples of defiance of the status quo represented in traditional jazz writing. Cowell discussed, "breaking out of the prison of jazz chorus form, playing with the expectations of the listener, guiding the improviser to challenging areas of possibilities with unusual scales, rhythms and harmonic structures." Although Cowell has stated that representing racial identity in music has not always been his aim, his compositions "Abstrusions," "Abscretions," "Parlor Blues," "Thank You, My People," among others, are further examples of pieces that represent racial identity. In the next chapter I explore how the idea of social death might be manifested in two improvisations compositions by trumpeter and composer Ambrose Akinmusire.

Chapter 4:

Improvisational Strategies And Social Death

This section features analysis of two Ambrose Akinmusire compositions, "Confessions To My Unborn Daughter" and "My Name Is Oscar," from his CD*, When The Heart Emerges Glistening* (2011). Through close score analysis of Akinmusire's compositional, improvisational and visual data, I address his social, metaphysical and ontological claims in his liner notes. Understanding Akinmusire's performances and statements from the theoretical view of Afro-pessimism allows us to explore how his work represents the impossibility of social, metaphysical, and ontological claims associated with humanity or whiteness. In this chapter I demonstrate ways in which Akinmusire defeats bar lines through strategies of musical and social commentary on black positionality.

Born May 1, 1982 in Oakland, CA, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire has been described as a "forward-thinking musician with a bent toward atmospheric post-bop" (n.a.) Akinmusire's music, often crudely categorized as post-bop and straight-ahead jazz, has been praised as a "conceptual extension into a new musical language" that "is never to the exclusion of beauty."[61] Before examining "Confessions," I consider how the visual portrayal of Akinmusire's black humanity on the promotional Blue Note art relates to his ideas about music.

Black Body/Glistening Heart

[61] http://www.banffcentre.ca/faculty/faculty-member/3326/ambrose-akinmusire/

Mixed reactions to "Confessions To My Unborn Daughter" from YouTube listeners (in the Top Comments section) are valuable for what they say and avoid saying. With 77,712 views and hearings of the song, 316 "thumbs-up" and six "thumbs down" votes, it would appear many–musicians and laymen alike—have positive views of Akinmusire's work.[62] From YouTube comments such as "un po musica buona per incominciare questa splendida domenica"—which translates as "a little of this music is good to begin this splendid Sunday—from YouTube listener Alex Naviglio—to Kai Lyon's comment "God, this touches on every emotional palate I have and ones I never thought existed," or chazzjazz93's "Dude it really is a trumpet. Unbelievable right?!..." a range of comments represent quotidian enjoyment, existential experience and disbelief of Akinmusire's peculiar trumpet timbre.[63] None of the YouTube comments, however, refer to the provocative CD cover picture, attached to the sound file; no comments to date refer to the artistic representation of Akinmusire's ontology, which I argue, communicates what is at stake in his musical performances.

Akinmusire's CD cover for *When The Heart Emerges Glistening* features a representation of himself dressed in black suit and white shirt opened at the collar. His eyes and mouth are closed and his face appears peaceful and calm without contortion. Since Akinmusire is photographed with head tilted slightly up, one cannot objectively determine whether he is standing or lying down. His unrestrained hands appear to be behind his back, though apparently not restrained. Remaining seemingly undisturbed while a vibrant explosion of colors—ribbons of linear shapes and curvatures—explode

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[62] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QZ5chS_by8 accessed on February 16th, 2013

[63] Ibid.

stylistically at the center of his chest, Akinmusire is pictured as passive while his heart "emerges" and "glistens." The word "emergence" is defined as something formerly unknown or hidden coming to light and importance. "Glistening" refers to the appearance of vibrant colors but also to texture; in the CD image the colors are various permutations of red, maroon and burgundy. The colors purple, grey and white create stark contrast with the warmer, darker colors. The portrayal of Akinmusire's humanity—or rather his nonhumanity—represents a beautiful, geometrically placed benign violence erupting from his chest area at the centerpiece of this representation. The white blots and grey stripes juxtaposed with more vibrant colors create a representation of complex humanity. This metaphorical glistening is connected with ideas of universal human connections on deep levels but also to notions of black subjectivity.

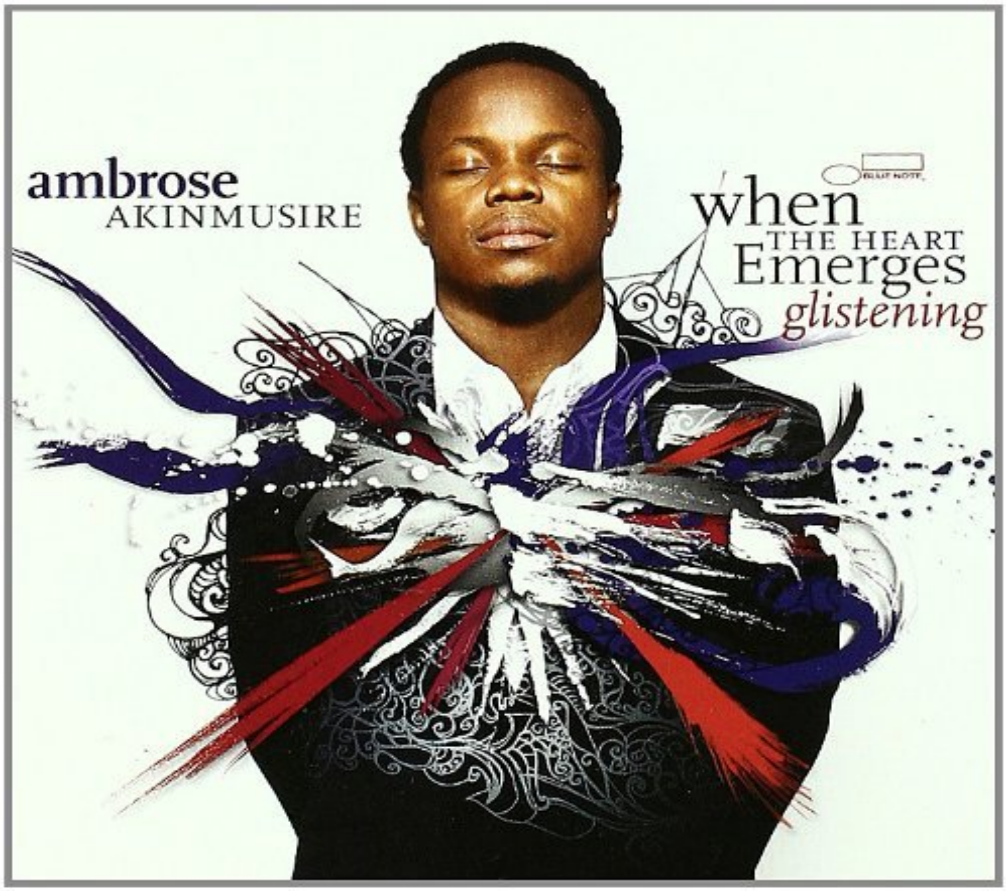

Illustration 4.1. Artwork for "When The Heart Emerges Glistening"

This controlled, asymmetrical explosion of linear splendor at the center of Akinmusire's body portrays a vulnerability not commonly associated with black men, historically in America feared by whites and associated with violence. The litanies of historical archetypes such as the Buck were designed to foster simultaneous notions of violence and non-humanity.[64] Hyper-sexualized, violent, and portrayals of shiftless black gangsters still flood our popular imaginations. As Herman Gray explains, "Self representations of black masculinity in the United States are historically structured by and against dominant (and dominating) discourses of masculinity and race, specifically

[64] For more information on archetypes, see Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*

(whiteness)..."(Gray 1995, 401). Many African American male musicians, conscious of their mythological, historical representations, have redefined black masculinity in ways antithetical to images of black males that bolster white supremacy. Both musicians Duke Ellington and Miles Davis are examples of men who represented black masculinity through sartorial resistance. However, many representations of black male musicians have been problematic. While these representations—on an off the stage—by black male musicians challenged "dominant white discourses of heterosexual masculinity," black male musicians maintained and enforced unequal power relations between themselves and women (401). The fetishization of black male musicians [and many black women] into caricatures of themselves led to simultaneous policing and exoticism by both white men and women (401). Yet as Gray argues,

> Through their music and style that these (largely heterosexual black men) defined themselves in a racist social order... jazz men articulated a different way of knowing ourselves and seeing the world through the very "structures of feeling" they assumed, articulated, and enacted—from the defiantly cool pose and fine vines of Miles to the black and third world internationalism that framed the ceaseless spiritual and musical quest of Coltrane. Davis and Coltrane ... enacted a black masculine that not only challenged whiteness ... in their hands blackness was a powerful symbol of the masculine. (Gray 1995, 401)

Akinmusire's recent intellectual project is connected to unconventional representations of black improvisers. One can say only provisionally Akinmusire's desire to represent an alternative black male humanity in artwork and music. His liner notes, however, buttress my claim that his CD cover artwork is meant to portray complexity and vulnerability, through the colors and the plethora of complex shapes. Here Akinmusire writes about concepts behind his CD title:

> "When The Heart Emerges Glistening" refers to being present, emotionally invested, honest—not exclusively in our art, but in every act of expression…. It's about parting our chests to reveal ourselves to one another and to ourselves, to reflect honestly the "everything" of us—the ugly, the changing, the vulnerable, the fierce, the solid, the safe. The heart "glistens" because it is wet, it is fresh. With every act of expression, it is a newly excavated heart, so that through listening closely, we are ultimately chronicling every present moment, and constantly re-examining our changing selves. In bearing ourselves this way, we connect more deeply with one another. The many sides of the album itself are a testament to our complexity and uniqueness as individuals, and the imperative to bare and explore honestly every coexisting side of us."[65]

Akinmusire situates his poetic statement in a universal context by claiming that musical expression is about "connecting more deeply with one another" (quoted in liner notes, 2011). He appears to argue that if we [the human race] would just open ourselves to each other we could reveal the complexity of who we are as human beings by excavating our own hearts. Through musical practice we mutually dig to discover something that connects us with others. Akinmusire also defines what he means by "glistening heart." For him, the wet, glistening heart symbolizes consistent reexamination of one's self and being cognizant of the present; listening to music closely is connected with embracing complexity inherent in the human experience. While Akinmusire's prose about humankind is expressed in universal terms, it is also a reflection of how he imagines his own subjectivity in relation to broader society that ultimately rejects his humanity. Akinmusire's verbal and musical statements about emerging and glistening hearts may not be a deliberate project to humanize black males. However, it seems impossible not to mediate on the value of black male humanity evoked by the layered, textual representations (musically and visually) that make up the narrative of his project.

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[65] http://www.mariahwilkins.com/akinmusire/bio.html/ accessed on 11/28/12

Unabashedly, Akinmusire's liner notes describe openness in universal terms that position his humanity in the same register as whites. However, his representational strategies of black masculinity on the cover of his recording juxtaposed with his poetic and musical commentary on the murder of black males by police—which will be discussed below—indicate his appreciation of the denial of black personhood. The artistic expression of this denial is through musical innovation such as the avoidance of clichés to reach for something never played before.

Narrative As Inspiration

Akinmusire's uses words and imagery to inspire his compositional and improvisational processes. Since the title indicates that he is communicating to an as-yet unborn and unknown daughter, the motivation for the composition remains mysterious. We do know, however, that a narrative is presented through sound. For many different reasons and circumstances, scores of parental tributes to unborn children exist on the internet. Thomas Hardy's *To an Unborn Pauper Child* is one of the most well known poems of this nature. Hardy's well-known 1890's poem is about "being better not to have been born—a piece of wisdom associated with Sophocles and imparted by Silenus to King Midas (as Nietzsche recounts in *The Birth of Tragedy*).[66] While these examples in literature exist, no evidence suggests that Akinmusire read either Hardy or other sorrowful poems of parents whose children were not born for various reasons.[67]

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[66] http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~ttha/poetry/potm/?p=167

[67] My emails to Akinmusire seeking a response to this question were not returned.

However, beyond speculation and theories, we know Akinmusire often writes out a narrative, which then becomes material for his compositional ideas.

Often writing out pages of narrative prior to composing music, Akinmusire's compositional process is stimulated through extramusical methods. He has described,

> Some of my songs have lyrics that will never see the light of day." "Most of my compositions are done this way now...when I was younger, I could write a tune from divine inspiration...now, I need overstimulation; I need to think of stories. But I like to do it that way, because it gives an unusual shape to the compositions. Plus, because its a narrative, people can relate to it more easily. Most people don't say, "Hey did you hear how he played a tri-tone substitution, then they went into 7 and now they're in 5?" No, that's for musicians. The average listener is attuned to emotion, and he or she gets that from this approach, even without words. Sometimes I'll watch a French film on DVD and turn the subtitles off to see if I can track the emotions without knowing the language. That's what's happening in my music. (Chinen 2011)

Within the context of Western European culture theory, narrativity in music is related to a period in which a society agrees over time on a codified set of musical values and vocabulary of musical gestures. As musicologist Jann Pasler explains,

> The narrativity of a composition, or the presence of some organizing principle, some macrostructure and syntax characteristic of a certain period and place, presents the listener with a set of probability relationships concerning, for example, where to expect a climax, or how opposing ideas may be brought into reconciliation. The more familiar the listener is with them, the more definite will be the order he or she seeks in the work, and the more occasion the composer has to play with expectation and surprise. It is in fact the 'arousal and subsequent inhibition of expectant tendencies in the shaping of musical experience" (through delay, ambiguity, and improbability), as Meyer points out, that gives rise to musical meaning. A work's narrativity then sets the stage for the communication of meaning. (Pasler 2008, 37)

Akinmusire's improvisation and compositional style fits uneasily into this definition of narrativity. Akimusire's music does not adhere to ideas of periodization inherent in Pasler's comments or the goal-oriented expectations of civil society. As an Invisible man,

Akinmusire is not a full member with rights and privileges of humans in civil society therefore his music can not reflect such privileges. Consequently his music does not reflect those ideals. His narrativity stems from a different sphere. The improvised musical stories Akinmusire tells are stories of the non-citizen, the nonhuman; stories of ghosts on the outskirts of humanity. Akinmusire's' agency in performance is derived from lack, from non-humanity. His narrativity as performance technique differs from Pasler's narrativity definition, which could be considered irrelevant to the collective, improvised musical statements by Akinmusire and his band. While the rebellion against narrativity—exemplified in contemporary music by antinarrative and nonnarrative compositional stances has waned, according to Pasler, in the last hundred years—narrativity in composition, as a means for audiences to participate in the aesthetic experience, has been brought back (2008, 48). And though she is not speaking about African diasporic composition and spontaneous composition in her assessment, Pasler is right when she states,

> People's experience and understanding of time has changed in this century, artists of all kinds, particularly composers, have sought to give form to other processes that are not necessarily goal-oriented, dramatic, or organic. One can not develop expectations about these processes or resolve their inexplicable but inherent contradictions; one cannot grasp them into one thought; one can only endure them. (Pasler 2008, 48)

The "inexplicable but inherent contradictions" in European music that Pasler describes are inherent in black life, thus the music that is spawned from black life. If one accepts that Akinmusire's improvisational process reflects a style of narrativity lying outside the sphere of Euro-American cultural expectations, if one understands that Akinmusire's narrativity is based on an agency and personhood not covered under the blanket statement

of humanism, then one appreciates the inexplicability and contradictory consciousness behind his permutation of notes.

Analysis of "Confessions To My Unborn Daughter"

"Confessions to My Unborn Daughter" has two main sections, the first an E-minor blues in spirit, not the codified 12-bar blues form but in which the music is played with a blues sensibility. The performance begins with a solo trumpet improvisation by Akinmusire, a meditative, musical rumination featuring a run of various scales. Moments later he signals the rest of the band to come in with a clarion call. As a way of tying the musical narrative and compositional form together, this call, a perfect-fourth figure (from B to E), is also played as a thematic interlude between solo sections.

Illustration 4.2. Perfect Fourth Theme in "Confessions to My Unborn Daughter

Initially Akinmusire calls with the perfect-fourth figure while the rhythm section responds to the varied perfect-fourth pattern. Band pianist Gerald Clayton initially responds with chords to the call in high and low registers of the piano. Eventually the piano picks up the figure of the call in the arrangement. The rest of the rhythm section responds to the pianist's call on beat 1. The pianist responds to the remaining rhythm section by playing on downbeats of the measures in response to the trumpet, then leads

the rhythm section by taking up the figure, while the rest of the rhythm section responds in kind.

The melody of the piece—which varies quite rapidly without any concern for establishing the head— happens over a chord progression largely based in E minor. Akinmusire's concept of ensemble technique is shown nakedly here. The briefly stated melody develops quickly into collective improvisation that features no particular musician. Akinmusire resists playing melodies in strict and clear ways, resisting the typical attention paid to the soloist and bandleader. There is no conventional hierarchy between bandleader and sidemen, no division of labor in terms of how the music is arranged. Resisting small group bebop convention, Akinmusire shares the melody with saxophonist Walter Smith, who provides a timbral contrast and foil to Akinmusire's improvised lines. No competition for space appears in this interplay between saxophone and trumpet. The data shows the melody dissolves rather rapidly into collective improvisation between the two lead instruments of saxophone and trumpet, and the rhythm section. Innovation and resistance is shown in efforts to blur lines between playing the theme and collective spontaneous composition, traditionally separate sections. Similar performance strategies of staggering, melodic collective improvisation are found in Ornette Coleman's *Lonely Woman* (1959), Don Cherry's *Where Is Brooklyn?* (2005), *and* Andrew Hill's *Time Lines* (2005). However, these aforementioned bands stick to the melody whereas Akinmusire and Smith improvise on the melody almost immediately. The band never repeats the melody in the same way, demonstrating Akinmusire's willingness to challenge traditional jazz performance hierarchies in terms of who states the melody and who improvises first. These improvisations between Smith

and Akinmusire and rhythm section represent balance between free improvisation and improvising within a structure. As Akinmusire explains:

> Why do I have to wait until after the head to solo?...why can't I begin with a solo? Why do I have to solo at all? For a long time, I've been trying to break through the forms. That's why I surround myself with musicians who are also willing to break down forms. When we play these tunes live this year, they won't sound like they do on the album. Anything I create is something to be manipulated and explored, and I trust the musicians to do whatever they feel. Even if I go, 'Damn, why did they do that?' I still trust them. Sometimes you might be in the middle of the solo and someone else will come in and that will be OK. Anything goes. And I mean anything. (Akinmusire 2011)

Akinmusire's approach to improvisation demonstrates avoidance of jazz clichés, which I define as the practice of avoiding codified jazz vocabulary in an improvisation. Codified jazz language could be the use of codified musical phrases or licks such as blues clichés.[68] Standard harmonic progressions from the bebop and previous eras in jazz, many of which come from the standard repertoire of Broadway show tunes, and have become musical stereotypes. Avoiding the traditional language of jazz while performing without clichés is a strategy of resistance. Improvisers can perform improvised language in infinite unpredictable permutations. Avoidance of cliché is illustrated in Cornel West's statement about originality,

> I cannot conceive of a great musician who has not explored the highest levels of courageous engagement in their craft… at the level of form and content… at the level of style and substance. That's what greatness is; it's the courage to go to the edge of life's abyss to step out on nothing and still think you are going to land on something (West, 2009).[69]

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[68] A cliché is a musical lick that is practiced to be used during a solo and much like verbal clichés they are practiced, predictable and unoriginal.

[69] Cornel West's text is largely voice overs which occur the beginning or ending of the compositions on the album. This text was spoken at the end of the composition "Winding Roads."

In “Confessions” a differentiation lies between the E minor blues and tonality as a system. However Akinmusire’s configurations suggest that he likes resisting the system of tonality while at the same time working within it. Akinmusire’s harmonic scheme seeks no conventional harmonic resolution. There is no effort to establish a clear melody through exact repetition of melodic figures or rhythms; no clear, melodic statement is made in this composition.

I contend that the underlying chords of “Confessions” form not a progression but a repeated, bass driven, almost completely diatonic chord cycle that does not stray away from the Emin chord sound. The chord progression that Akinmusire creates in 3/4 is based on an E minor chord which progresses to C♯min seventh ♭5, then proceeds a half step down to Cmaj7, with a passing slash chord of Gmaj/B. This is immediately followed by the Amin chord, which precedes a whole step down to Gmaj chord, which “resolves” to Emin. The harmonic rate has each following chord shift on the third beat of the measure. For example, C♯min7 in the first bar, The Emin chord in the second bar, and Gmaj on the third beat of bar 3 all demonstrate this pattern. The contrasting B section brings different colors.

The B section is a harmonic oscillation between two major chords of Cmaj and Emaj, a major third apart. After the rugged, blues quality of the extended E-minor riff, these chords function as a release from the minor blues sound by bringing different colors to the composition. These chords symbolize something different in this musical narrative. The E-minor section during the solo is expanded through rhythm and the form of the composition seemingly disappears. Musical illusions are cast when the 3/4 appears,

dissolving into a sea of metric modulations. Metric modulation is defined as "changing the rhythm (not necessarily the meter) from one section to another (n.a.).[70] Novice jazz listeners may hear the performance as having left the form altogether. However it is clear that the musicians remain on the same time and rhythmic grid as they cue each other through the form.

Intervallic Analysis of Akinmusire Solo

The way that Akinmusire manipulates space and rhythm in his improvisation, the way that he plays inside and outside harmony relates to his being at the center and the periphery at the same time. His performance simultaneously represents strategies of resistance and social death.

In this intervallic analysis examining Akinmusire's solo approach in his musical representation of his confession, I seek to understand how he shows resistance to the bar line. I will look at several unconventional phrases of mostly large intervals. Moreover, I will analyze Akinmusire's motives, timbres, and use of time. These phrases are important because they will demonstrate the musical portrayal of social death. The guiding question is how does Akinmusire musically address ideas of race, space and time as he negotiates his non-personhood on the outskirts of civil society?

Akinmusire's represents his search for personhood through playing non-chord tones over E minor.[71] While he plays free, he is mindful of the harmonic scheme, or

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[70] "Metric Modulation." *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed February 13, 2013, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e6759.

[71] Akinmusire's approach is similar to the improvisational approaches of bassist Charles Mingus, saxophonists John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, Anthony Braxton and Kenny Garrett, and many other musicians.

changes, he has created. Avoiding musical cliché, Akinmusire departs from the bebop tradition of trumpet performance that relies on linearity in scales. While trumpeters Clifford Brown, Miles Davis and other trumpet players may have influenced Akinmusire's style, he demonstrates their influence in spirit, but works beyond their music vocabulary.

In the first four phrases of his trumpet solo. Akinmusire plays unconventionally wide intervals that signify innovative creation of musical space and intervallic exploration. While his exploration is facilitated by a limited harmonic framework, which mostly centers on E minor, there is no harmonic stasis. Through the performance of complex intervals, he superimposes harmonies that expand allows us to hear E minor through different sonic prisms.

Akinmusire does not play modally. For example, the first notes Akinmusire plays are B, G, and D, which is composed of intervals of a m6 and a P5. The second phrase he performs is M6 to m6, and the third intervallic configuration he performs is G to F♯ followed by B, which is a M7 to m6. The fourth phrase is A to G to F♯.

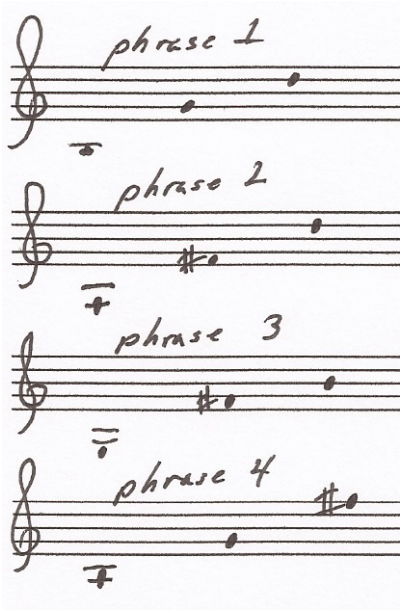

Illustration 4.3. Permutations of Spacious Intervals in "Confessions"

These permutations of spacious intervals signify risk and searching for something impossible to reach: Akinmusire's unborn daughter. More importantly these intervallic configurations signify departure from conventional forms of performing jazz. The significance of this very untraditional way of improvising is found in the ascending intervallic permutations.

Akinmusire's wide intervals are similar, in their unconventional nature, to multi-reedist Eric Dolphy's wide registral leaps in his flute improvisations on "Like Someone In Love" (*At The Five Spot* With Booker Little , 1961)[72]

[72] See Eric Dolphy *At The Five Spot* With Booker Little, Mal Waldron , Richard Davis, ad Eddie Blackwell on the prestige label. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvXICIZ_vZE accessed on January 7, 2012. I am specifically referring to Eric Dolphy's flute performance on "Like Someone In Love" by Johnny Burke and Jimmy Van Heusen. Dolphy does play in scalar fashion but he also uses wide leaps in solos. For example, in

In Phrase 6, Akinmusire departs from the three note-wide interval motive. The interval ascends from A below C to D, a span of 19 notes.

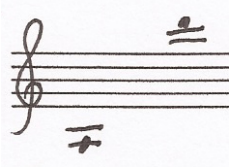

Illustration 4.4. Widest Phrase in "Confessions"

The D rises more than two octaves. So far, this is the shortest phrase and the widest interval in this improvisation. However beginning with Phrase 7 we begin to see a pattern of phrases that pivot off of two notes. I will demonstrate in the analysis of these next several phrases how Akinmusire's seemingly sporadic ideas are well thought out and consistent..

In Phrases 7 to 13, Akinmusire plays motivic and varied ideas that pivot off notes D and E. These phrases are more intervallically compact. Whereas the earlier improvised phrases only descended, the phrases now have ascending and descending patterns.

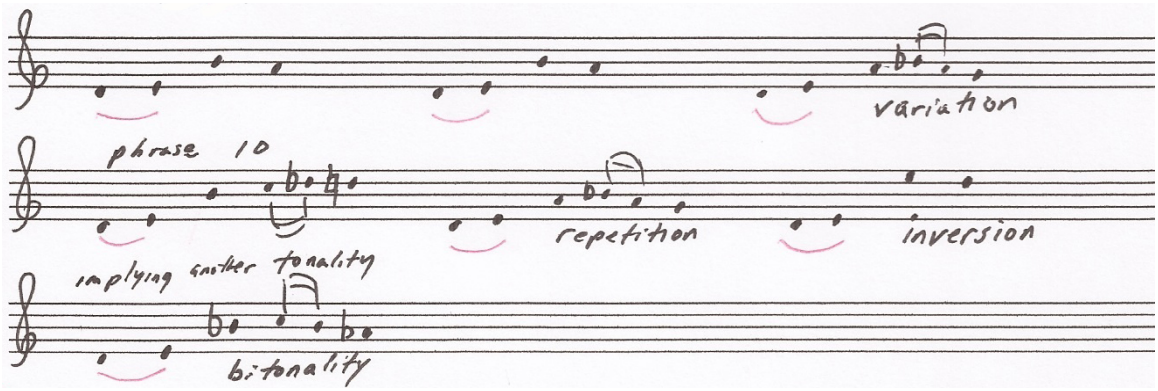

Illustration. 4.5. Example of Motivic Improvisation in "Confessions"

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the last part of the first phrase of his chorus, he ends on a very high B-natural (immediately followed by a dotted-eighth rest) a tenth away from where he started.

Phrase 7 begins with D and E, a M2 that rises a P5 from E to B and descends a M2 to A. Phrase 8 repeats the permutation in Phrase 7. This phrase is repeated for emphasis to establish the melodic and rhythmic motif. In Phrase 9, Akinmusire begins the first variation on Phrase 7's permutation by playing D, E, A and B, then descending to A and G. The B ♭ and the A are grace notes or decorative flourishes. The difference is that B ♭ is flattened and a G is added to the phrase. In Phrase 10, Akinmusire ends the phrase in a different direction. He plays A, D, E , B ♭ and C and approaches D chromatically through D ♭ This is the first time a phrase ends in ascending motion since Phrase 6.

Other musicians defeat the bar lines through strategies of unconventional improvisation. Saxophonist and composer Greg Osby often superimposes different meters against the rhythmic framework the band is in (G. Osby, personal communication, March 23, 2011). Osby shared a story about a performance several years ago in which he was seen as have no rhythmic sensibilities. During a live performance at a club his fiancé once owned, a male patron instructed his fiancé to not stop dating Osby since he was an African American without rhythm. As Osby explains, "a lay person would not understand how a soloists counts seven against four" in an improvisation (G. Osby, personal communication, 2011). Osby's swaying of his body center stage to alternative meters while his band performed in another meter, must have seemed odd to the patron who defined good rhythm as playing on the beat, or "in the pocket." Recounting a time when a famous saxophonist told him he couldn't believe he was from St. Louis because of his practice of superimposing meters onto other meters—"you couldn't swing if some one

hung you from a noose…you couldn't swing from a rusted gate,"—Osby's story reveals that many musicians, even some the most well-known—have ossified conceptions on how "black rhythm" is supposed to sound and feel. It also reveals how the tradition–anti-tradition binary influences the way musicians construct ideas about improvisation and then perform those ideas.

Similarly, while Akinmusire's performance represents a willingness to explore new ways of improvising, his strategies of musical resistance are rooted in ideas of racial pride defined by culturally based, high standards of performance. In contrast to Nicholas Payton's comments about musical ownership, quoted in the introduction of this study, Akinmusire argues it's unnecessary for black improvisers to claim ownership of "jazz." Rather, ownership can be tacitly claimed through the maintenance of high levels of performance,

> To say "this is ours"… that's a known thing, we don't need to necessarily say that, and saying it is not necessarily going to make people not want to take it away if that's what they're trying to do. It's just going to exclude people like, "Oh I can't do that." And those people might have valid things to say and contribute to the music. I think if you just live that… like, to me, Mark Turner is like that. He'll never say a word. Or, like Marcus Gilmore. These cats don't talk, but if you get on the bandstand with them, you know you have to deal, and that's some black shit. Like yeah, this is our music. But if you're not stepping up to the plate and playing like that, then yeah, you have to talk "They're taking it away." You think Trane had to say that? He didn't have to say nothing. You think Lee Konitz was going to get up there with the John Coltrane Quartet? You don't have to say nothing. (Akinmusire, 2011)

According to Akinmusire, black musicians need only to keep their musicianship to a high level in lieu of political statements about authenticity in improvisation. African American artists often claim their art is not political because they associate politics with corrupt

(Iton 2008, 8). However, as we can see with Akinmusire's above statement, an artist disassociation from common notions of "politics" does not rule out his/her desire for cultural impact in society demonstrated in strategies of musical resistance against a system that often devalues the art.

In an August 25th, 1999 interview with Charlie Rose, musician Cassandra Wilson commented on the value of jazz in terms of its functionality. According to Wilson, jazz has become to abstract, which has caused it to be separated from the black community. Wilson's comments seem to suggest that abstract improvisation—played by Akinmusire and others, is often lost on the "black community."

> I'm concerned. I'm concerned about the health of jazz. I think its found a home inside of academia. There are institutions now that provide a home for jazz. But jazz has been cut off from the community that gave birth to it. And I am speaking specifically of the African American community. I think that, uh, its really dangerous for it [jazz] to have such a distance from it [community]... it seems to have become more of an object instead of a peoples music that is functional, music that has dance, music that has life, and essence, and I worry about that. (Wilson, 1999)

Wilson, echoing a music colleague, also argues that when saxophonist Charlie Parker began to create the complex modern music (Bebop), the performances moved downtown, taking on a more European aesthetic and her colleague points to that as the point where we begin to see the music leave the community."[73]. Ultimately her statement reinvigorates black interest in the music by making it less abstract and more functional. Wilson's comments illustrate that philosophies behind strategies of musical resistance are not monolithic. Both Akinmusire and Wilson would likely agree that improvisation performed from one's experience as an African American is dealing with what

[73] Ibid

Akinmusire calls “some black shit.” Their statements about music go beyond notions of authenticity in jazz performance and toward performance as a reflection of the difference in positionalities between the human (social life) and the inhuman (social death). The humanity of non-black musicians—no matter their musical proficiency—is not in question. These positionalities are signified in the motivic strategies.

Phrase 11 is a repetition of Phrase 9, which further demonstrates motivic thinking. Akinmusire’s performance is similar to that of saxophonist Wayne Shorter, who develops non-cliché motives through his solos. Phrase 12 is a permutation of notes in reverse of each other through octave displacement. The phrase begins on the pivot notes D and E, which ascend a P8. The notes are then performed in reverse order. This example of octave displacement predicts what will happen later in the solo.

For the majority of his solo, Akinmusire exploits two registers of his trumpet. At Phrase 13, the last phrase where he pivots thematically on D and E, Akinmusire suggests bitonality by performing notes that are not traditionally within the scale of E minor. For example, he plays B ♭ , C, B ♭ and A ♭ , all colors indicating a different chordal area altogether. This thematic variation of what he played six phrases before may be a foreshadowing of the movement into the contrasting section that oscillates through the harmonic pendulum of Cmaj and Emaj chords. The contrasting section mentioned above enters at Phrase 14.

Contrasting Section B

The contrasting section moves from Cmaj to Emaj by way of a Dmaj chord. Akinmusire’s improvisation, characterized mostly by “out notes” thus far, harmonically

adjusts to these notes in Phrase 14. Akinmusire intones A, B ♭ , A and G. This phrase begins in the lower range, below and then lingers in the midrange. Phrase 14 also appears to be a variation on Phrase 9. While Phrase 9 pivots on D and E, Phrase 14 begins on G and A; however, the latter half echoes Phrase 9 in the melodic contour of A ♭ A, and G. Phrase 15 is the longest phrase up until this point in the improvisation. In the B section, Akinmusire's twenty-one note Phrase 15 threads through the two contrasting major chords of Cmaj and Emaj chords which oscillate like a pendulum of bright colors compared to the prior non-metric dirge quality of the E-minor A section (an illusion of fraudulent harmonic stasis) that allowed the improvisers to superimpose various modes.. Except for perfect octave leaps and intervals of P5, this phrase is mostly constructed on M2 and m2 intervals, Over the course of this long phrase, Akinmusire emphasizes chromaticism in the melodic line of such intervals. Moreover Phrase 15 is not fragmented as are most phrases in the A section. While it illuminates Cmaj and Emaj chords, Phrase 16, a much shorter ten notes, occurs only over the Cmaj chord. The reintroduction of phrases split between two distinct registers happens again after the B section. As I mentioned above, Akinmusire's oscillation between two registers adds a peculiar character to the shape and sound of his improvised lines. He uses the A section for more abstract musical ideas—such as suggesting bitonality—and the B section for musical ideas more in line with the chord changes. In Phrase 17 notes occur in the mid to high range of the trumpet. The second part of the same phrase (A, ♭ A, G, D, E, and B)—over Emaj— occurs in the lower range of the trumpet. This musically phrased representation of double consciousness sounds momentarily discontinuous, and connects in one breath. I

contend that Akinmusire's performance of two registers of his trumpet represents a peculiar double consciousness.[74]

Illustration 4.6. Representation of Melodic Double Consciousness in "Confessions"

Further evidence of this Akinmusire's representation of double consciousness is that this gesture is repeated again in phrase eighteen. Whereas the seven-note phrase of G-F-E-F -G-A ♭ -A are performed in the high register of the trumpet followed by a leap an P8 below to A in Phrase 19, the majority of the phrase—the notes of A ♭ , G, B ♭ , G, A ♭ and D, in the lower register. Most of these registral leaps are separated into phrases.

Continuing the strategy of performing in two registers, Akinmusire plays Phrase 20 shoots into the upper registers again. The shorter Phrase 20 is a continuation of ideas in Phrase twenty one, however, is performed in a lower register. Akinmusire not only skips between low and high registers of his trumpet, he varies his musical statements between longer phrases and shorter phrases. Again most of his fragmented harmonic exploration occurs within the E-minor non-progression whereas longer, poetic melodic lines are performed in the contrasting section over major chords.

[74] please see chapter 2 for more explanation

Phrase 22 demonstrates a shorter four-note melodic line, again in the upper register. Akinmusire performs a constellation of notes that are that are highly, chromatic pitch sets. For example, Akinmusire plays A-A ♭ −G - A.

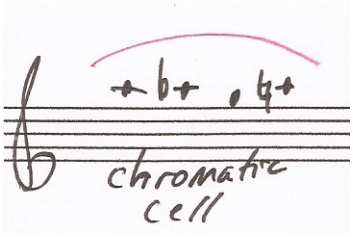

Illustration 4.7. Chromatic Pitch Sets in "Confessions"

Akinmusire's melodic concept does not reflect the tradition of melodic linearity found in the bebop style of trumpet players, such as his forbears Lee Morgan, Dizzy Gillespie, and Clifford Brown. Exploiting the full range of the instrument, with melodic invention in two registers at once while maintaining a vocal timbre, Akinmusire improvisational approach disavows codified styles of improvisation. His melodies are often displaced and staggered by one or more octaves. In this improvisation, Akinmusire never relies on diatonic melodies performed within an octave. As Geoffrey Himes comments,

> Most jazz musicians create improvised lines in a linear fashion, sprinting up and/or down a series of small steps. Akinmusire by contrast, takes slower, bigger leaps across intervals—"giant steps," as it were—to craft new, unfamiliar melodies. Its an innovative approach, but the technique is not an end in itself; its just a means to realizing his narrative concepts. (2011).

Phrase 22 is a four-note permutation as in Phrases 20, 17, 8 or 12. While there is much chromaticism in the varied melodic lines, these four-note permutations are

connected in that no wide intervallic leaps are used. In the first chorus, Phrase 23—which also has several ghost notes—is the second longest phrase after Phrase 15. This indicates that Akinmusire thinks mostly in smaller pitch sets, which he sometimes spins out into longer phrases. This series of improvised permutations in Phrase 23 is the first line with two intervals of tritones (B ♭ and E; A ♭ and D). Thus a momentary emphasis rides on the tritone in this 16-note phrase. Phrase 24, a 9-note phrase, occurs in contrast in the upper range of the trumpet. With a large number of M2s and m2s, Phrase 25, also performed in the lower range, is highly chromatic as well. .

Phrase 26 is a marked contrast in melodic construction, with the first partial blues cliché in a flatted fifth in the beginning, a B ♭ over E minor. With a partially played blues scale, Akinmusire signals the end of one cycle of improvisation. . However, this ending is demarcated by Phrase 27, a one-note phrase (F ♯) played on a half-valved bending pitch. This half-valve F♯ signals a new improvisation cycle because—in addition to the previous altered blues cliché and the musical space that follows F♯—Akinmusire returns to the earlier idea of the wide-interval motive in Phrase 28. However, what distinguishes this new cycle of wide-interval motives—while indicating the next phase of the solo—is that they are played within a phrase, not in separate phrases as they were in the beginning of the solo. Beginning in Phrase 28, Akinmusire's wide leaps are played within the phrase, facilitated by his diminution of the initial idea at the beginning of the improvisatory journey. Note values of the second round of wide-interval motives, are played within a phrase whereas the motives in the beginning of the solo, were played in separate phrases.

Notwithstanding the difference in the size of the intervals, the initial idea is brought back in the second cycle of the solo, as Phrase 28 contains all ascending intervals. The next five-note constellation in this phrase is C-E, followed by a three-note variation of E-F,♯-G. This is followed by a chromatic four-note phrase of D moving a half step to E♭ followed by a P5 to B♭ then ascends a M7 to A in slight vibrato, which ends the phrase.

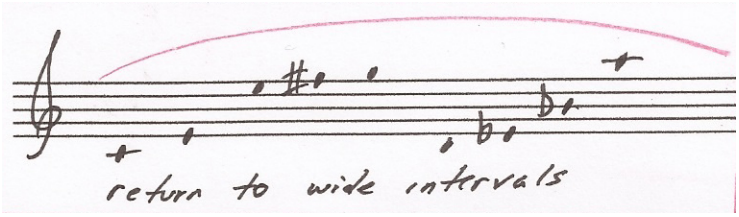

Illustration 4.8. Return To Wide Intervals in "Confessions"

Revealing a connection to a narrative, Akinmusire's return to the wide interval motive a return to the initial idea,

The musical data from Akinmusire's solo reveals high-pitched growls, splitting of melodic lines into two registers, as strategies of musical resistance to codified constructs of improvisation. Akinmusires' unconventional musical gestures represents social death that is blackness. Thus social death—as represented by the performance of Akinmusire—represents musical values on the outskirts of universal notions of musical beauty, agency, and humanity. Codification of improvised language is a ruse designed to make students think black musical culture (of social death) can be apprehended, according to Akinmusire,

> I don't think you can take someone's culture... once something becomes tangible, then you can take it away and that's because we don't have it

> here in our hearts So maybe that's why I don't understand [the first viewpoint]. It's like, I'm Black; you can't take that away from me. I live jazz; you can't take that away from me If we have a whole community who understands that it's here [points to his heart], you can't take that away from us. That's the way it was with the be-boppers, before jazz education came and made it this tangible thing and a lot of people started believing it. (Akinmusire quoted in Beener 2011)

The music of phantasmagoria has no tangibility, thus cannot be apprehended. Social death is revealed in the notes and musical strategies that Akinmusire uses to humanize himself, to make his heart emerge glistening. Avery Gordon's definition of complex personhood is partially relevant for describing what musicians like Akinmusire express through music,

> Complex personhood means that people that suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves. Complex personhood means that even those called "Other "are never, never that. Complex personhood means that the stories that people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward. (Gordon 2008, 5)

The complex personhood, embodied in Akinmusire's improvisation, resides in the intention to resist ideas of music held up as tradition, a philosophical dislocation. In the face of repeated dislocations and passages, Akinmusires cultural imagination reigns through renewal and musical experimentation to play music of his time,

> I feel like people who consider themselves traditionalists are ignorant, and that comes from a lack of understanding that whatever it is you're analyzing is related to the history of that time… so bebop was relating to what was happening at that time and it was modern at that time. So I just try to play the music that's of the now right now and that's related to me and I just try to be honest with who I am. Today I feel this way and tomorrow I may feel another way and I think it takes courage to say what I thought yesterday was wrong and I think a lot of people are scared to do that. (Akinmusire 2011)

Akinmusire's narrativity is focused on a place beyond tradition. His music reminds us that African American musicians create stories that reveal how they view themselves in relation to a larger society, which does not view them as equal. Akinmusire's compositional and improvisational practices are important for what they say about black life operating in a sphere outside civil society. To paraphrase Robin D. G. Kelley, it is not the form but the meaning applied to the form that counts. The meaning is derived from social death expressed in the creative practice of black musicians. As Ornette Coleman has explained, "jazz" is a label that has been concocted to describe music whose value can not be based on dominant aesthetic criteria,

> But if you analyze the music itself, just from music for music, from notes for notes, it is a superior music as far as individual expression is concerned, jazz is. It's not a written music where you can show someone how well you just punch the button, or it's not a written music where the composer is dominating, and anyone can change what the composer is saying for the betterment of themselves. It's only a label for them [whites, music historians, and music industry professions] to let you know they are aware of either one or two things; they're trying to make you feel that they're giving you some sort of respect, to let you know that there's music that has come out of your race, or that there's a certain kind of music that you play that isn't like anyone else, and it's jazz. If people weren't what they were, they wouldn't have to use labels. (Coleman, as quoted in Spellman 1985, 143)

Akinmusire's attempt to humanize himself through music is manifested in unconventional improvisational and compositional techniques connected with what George Lewis calls the "traditional mission in blues history" (Lewis 2012,90). Lewis describes this mission as "reasserting the blues idiom by critically boxing with it and evading attempts at formal standardization, as the old blues people and their jazz

descendants and contemporaries had done."[75] I contend that Akinmusire's project is part of that traditional blues mission, and my semiotic readings of his music attend to how that blues mission is manifested.

[75] Ibid., 90

Strange Fruitvale

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck, For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck, For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop, Here is a strange and bitter crop.

~Abel Meeropol

Yeah, what did you? What did you bring me, keep me from the gallows pole?
~Lead Belly

The most ridiculous question a black person can ask a cop is, 'why did you shoot me?' How does one account for the gratuitous? The cop is at a disadvantage: 'I shot you because you are black; you are black because I shot you.' Here is the tautology at the heart of the colonial experience.

~Frank Wilderson III

Ambrose Akinmusire's "My Name Is Oscar" speaks to the ontological position of the black. Through an Afro-pessimist reading in the following essay, I will show how his composition is important for how he humanizes Oscar Grant through fragmented, poetic statements.

The 22-year-old butcher's apprentice, Oscar Grant was killed by Oakland Bart Transit System police officer, Johannes Mehserle on January 1, 2009 as a result of one shot in the back while he lay facing down. Handcuffed with face pressed against metro ground, Grant was shot by Mehserle. Evidence of the allegedly accidental, perfunctory shooting that produced this macabre theater, appears in the plethora of amateur camera videos made by subway riders that still circulate through the Internet.

The multiracial public response to the killing of Grant was swift, angry and fierce. After major demonstrations 120 people were arrested that day. Widespread protests were not simply a response to what many felt was a deliberate execution of another black male by the State. The Riders case—"in which a group of Oakland police officers were

accused of abusing and falsely accusing subjects"—had stirred up angst from decades of distrust between Oakland's black community and the Oakland police.

The twenty-eight-year-old Mehserle, who was initially charged with the more serious second-degree murder by a Los Angeles jury, was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter. Grant's family, who remained defiant and unsatisfied with the verdict, filed a fifty-million dollar lawsuit. Tatiana—Grant's now fatherless daughter, was eventually paid 1.5 million dollars by the Bart Transit system, approximately a year later. In early November 2010, Judge Robert Perry sentenced Mehserle to two years in state prison. Widely perceived as a light prison sentence, the verdict prompted violence in Oakland by initially peaceful protesters.

Under the mantra and social banner "My name Is Oscar," artistic responses to the killing of Oscar Grant have been reflected in graffiti, photography, poetry, posters, songs, videos, and a major motion picture called *Fruitvale*, scheduled to be released in 2013.[76] As the editorial writer of the *Urban Habitat* explained,

> People are angry. Thousands have been appalled by the Oscar Grant shooting and have taken a new stand to fight injustice. Many have chosen to creatively express their stance through art. Songs have been written and dedicated to Oscar Grant. Poems, paintings and posters have been created. Graffiti artists have painted murals. Some of this is compelling art, some is ephemera. Some of this art is controversial in its subject matter or its expression, but above all this art is the expression of a critical moment in the movement to end police violence.

Responding to violence through art is not new and has never been solely concerned with "human" rights of blacks. The resonance of human rights issues defies, borders, localities,

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[76] *Fruitvale* is an independently produced movie about Grant's last day. Directed by African American Ryan Coogler, and filmed in Oakland, the Sundance Grand Jury winning *Fruitvale* has been acquired by the Weinstein Company.

and eras. There is a long, radiant, tradition of improvisers who use music to champion human rights issues through musical protest against violence. Billie Holiday's performance of the anti-lynching song, *Strange Fruit*, comes vividly to mind. Police brutality—legalized and civilian—goes well beyond hitting with a baton. Surveillance is a type of disciplining violence as well. As Foucault stated long ago, "Discipline makes individuals; it is a specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its own omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy (Foucault 1977, 170). This idea has been demonstrated in the history of FBI investigations of subversive movements and individuals, and has also focused on black improvisers from marginalized communities.

The history of FBI surveillance on jazz musicians reveals that black improvisers were often thought to be subversive, which prompted their scrutiny. For example, FBI surveillance programs kept files on black improvisers. In "Jazz and the FBI: Guilty Until Proven Innocent," Andrew W. Lehren reported that the FBI has secretly monitored several jazz musicians (2009). FBI agents—according to files accessed through the Freedom of Information Act—often questioned the late drummer Max Roach about possible associations with the Revolutionary Action Movement, which the FBI viewed as a "precursor to the Black Panthers." Many people imagine modern improvisers as a small community with a dwindling listening audience and accompanying low market share. However, Lehren writes that jazz musicians were seen differently in the 1960s and 1970s. Improvisers Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, for example, acquired "notoriety" and were considered a threat by the FBI. Lehren writes "The attention lavished by the bureau is, in

an a way, a reminder that these were not just musicians boxed in a genre appreciated by only parts of society, but artists who attained a place among the most popular entertainers of the day" (2009).

Other black composers/improvisers/bandleaders under surveillance were harassed by the FBI as well. Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong and Nat King Cole, all prominent musicians, were all scrutinized. Ellington from 1938.. FBI agents watched Ellington as he participated in benefits for Civil Rights and other human rights causes. Because he often supported politicians who were members of the Communist Party, Cab Calloway was under FBI surveillance at beginning of the 1940s. Louis Armstrong, a cultural ambassador for the US State Department whose used his music to represent and promote democratic values beyond the geographical and cultural borders of America, had several gigs canceled by the FBI when he publicly criticized both Arkansas governor Orval Faubus and President Eisenhower. By the time Armstrong commented on segregation, he had been under FBI surveillance for ten years. Armstrong's physical safety was also threatened. Lehren writes,

> What is seldom noticed is that, even before Armstrong's remarks about the Little Rock crisis, the FBI had been keeping tabs on Armstrong for nearly a decade. The entries range from the mundane—a person they were tracking in 1948 had Armstrong's phone number—to the dangerous. It noted that in February 1957, in Knoxville, Tenn., someone exploded dynamite near a stage where Armstrong was performing. But the dossier reveals no notations that the nation's top law enforcement agency then investigated the blast, or that the case was ever solved.

Even more recent 20th-century musical responses to social injustices predate Akinmusire's work by several years. The musical vocabulary Akinmusire uses through modern technology to rescue Grant, by embodying his ghost, is rooted in the tradition of

black protest improvisation and composition. Abbey Lincoln's "People in Me" (1979), James Mtume's "Alkebu-lan:Land of the Blacks" (1971), Herbie Hancock's "Mwandishi" (1971) and Clifford Thornton's "Freedom and Unity," as well as his live recording "The Panther and the Lash"—a title borrowed from Langston Hughes's poem about the Black Panther organization—all musical projects developed within an era and Black Consciousness—informed strategies of musical resistance (Tkweme 2009). Horace Tapscott's "Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra," as well as his arrangements for Black Panther vocalist Elaine Brown's *Seize The Time* (1969), are other examples of conscientious protest music. Gary Bartz's *Harlem Bush Music* (1970) "was addressed specifically to people of African descent with a message of cultural renewal and struggle against injustice." Rashaan Roland Kirk's *Blacknuss* (1971), which offered up a song with multiple agendas: "one part send -up of the cult of blackness, one part celebration of Black vernacular and culinary folkways, and one part musical experiment" demonstrates questioning constructs of black identity through improvisation. A recent example is trumpeter Terence Blanchard's collaboration with Cornel West on *Choices* (2009).West's philosophical statements become the connective tissue between the compositions on this album.

In the creative practice of Wadada Leo Smith, landmark improvised speeches themselves have become inspiration for compositions. Smith also uses speeches to teach his students about improvisation. In an interview, Smith shared his strategies of musical resistance with me. He explained that speeches are models of resistance and improvisation. Not only has Smith based his work on speeches, he has also used speeches to teach improvisation (W. Smith, interview, March 9, 2013). For example, he uses

Martin Luther King's last speech, and the Civil Rights speech of John F. Kennedy to explain thematic improvisation and composition. Mississippi-born, Smith states that "President John F. Kennedy was the first American president to speak publicly about civil rights in a speech that was not scripted; it was totally improvised." Smith sees a connection between Kennedy's speech and Medgar Evers slaying, 10 minutes after JFK finished the speech.

In regards to King, Smith states, " if you understand the way he used thematic reference throughout his speech then you would understand how to make a music object that represented you" (W. Smith, interview, March 9, 2013). Smiths use of unconventional methods defeats the bar lines between the music and the so-called extramusical.

I contend that Akinmusire's work is also tied to these historical examples of resistance music. Akinmusire's musical commentary on police brutality is connected to a larger history of modern violence towards African American musicians and connected to the larger topic of international human rights. "My Name is Oscar" is connected to the tradition of protest above, and national and international movements to end police brutality. It should be seen as an extension of protests that not only connect to the current movement connected to the killing of Oscar Grant, but to the abolitionist movement and the Civil Rights. Through technology, methods of violence have changed and evolved, in some ways seem less primitive. The taste of violence, however, remains the same, irrespective of era and institutional zeitgeist. Michelle Alexander has shown that much of the policing of black communities have historically been based on racial politics,

> President Reagan officially declared the current drug war in 1982, when drug crime was declining, not rising. From the outset, the war had little to do with drug crime and nearly everything to do with racial politics. The drug war was part of a grand and highly successful Republican Party strategy of using racially coded political appeals on issues of crime and welfare to attract poor and working class white voters who were resentful of, and threatened by desegregation, busing, and affirmative action. In the words of H. R. Halderman, President Richard Nixon's White House Chief of Staff: "[T]he whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to." (Alexander 2010, 76)

Police brutality issues resonate with Akinmusire. Black males in general and black musicians are, of course, cognizant of the history of what many believe is government sanctioned violence against blacks. Black musicians have often been under surveillance that leads to physical discipline, sometimes escalating into murder. Referring to the late 1980s Compton, California-based rap group NWA (Niggas With Attitude), Akinmusire distinguishes his work from their anti-police songs; his musical mission was to make more audiences aware of the story. As Akinmusire explains,

> I just want people to know the story. I don't want it to become this "f*ck the police" anthem,… every time I go back home I'm reminded of it, people still talk about it, it's still such a big thing because he [Mehserle] got off with just two years, he didn't get charged with murder. It just really resonates with me because I feel like it could have been me or anyone. The piece begins with me observing what happens, then me talking in the voice of Oscar Grant himself. (Akinmusire quotes in Beener 2011)

Recalling his training, Akinmusire tells us how paternalistic Oakland musicians, many former Black Panther musicians, guided his musicianship as well his consciousness. He explains, "I almost grew up in a Black Conscious museum." "My Name Is Oscar" is a direct commentary on police brutality where Akinmusire identifies with the deceased. Akinmusire's composition is not just a protest against police brutality connected to a larger movement; his composition also shows how he views himself as a potential

recipient of police brutality.

Analysis of "My Name Is Oscar"

"My Name Is Oscar" is recorded live, a spoken-word recitation with drum accompaniment. Drummer Justin Brown appears to be responding in real time to Akinmusire's sparse poetic statements about the killing of Oscar Grant. However, the poem is recited to a prerecorded drum solo—initially recorded in conjunction with saxophonist Walter Smith's composition on the same recording session. Influenced by the work of performance artist Joan Jonas by way of assistant producer Jason Moran's suggestion—"My Name Is Oscar" is a constructed presentation that manipulates listener perceptions of the performance.

Akinmusire's spoken word is performed and choreographed in response to Justin Brown's recorded drum solo. This performance breaks with conventional performances in the popular imagination, as one might imagine jazz musicians responding to live poetry readings exemplified in New York City's East Village Nuyorican Café Poetry Slams. It is likely that Akinmusire listened to the recording of the drum solo several times before he devised a musical strategy to record the poem for Oscar Grant. Akinmusire's reading of his poem is thus an improvisation to Brown's drum solo. His use of space between words and phrases, the subtle drama of his monotone voice, result from knowing in advance where drummer Justin Brown switches to drumsticks from hand drumming. Thus Akinmusire knew where the drum solo climax occurs when he states the most humanizing words of the poem: "Don't shoot!" and "I am you!"

Akinmusire's voice is treated with vocal effects throughout the recording. His

voice is the sonic representation of disembodiment, which portrays the haunting phantasmagoria of Oscar Grant. This composition provides an interesting contrast between Brown's asymmetrically, vibrant drumming and the (mostly) dispassionate reading voice of Akinmusire. The first phrase, "My name is Oscar", begins at fifteen seconds. Akinmusire states this introductory line in monotone fashion. The rhythm of the phrase is composed of a short sixteenth note beamed to an eighth for "my name," then space followed by an eighth and two sixteenths intoning "is Oscar. The words "Fruitvale," "human," "apology," and remaining phrases—are stated separately, "listed" for dramatic effect, or stated as a nonlinear list of signifiers related to the events surrounding the killing of Oscar Grant.

Such reactions from Bart transit system riders to events surround the killing, which one might view on YouTube, do not appear on Akinmusire's representation. His Oscar Grant is a lone voice, an eerie orator, he eulogizes Grant in fragmentary declarations. Complex hand drumming continues with the drummer's left foot keeping a quarter-note beat. Akinmusire's monotone voice is displayed here in a series of rhythmic divisions that include quarters, sixteenths, eighths and eighth triplets. While the hand drumming of Brown becomes more complex, through increased rhythmic interplay between the snare drum and the toms, Akinmusire's voice remains stealthily subtle in contrast. Akinmusire creates dramatic effect by separating syllables and drawing out phrases. For example, at 1: 46, police officer Johannes Mehserle's name is divided defiantly and mockingly into three rhythmic syllables. The arc of the phrase is in stark contrast to the previous monotone statements. At 2:39 the word "live" is elongated for dramatic effect in response to the increased velocity and cymbal crashes of the drummer.

Another strategy of Akinmusire's musical resistance are the use of pointillistic speech. Where Brown has switched to sticks (at aforementioned 2:00 and 2:09), changing the texture, speed and pitch of his solo, Akinmusire waits for the barrage of cymbal crashes and rapid succession of sixteenths before saying "I am You!" and more dramatically, "Don't Shoot!."

The last effect of this duo performance is the layered echo of Akinmusire's initial statement, "My Name Is Oscar." To emphasize, Akinmusire places this echo effect over his voice just as the drums fade out with decrescendo cymbal reverberation.

Akinmusire's tribute to Oscar Grant, while a clear protest against police brutality, is also a performance of social death. The semiotics of that representation of social death lie in the sonic representation of disembodiment through treated-voice speaking the litany of keywords central to the story of Grant's public execution, and the layered reverberation of the void, the double consciousness. In stating that his name is Oscar, that he views himself as a potential candidate for state murder as well, Akinmusire connects himself to the larger movement against police violence by taking the position of the slain. As Wilderson has said, black men magnetize bullets (2010). The listener is asked to connect Akinmusire's seemingly random out-of-sync phrases into a story. This presentation is similar to a chanting ritual with sacred drumming. Akinmusire's ghostly representation of Oscar asks the listener to imagine Grant as having the same humanity as those most valued in society. "I am you!" and "we are the same" are poetic declarations true in the abstract, but here I agree with Wilderson, that the evidence fails to qualify blacks as human. We are perhaps reminded through this representation of Oscar

Grant, that his ghostly plea is for recognition of social life. No exit strategy for Oscar Grant, or those like him, exists in this life; only an inescapable deceptive cadence. Akinmusire's musical material tells us that this performance of social death is not just a protest against police brutality. Through his musical strategies of resistance, Grant is eulogized in an artistic and resistance portrayal.

"My Name Is Oscar" is about resistance to police brutality, not just against black folks—who are statistically disproportionately effected by police brutality—but resistance to police brutality against anyone. Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of people of other races, genders, age groups, and sexual preferences, have protested against what they likely believed was Oakland police violence on the first day of 2009. While the racial composition of protesters indicates that police violence is not simply a black male issue, but a human rights issue, the statistics bear out that black life is representative of social death. As Wilderson argues, "I submit that death of the black body is (a) foundational to the life of American civil society (just as it is to the drama of value... and (b) foundational to the fantasy space of desires which underwrite the industrialist's hegemony..." (Wilderson 2003, 233). Akinmusire's "My Name Is Oscar" defeats the bar lines in a strategic performance that represents the ontological space outside of humanity, where Grant lived.

Table 4.1. Mapping Fragmentary, Poetic Resistance in My Name Is Oscar

Time of verse Launching	*Spoken Word(s)*	*Drumming Evolution*	*Vocal Dynamics & Approximate Rhythm*
0:15	my name is Oscar	hand drumming with quarter note cymbal	monotone, mezzo piano
0:38	Fruitvale	Hand drumming, ride cymbal crash	staccato (sixteenth note beamed to an eight)
0:50	Human	Hand drumming with quarter note cymbal	monotone eighth notes/piano
1:07	Apology	Hand drumming/ with quarter note cymbal and tom drum	monotone/ eight note and one grouping of eighth note triplets/ piano
1:22	nineteen days	hand drumming with quarter note cymbal	monotone Two quarters and a half note/ piano
1:27	Inauguration [Obama 2009]	Hand drumming begins to intensify	Monotone/ four sixteenth notes and a quarter note/ piano
1:36-1:37	my name is Oscar	Hand drumming continues to intensify	Sentence drawn out for dramatic effect. There is a space between "name" and "Oscar"
1:46	Meh-ser-le	Asymmetrical Interplay between drums is increased	calls out police officers name defiantly & mockingly/ slightly higher pitch range
2:00	I Am You!	After some space, switches to drumsticks/ two cymbal crashes after spoken word	Vocal intensity and speed increases. States in a declarative fashion/ higher pitch range
2:09	Don't Shoot!	Barrage of cymbal crashes in higher pitch range	More vocal drama and intensity/ pointillistic enunciation with drama
2:27	Oakland	Fury of cymbal crashes continues	Stated with defiance and pride in the city
2:39	Live…	Increased velocity of cymbal crashes mixed with snare drums	Elongated, dramatic phrasing
2:52	my name…is Oscar	Speed, volume and intensity of drumming climax	Stated louder and more defiantly, but legato this time
3:17	we are the same	Drumming still intense but begins to dissipate	Even sixteenth notes in declarative style
3:23	my name… is Oscar…I am… Grant…I grant	Drums fade out quickly with cymbal reverberation	Akinmusire's voice trails off with, layered echo effect

Table 4.2 Intervallic Configurations in Ambrose Akinmusire's Improvisation on *Confessions To My Unborn Daughter*

Phrase Number	Notes in Phrase	Chord(s)	Intervallic Permutations	Significance of Permutation
1	B, G, D	Emin	min6th to P5th	Intro to large interval motif
2	A, F♯, D	Emin	M6th to m6th	Motif continues
3	G, F♯, B	Emin	M 7th to m 6th	Motif continues
4	A, G, F♯	Emin	M7th to M7th	Vibrato emphasis on F♯
5	E, D, G, A, B, A	Emin	m 7th, P5, M2, 9th, M2	
6	A, D	Emin	Nineteenth	Shortest phrase and largest interval
7	D, E, B, A (with vibrato)	Emin	M2 to P5 To M2	Phrases begin to pivot on D, E
8	D, E, B, A	Emin	repeated	Phrase repeated for emphasis
9	D,E, A, B♭, A, G,	Emin/A	MA2, P4, m2, m2, MA2	Variation on phrase 7
10	D, E, B♭, C, D, ♭D	Emin/A	MA2, Tri-tone, MA2, m2, m2	end of phrase goes in different direction for the first time
11	D,E, A, B♭, A, G	Emin	M2, P4, m2, m2, M2	Repetition of phrase 9
12	D, E, E, D	Emin	M2, P8, M2	Variation on phrase 7 through octave displacement
13	D, E, B♭, C, B ♭, A♭	Emin	M2, Tri-tone, M2, M2, M2	Variation on phrase suggests bitonality

Table 4.2 Intervallic Configurations Continued

14	G, A, A, B, ♭ A, G,	Cmaj	M2, P8, m2, m2, M2	Variation on Phrase 9
15	D, A, B ♭ , A, G, G, ♯ G ♯, G ♯, B ♭, A ♭ , G, A, ♭ G, E, F, E, D, G, F ♯ F , E	Cmaj/ Emaj	P5, m2, m2, M2, m2, P8, P8, M2, M2,m2, m2,m2, M6, m2, m2, M2, P5, m2, m2, m2	Longest phrase that stretches over 2 chords in contrasting section
16	E, F, E, D, A, A ♭ , G, E, A, B	Cmaj	m2, m2, M2, P4, m2, m2, m3, P4, MA2	Chromaticism in the low trumpet range
17	E, E, ♭ D, C, B/G, A, A, ♭ G, D, E, B	Emaj	m2, m2, M2, m2	Phrase split between high and low ranges of trumpet
18	G, F, E, F, G, A ♭ A	Cmaj	M2, m2, m2, M2, m2, m2	
19	A, A ♭ , G, B ♭ , G, A ♭ , D	Emaj	m2, m2, m3, m3, m2, Tri-tone	Sudden shift to lower register contrasts previous phrase
20	B, ♭ A, ♭ G, B ♭	Emaj		Short 4 note phrase played again in higher range

Table 4.2 Intervallic Configurations Continued

21	B ♭ , A ♭ , G, B ♭ , B, A, ♭ B ♭ , D	Emin	M2, m2, m3	Shift to lower range
22	A, A ♭ , G, A	Emin	m2, m2, M2	Continuation of 4 note permutation idea
23	A, B ♭ , B ♭ , E, B, B ♭ D, A, A ♭ , D, F, A, ♭ G, E, C♯, F	Emin	m2, Tri-tone, P4, m2, M3. P4, m2, Tri-tone, m3, m3, m2, m3, m3, M3	This series of improvised permutations has 2 tritones between B ♭ and E and A ♭ to D. Momentary emphasis on tri-tone. Second longest phrase after phrase 15
24	A, G, F, E, F, G, B ♭ , A ♭ , G, A ♭	Emin	M2, M2, m2, m2, M2, m3, M2, m2, m2	Sudden shift to higher register again
25	A ♭ G, A ♭ , C, E ♭ , C, F, G, E, C, B	Emin	m2, m2, M3, m3, m3, P4, M2, m3, M3, m2	
26	B ♭ , A, G, B, E, E, D, A, B ♭ , A, G, D	Emin	m2, M2, M3, P5, Unison, M2, P5, m2, m2, M2, P5	Phrase has the most blues sensibility . Vibrato on last note D of phrase

Table 4.2 Intervallic Configurations Continued

27	F♯	Emin	No intervals except in the microtones located in the half-valving	Permutation is in the faint notes that result from half valve. This blurred half valve signals end of an improvisation cycle
28	A, A (octave higher) F, C, E, E, F♯ G, D, D♭, B♭ ,vibrated A , D♭, A♭ D♭	Emin	P8, M6, Tritone, M3, P8, M2, m2, m2,P5, M7, m6, octave displacement, P5, P4, octave displacement	wide leap motif brought back. Wide leap motifs played in single phrase
29	A♭, G, B♭, B, A ♭, G	Emin	m2, M3, M2, M2, M3,M2, M2, repeated M3, m2, m2, m2	Notes B, A, G, are repeated twice in this permutation
30	G,A, D, E	Emin	M2, P4, M2	Sudden shift to lower register
31	E, B♭, G, A	Emin	Tritone, m3, m2	Phrase suddenly shifts to higher register

Chapter 5:

Crossing Cinematic Bar Lines: T-Pains' "Can't Believe It"

Imagination is a magic carpet / upon which we may soar
To distant lands and climes /And even go
Beyond the moon
To any planet in the sky /If we came from
Nowhere here
Why can't we go somewhere there?[77]

In the Chapter 4, I explored how resistance and agency through the interpretation of social death are manifested in improvisation. Artistic representations of social death are revealed not only in jazz composition and improvisation. We can also locate these portrayals in music videos, even when others mitigate these videos outside the sphere of social death. While my study up until now has used data from musical composition and improvisation, I look at a different set of data in this chapter to discover how visual images represent the social death of blackness. How do Hip Hop artists—through the music video, and in a profit-oriented music business—defeat the bar lines? While unknowingly or willfully supporting the proliferation of stereotypes or archetypes, how do black male musicians subvert dominant representations of black masculinity in the visual culture of music videos, to construct powerful representations of black male subjectivity often through portrayals of fantasy and realism?

In this chapter, I argue that the ontological position—or rather the lack of an ontological position—is represented in the music videos of hip-hop through strategies of

[77] Sun Ra, quoted from his song "Imagination" (as cited in Szwed 1997, 141).

resistance to black stereotypes. The music video allows the expression of black bodies in alternate realities that amount to reterritorialization of blackness—through artists' CGI representation, in virtual spaces. Recent portrayals of blacks in the American film industry continue to portray them as less than human, or humans with what Wilderson would call "borrowed institutionality" (Wilderson 2010). African Americans are affected by what they see onscreen, and how art imitates life. Distinguished black male professors like Guy Ramsey have not shied away from speaking out against such images and the racial profiling influenced by them. As Ramsey explains on his Dr. Guy's MusiQology blog, "Race and racism impact my life in particular ways, and music scholarship generally avoids direct confrontation with some of the uglier facts of human nature. But 'it' must be acknowledged. Much of music history scholarship has tended toward ruminations on the beautiful" (Ramsey 2013).

The recent movie *End of Watch* (2012) depicts many instances of blacks as nonhuman. Filmed in documentary style by director David Ayer, the film features two vigilante, Los Angeles police officers, one a white male, ex-Marine (played by Jake Gyllenhaal), and the other his Latino partner (played by Michael Peña). The opening scene features Gyllenhaal narrating a voiceover about what it means to be a police officer as the two chase two black suspects through the streets of Los Angeles. Once the "inevitable" confrontation occurs and a shooting match ensues, the officers kill the black subjects in perfunctory fashion. Shot down like enemies in a video game, the black men have no defining features beyond their physicality and actions. (This depiction has long been a cinematic strategy to show violent black males as target practice.) Later in the film, the officers get a call to a South-Central Los Angeles home where a black female and

male—apparently under the influence of illegal substances—complain about their missing children. The black woman—whose eyes bulge as she speaks rapidly and incoherently—states that her children are missing, while the black male, pinned down on the couch by Glyllenhaal's character, tries to silence her, stating that the children are with their grandmother. Glyllenhaal conducts a search of the house and finds the two children, one a baby, the other a toddler—mouths and limbs bound with duct tape—in the closet. Glyllenhaal's character rescues the children from the degradation and insanity of the black adults. The narrative and the cinematic strategies here picture blacks as agents of inhuman acts, binding their children, then "forgetting" and perhaps lying about their whereabouts.

Other recent films have continued to use various strategies, ostensibly to give black males agency, only to reinforce depictions of their nonhumanity. *Django Unchained,* Quentin Tarantino's modern-day Western gives agency to an enslaved black named Django—played by Jamie Foxx—by placing him in a pupil role as a rescued slave with a natural prowess for violence but less intellectual attributes than his paternalistic teacher German-born bounty hunter, Dr. King Schultz, played by Christoph Waltz. Schultz rescues Foxx's character from two white slave traders in the darkness of the night, only to use him to find the Brittle Brothers. Enslaved again by Waltz, who "apologetically" agrees to give Django his freedom (and help him find his enslaved wife), once led to the Brittle Brothers bounty—Django remains the property of white men even when freed from worse conditions. Tarantino gives borrowed agency to the enslaved Django character through the tutelage of the German bounty hunter, who is depicted as refined, educated, and articulate, and, eventually, a vengeful and violent man. Agency is

given to Django through this borrowed and real humanity of the immigrant and, again, through vengeful violence against the white race.

Upon the offer from Schultz to join in finding the Brittle brothers—and his wife––through violence, Django remarks, "Kill white people and get paid for it, what's not to like?" Tarantino may be attempting to rescue the black male from common portrayals of black males as subservient, docile, and inarticulate in the history of American film. This attempt, however, only reconfirms a lack of humaneness through committing inhumane acts.

These two cinematic cases—one that confirms the inhumanity of South Central blacks by the portrayals of their inhumanity, in contradistinction to the LAPD, and the other an attempt to give humanity and agency to the enslaved Django through European guidance and vengeful violence—reanimate and revise tropes about blacks as inhuman in the American cinematic history.

Alternative Images in Alternative Spaces

In response to these confining visual tropes, I move to another field to ask how black musicians have defeated the bar lines by creating alternative images in alternative spaces in response to the perpetuation of archetypes? The guiding discussion, formed in terms of the sonic and visual semiotics of T-Pain's music video "Can't Believe It," asks the comparative question, How is the lack of black ontological positions represented through cinematic and musical strategies of resistance?

Hip Hop singer and rapper "T-Pain," (Faheem Najm), was born June 30th, 1985 and raised in Tallahassee, Florida. The "T" of "T-Pain" stands for a signifier of

Tallahassee, and the "Pain" part of this stage moniker signifies the putative pain he suffered while growing up in southern Florida. T-Pain is an industry phenomenon due to his imaginative use of pitch correction plug-in software, or Auto-tune, to improvise and to create various sonic textures, which musically signify on his own musical gestures as well as the socially shared music culture of black music. These techniques and commentary have put T-Pain at the forefront of hip-hop culture. His videos are important black texts constituted of iconic signs that center around black male agency through contemporary, mythological, representations of social death. These signs are iconic representations, signifyin (g) on alternative realities. Meanings are never fixed and one cannot be certain of T-Pain's meanings, musical or otherwise, in his videos. Thus interpretations of his works are important as they provoke questions about, for instance, what representations of T-Pain's body might suggest regarding notions of black music culture linked with constructions or representations of black masculinity. T-Pain's "Can't Believe It" music video exemplifies a wider, unfixed practice of how black bodies are represented in visual media. Before analyzing the images, I first examine the pitch and rhythm scheme from which images were choreographed.

The Sound of Racial Identity and Auto-tune

T-Pain uses Auto-tune pitch-correction software in ways that defy its original intentions for usage.[78] How he uses the software suggests how he is thinking about sound

[78] Antares Auto-Tune, invented by Dr. Andy Hildebrand, is a software plug-in designed for use in both studio and live settings to correct out-of-tune or wavering pitches in a singer's performance. Using sophisticated analytical and algorithmic processing techniques, Auto-Tune compares a vocal performance in real time to a user-specified

and how that sound reflects his racial imagination. Before T-Pain's innovative use of Auto-tune, pitch-correction software was predominantly used in the popular music industry to correct out-of-tune vocal notes. T-Pain uses Auto-tune instead for creating desired sound affects that stem from his musical imagination. We can connect T-Pain's reinvention of musical tools to a long list of musicians who reinvented instrumental sound on instruments associated with other American and European historical and performance traditions. The various trumpet sounds of Miles Davis or the pianism of Thelonious Monk, for example, illustrate sonic reinvention of instruments according to the cultural traditions associated with Afro-diasporic music. In broader terms, instruments once used to represent pastoral scenes of a European countryside have been transformed through percussive embouchures, innovative breath control and fingering technique into the sounds that represent the tribulations of Harlem urbanites. Socially marginalized players who evolved from communities of different musical values, and thus different musical priorities, transformed traditional European instrumental technology into instruments that reflected their imaginations. Marginalization of black musicians has kept their cultural production from being fully commoditized. Amiri Baraka explains that even in the midst of music as commodity business, black musicians retain autonomy in musical expression based on their existence on the outskirts of what Afro-pessimist scholar Frank Wilderson's calls "civil society" (2010):

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scale, in most cases corresponding to the key of the composition. If the singer is either flat or sharp in relationship to a given target note, then pitch correction is applied according to several smoothing variables in the software. If the singer is singing at the correct pitch, no automated correction occurs. T-Pain's "brand" is no longer associated with Antares Auto-tune and since 2011 has launched his own production style software, *The T-Pain Effect*, with iZotope (Brown 2011).

> Afro-American music, because of its exclusion as a social product yet ultimate exploitation as a commercial object, could influence that whole of the musical (and social and aesthetic) culture of the U.S. and even be subjected to mind-boggling dilutions and obscene distortions; yet the source, the Afro-American people, was spared the full "embrace" of commercial American absorption because of their marginalized existence as Americans. This is reflected, as well, in the music, which is an expression of Afro-American life, hence a register itself of the pain and struggle that it exists as the expression of, as that beauty continuing to exist and be seen even more stunningly because of the ugliness, which surrounds and limits it." (Baraka 2002, 261)

To be sure, while T-Pain is one of the most commercially successful popular musicians in the music business , and while his music and representations support sexism and other stereotypes, his musical innovation and cinematic representations with Auto-tune represents the otherworldly marginality that he will never escape. From the vantage point of Afro-pessimism, T-Pain's musical and visual representations are the signs of his lack of human value defined in relation to humanity represented by whites. T-Pain's popularity was based on his creative reinvention of Auto-tune software for his own purposes, which were based on the natural voice and the saxophone. As T-Pain states, "My dad always told me that anyone's voice is just another instrument added to the music... I got a lot of influence from [the 60s era] and I thought I might as well just turn my voice into a saxophone" (quoted in http://mashable.com/2011/12/06/t-pain-autotune/ Sniderman 2011). T-Pain's usage of Auto-tune technology to create a sound that reflects 40-year-old production values has both been criticized by rapper/business mogul Jay-Z in his song, "Death of Auto-tune" (2009), and by other singers like Raphael Saadiq. Yet, since the 20th century, most recordings have been treated or enhanced in some musico-technological way. In fact, the rather old-fashioned idea that the recording process

primarily captures the natural (black) voice, or acoustic instrumental sound, has been a tenuous argument since the genesis of the recording process. Timothy Warner explains:

> The view that audio technology simply seeks to literally "record" the acoustic reality of traditional musical activity as transparently as possible is not only untenable, but also was hardly the case at the dawn of recorded music. The levels of sonic manipulation of modern popular music recordings are not only very high, but also completely fly in the face of traditional musical activities. Virgil Moorefield points out that, for popular music, in the last 50 years 'recordings metaphor has shifted from one of the "illusion of reality" (mimetic space) to the "reality of illusion" (a virtual world in which everything is possible). In other words, all popular music recordings could be analyzed as technological determined artifacts, even though some might appear to be more or less the result of technological intervention and manipulation than others. (Warner 2009, 135)

Citing the late Amy Winehouse as an example of someone who achieved an older sound on *Back To Black* (2006), T-Pain talks about being influenced by the sound of older recordings. T-Pain bends modern technology to reflect the old sound of black cultural priorities in crooners like Sam Cooke, compared to the sound of rap songs like Ice Cube's "Gangster Rap Made Me Do It." Tricia Rose has argued that rap producers used sampling as a musical time machine to access and reframe in the present sounds produced by black artists from the 1970s (Rose 1994). In this process black cultural priorities in sound are continually revised and expanded to adapt to modern social conditions from a black perspective; through his work with Auto-tune, T-Pain fits within this tradition of sonic revision. One may argue (as a fellow musicologist once did) that T-Pain's Auto-tuned voice, since it is mediated by technology, is liberated from historical constructions of the black male voice and thus free from racial sound. However, T-Pain "credits the core of his music and lyric style

to R. Kelley and Cee Lo Green, two R&B artists known for their expressive—and unfiltered—voices" (Sniderman 2011). This shows further evidence that amid the formidable technological apparati of the studio, the goal is still to sound racially "natural" or "authentic."

The reverb on T-Pain's Auto-tune voice is a simultaneous, sonic representation of post-humanity and social death; a rhythmic double consciousness represented by the spaciousness in his sound (which you will discuss below? –as this isn't clear what you mean by spaciousness). Similarly, guitarist and vocalist Lead Belly often draws out the metallic grain in his voice by bending notes to create melodic, rhythmic and harmonic interest. Thus, T-Pain's version of black sound is highlighted at the same rate his black voice is mediated; auto-tune is a means not an end. T-Pain explains:

> I'm leaning more towards old school Neve and TubeTech preamps and tube compressors…I think that stuff just sounds better. I was amazed at how they made Amy Winehouse's Back to Black sound like it was made in the Fifties, and I think a lot of that had to do with the old school hardware they used when making the album. There was so much wetness and girth on that whole album…I feel like my sound comes from a similar place, like old crooners like Sam Cooke or even the old Stevie Wonder stuff. I want to go towards that sound, so you need the right hardware to do that. You can't just get a bunch of plug-ins and make that happen. You have to record to tape and use old tube hardware. That's what's going on my new album, and that's what I'm putting in my studio right now. I'm still using pitch correction software, but I always do one song without it just to let people know that I'm not only about that. People think that I have hits just because of pitch correction, so I like to let them know I can still write a song and perform the music. (n.a., http://gc.guitarcenter.com/interview/t-pain/)

Rhythmic Representation of Fantasy and Space in an 8-Bar Phrase

One of the first things one might notice while listening to "Can't Believe It" (2008) is the subtlety of the rhythm track. The rubato opening acts as an ethereal prelude, the arpeggiated keyboard sound combined with guitar evokes a mystical sonic backdrop. This brief, nonmetric, 21-second prelude prepares the listener for the repetitive harmonic sequence, which will soon follow, forming the basis for T-Pain's Auto-tune panegyric. Rhythm is not foregrounded in this song; no ostinato heavy bass line is used to outline the pulse. T-Pain's musical priorities revolve around creating a sound of fantasy and magic, achieved through subtlety in rhythm and bass lines. Rappers in the past have defeated the bar lines by pushing the bass sound far into the distortion zone, making the bass drum the loudest sound on the record, and purposely bleeding the bass sound into the other tracks (Rose 1994, 77). The lack of prominence in the rhythm track of "Can't Believe It" means that T-Pain prioritizes other musical aspects of the song, which are emphasized to reflect the message of disbelief and fantasy. What adds to this feeling of fantasy is a high-pitched, synthesized descending pentatonic melody that occurs at the beginning of every four-bar phrase. Such musical aspects given priority in the mix are T-Pain's voice and the auto-tuned sound.

In the repetitive 8-bar rhythmic scheme of "Can't Believe It," T-Pain samples a finger-snapping sound as well as a bass drum to create a feeling of space through the placement of beats. Creating a contrast in ranges, the finger-snapping is high-pitched whereas the sampled bass drum is lower. The sample of the finger-snapping occurs, without variation, on beats two and four. The interesting divisions of rhythms, and the key to the sound of spaciousness in the song, happen in the bass drum.

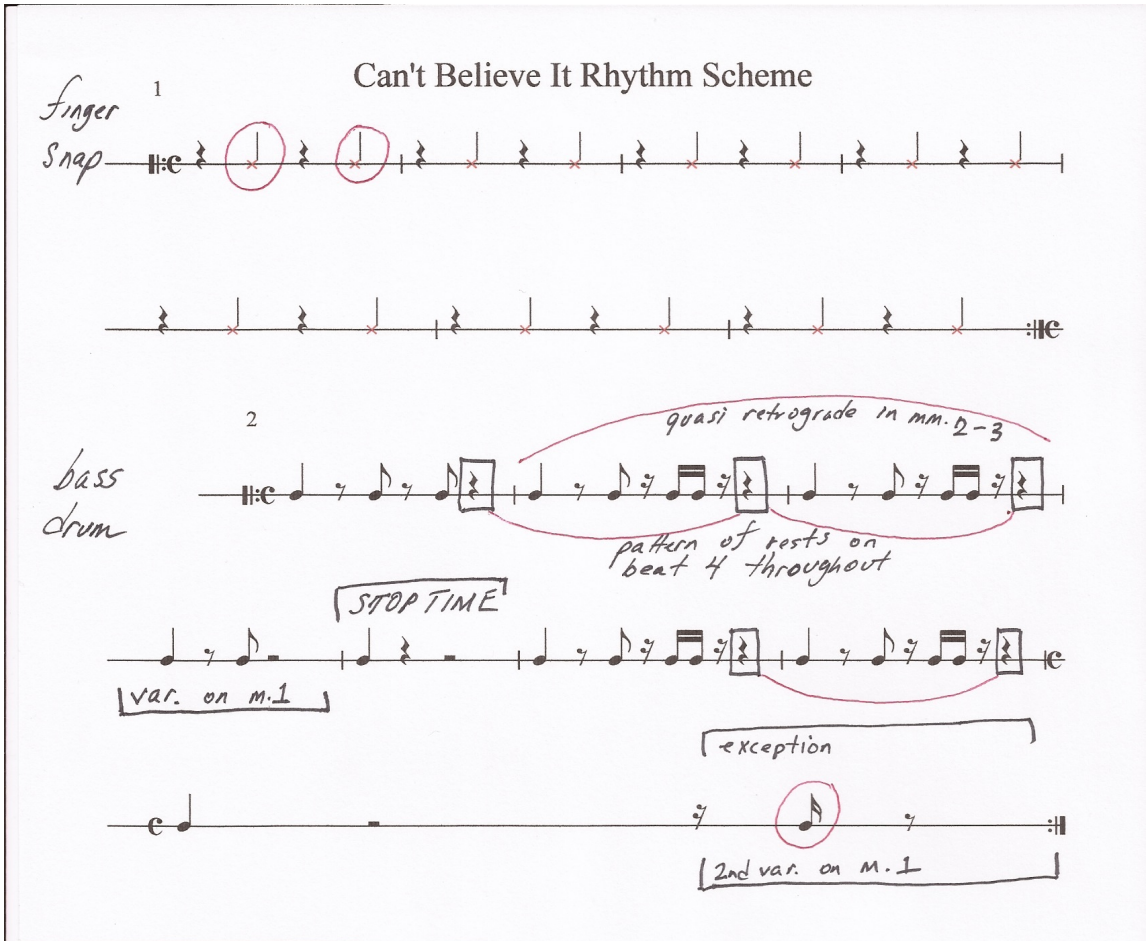

Illustration 5.1. Rhythm Scheme in T-Pain's "Can't Believe It" (2008)

With the exception of the last beat in bar 8, T-Pain emphasizes a feeling of space and subtle tension by leaving a rest on the fourth beat in seven out of the eight bars. The two sixteenth notes occurring in the middle of mm. 2-3 and 6-7 emphasize the space left on beat four. By deliberately avoiding rhythm on beat four—for the most of the eight bar

phrase—the sixteenth notes of beat three is emphasized as well as the first beat. Additionally, the otherwise repetition rhythms remain interesting due to the discombobulating mirror reflection between the rhythms of bars two and three, creating a quasi-retrograde inversion. It is not a full retrograde inversion because of the variations on measure one in bar four. The off-beat sixteenth note on beat four of measure 8 also keeps the repetitive rhythm interesting through emphasizing beat one. In the fifth bar—the beginning of the second half of the 8-bar phrase—this stop time creates space in the form and allows T-Pain to create emphasis on the words and the descending melodic figure that occurs at the beginning of every four-bar phrase. The prominence of the verbal text is essential here and the beats are designed to accompany, not dominate, the text. T-Pain's calculated instability creates a feeling of suspension in time. This feeling of chronological musical suspension not only reads as harmonic interest here but also as evidence of a sonic performance of resistance to constrictions and the restrains of the expectation of a steady, regulated beat.

I think his music video was his vision... after taking a pound a meth…

YouTube comment from ballinpc223

Performance of Fantasy and Social Death

The figure of T-Pain represented in his "Can't Believe It" video represents magical agency in the way he conjures objects and events. This award-winning music video was created with computer-generated imagery by the *design* and live-action directing company Syndrome Studio, Design and Direction, in conjunction with T-Pain. When I contacted Syndrome to see how much artistic input T-Pain may have had in the representations of himself, I was told that the information I wanted was not available, nor was I allowed to speak with the design team.[79] Yet from *Syndrome*'s own statements, T-Pain had a significant influence on the kind of images he wanted to see. Syndrome explains:

> The vibe and energy clicked very naturally between Pain and ourselves and that energy spilled all over these videos. It's one thing to have an artist stand in front of a green screen and perform, but when they interact and play off of what the treatment calls for, that interaction takes it to another level by adding the emotion and soul. T-Pain really went hard with his performances and got what we were going for ultimately being the key ingredient to bringing the concepts to fruition (quoted from http://trustcollective.com/portfolio/content/robotfilms_tpain.htm).

This description of the collaboration indicates that T-Pain realized Syndrome's ideas rather than Syndrome acting as a conduit for the artist's racial imagination. To be sure, however, Syndrome was inspired by the lyrical content, a theme of international travel, and the Auto-tune sound.

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[79] Robin Frank, interview, March 5, 2013.

T-Pain brought the nonhuman discourse and sound: the embodiment of social death. His magical agency is also represented in his transports—himself and his love-object—through virtual space to locations around the world. In this song T-Pain boasts the various places he can take his love-object. He sings, and through time-travel transports his love-object to a cabin in Aspen, Colorado, a condo in Toronto, a mansion in "Wiscansen" and a beach in Costa Rica. One could very well ask if T-Pain's notion of heterosexual black masculinity is embedded in representations of African American women as pliant when travel and wealth are offered. Virtual travel to various locations around the world, some more exotic than others, represents his ability break through boundaries that blacks face in quotidian life. What makes this song a fantasy song is its intended appeal to fans of T-Pain who likely have no discretionary income for travel or in some cases, may never have traveled out of their urban or rural environment.

"Can't Believe It" is filmed to simultaneously represent two types of desire, Desire in the form of new infatuation, and poverty representing the desire to break free of poverty-induced geographical limitations. In a *Guitar Center* interview, T-Pain indicated that the songs he writes and the images he produces are designed to inspire factions of his audience who cannot travel:

> If you want to reach the world…you have to see what the world is going through and talk about it. There are plenty of songs happening out there right now. A lot of artists fail to see that, and they just talk about what they are going through. It may be real to them, but a lot of other people can't relate to that. Not everybody can travel all over the world. A lot of people never leave their state, city, or even neighborhood. I like to sing about things that get people inspired, but you can only do that if you can relate to them (http://gc.guitarcenter.com/interview/t-pain/)

Indeed not everyone can travel all over the world, which is why this representation of boundless travel may appeal to an audience that desires to broaden their experience of the world beyond their immediate surroundings. It is the cinematic representation of black possibility, and unbounded creativity represented by the characters, which have access to sudden emancipation from their virtual surroundings; such meanings are what make these representations vital, important, and resistive. Yet this virtual magical agency represented in the actions of T-Pain confirms his lack of ontological position in reality. T-Pain's representations represent agency derived from an understanding of blackness that registers on the outskirts of humanity and civil society represented by whiteness.[i] In short, what appears to be agency by T-Pain, which inspires those who wish to travel, is also an artistic representation of social death.

Blacks, according to Wilderson, has an ontological position that manifests as the "grammar of suffering" due to the blacks "antihuman" status" (Wilderson 2010). Ontology is defined as the nature of being. However Wilderson defines ontology as "the capacities of power—or lack thereof—lodged in distinct and irreconcilable subject positions, e.g., "Humans and Slaves" (14). Illustrating the tension between these irreconcilable subject positions, or the Human (whites) and Slaves (blacks), Wilderson asserts that while slavery existed for other people, the institution of slavery renders blacks "always already void of relationality" to society (18). Blacks are "socially dead" to the rest of the world. As discussed in Chapter 2, social death is based on Wilderson's distinction between the experience of slavery by whites—who still had human status while enslaved—and the ontological position of slavery for blacks. Moreover, the perpetual outsider-ness that is blackness is the ontological yardstick by which humanity

"establishes, maintains, and renews its coherence, its corporeal integrity" (18). Ideas of the white slave's emancipation were worked out in their fantasies about the slave. Wilderson asserts, that the Enlightenment's discourse on humanism was theorized in comparison to the black slave, which represented the anti-human (19). The discourses on class conflict between the "workers and the bosses," "the modern discourses" of post colonialism, Marxism, feminism, among others, could not have existed without slavery (19-20). Slavery as a concept helped early Americans work through their own constraints as colonial subjects, yet these discourses never applied to liberating the Black slave (21). In other words, humanity—which Wilderson argues is tantamount to Whiteness and civil society—is defined by the nothingness that is Blackness. British scholar on post-humanity, Kodwo Eshun, has stated that African Americans should show no allegiance to the sign of the human. Citing, for example, the work of Sun Ra, Rammelzee, and Mad Mike, Eshun argues that these musicians avoided trying to make work that reflected what he calls "a really pointless and treacherous category": the category of the human (1998, 192). Eshun explains:

> And there 's the key thing which drew me into all this: the idea of alien abduction, the idea of slavery as an alien abduction which means that we've all been living in an alien-nation since the 18th century. And I definitely agree with that, I definitely use that a lot. The mutation of African male and female slaves in the 18th century into what became negro, and into the entire series of humans that were designed in America. That whole process , the key thing behind it all is that in America none of these humans were designated human. (Eshun 1998, 193)

Thus the definition of humanity is indelibly linked to the counter position of blacks as emblematic of the antithetical sign of the anti-human. In his display of magic T-Pain represents post-humanity as connected with blackness.

Alexander Weheliye states that New World black subjects have privileged access to artistic representations of post-humanity because America's institutions denied blacks the status of humanity for centuries (Weheliye 2002, 29). As Weheliye argues, "The literal dehumanization of black people through chattel slavery as well as the legal, political, anthropological, scientific, economic, and cultural forces supporting and enforcing this system afforded black subjects no easy passage to the sign of the human" (24).[80] Arguing that Katherine Hayles's notion of post-humanity is based on white liberal conceptions of selfhood, exemplified in the popular television show the *Bionic Man* (played by Lee Majors), Weheliye argues that these representations of selfhood are not available to blacks. If there is no universal humanism, there can be no universal post humanism. Weheliye explains, "Certainly New World black subjects can not inhabit this version of selfhood in quite the same manner as the 'white boys' of Hayles canon due to slavery, colonialism, racism, and segregation since these forces render the very idea that one could be "free from the will of others" null and void (Weheliye 2002, 24). T-Pain's CGI representation of selfhood extends from historical performances of resistance by invisible men and women, blacks who parceled agency while operating within the dehumanizing masks of minstrelsy.

Minstrel movements were popular at world expositions such as the 1893 Chicago World Exposition. Blacks were excluded from participation in such expositions and their protests from exclusion resulted in minstrel-inspired white propaganda that manifested in

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[80] This is where Weheliye and Wilderson part conceptual company. Weheliye argues that blacks have made it to the sign of the human but Wilderson argues that institutions that extend from historical institutions of slavery still render the black a slave, and thus inhuman.

caricatures posted in various well-known periodicals, souvenir booklets, and postcards, all of them ridiculing blacks. Black males, who had a financial investment in promoting the black caricature, often composed Coon songs with lyrics that described blacks as stupid, lazy, chronically inebriated, oversexed and violent (Robinson 2007, 141). Cedric Robinson explains:

> By the end of the nineteenth century, the draft of a new, that is, scientific, racial regime had been presented to the public through worlds fairs, museums, popular science magazines, and other forms of public instruction and amusement. Older forms of racial construal, like the blackface minstrel show, still survived, but they were sovereign over an earlier and more vulgar representation of the racialized other. Located on this same stream of culture were the new industry of postcards and the older conduits like dime museums, amusement parks, children's toys, books, illustrated magazines, and the like. On the other hand, race science could command the resources of the state and its auxiliaries, which, in turn, collaborated with the dominant sectors of American capital. (Robinson 2007, 136)

However, while some blacks collaborated with such caricatures, many blacks minstrels resisted the very depictions they recreated.

Combatting Racist Representations

The first indications of racial resistance to minstrelsy were in the titles of minstrel shows. "Creole," "Octoroons," and "Oriental America" were names of shows that featured mulatto women. These titles were less about the mulatto characters and more about challenging white supremacy through drawing attention to the fallacy in the notion of racial purity in blacks and whites. To be sure, black minstrels had an investment in tearing down constructs of racial purity that upheld stereotypes, such as Aunt Jemima or Mammy, which also reinforced the real practice of lynching blacks (Robinson 2007,

155). Moreover, a black minstrel performing in whiteface in such shows as *A Trip to Coontown* was also considered a revolutionary act "because it emerged without preconceived signifiers; nothing in the cultural system of racial signs in America at that time prepared white audiences to 'gaze' at Cole's newly devised racial construct" (Krasner (1996), as quoted in Robinson 2007, 274)[81] This act of putting on whiteface make-up was about challenging racial representation and disrupting the practice of imitating blacks (Robinson 2007, 153). In the work of black minstrels, for example, the play *In Dahomey* ([year]), the continent of Africa is reconstructed (in the dialogue of actors George Walker and Bert Williams) as a glorious empire, with beautiful places. Ethiopia had been a symbol of racial pride because its ruler Menelik defeated the Italian empire in 1898. "Ethiopianism"—the coined term for what inspired agency and fantasy in many black minstrels, was a "symbol of home and liberation," as well as one of liberation (Robinson 2007, 159). These strategies of black minstrel resistance found their way into independent black film.

Translation of strategies of resistance into film

Visual representations of blacks in films are never arbitrary or left to chance; they represent corporate decisions of what those images are supposed to portray or signify. American film history reveals many examples of how religious organizations and industry policy have dictated which race was praised and idolized, and which degraded on the silver screen (Robinson 2007, 201). Backed by the philosophy of cultural

[81] In his article version of this chapter, Krasner reproduced a drawing of Cole as Willie Wayside.

hegemony, degrading depictions of nonwhites, or European races that were "not white enough," were enforced and policed with institutional vigor. This is why the work of black minstrels on the stage had a direct connection to depictions of resistance in early independent black film. These cinematic strategies were manifested in such visible ways as an all-black cast. Robinson argues, "By the late nineteenth century, minstrelsy had come to contain concealed resistances, gestures of opposition smuggled in and hidden by the black minstrel performers so prominent in the form. Their impact was to be reflected in a second cinema: the independent Black film or all-black-cast film (2007, 130)."

Despite a clear difference in historical circumstances, a direct correlation connects these early cinematic strategies of resistance in the work of early black filmmakers and modern-day music-video cinematic strategies of hip hop performers and producers. Representations in the work of T-Pain can be placed in the celluloid genealogy of black resistance film that extends from the subversive performances of black minstrels. In her discussion of black portraiture, Nicole Fleetwood has argued that black artists have resisted the commodification of black bodies by representing black bodies in self-portraits that are disfigured. These alternative representations of blacks, according to Fleetwood, should not be assessed within Western art history discourse but instead as resistance to that very canonical history.

> Because idealized projection and fantasy are associated with whiteness in Western discourse, black portraiture and self-portraiture function quite differently in dominant visual representation and canonical art history. Portraits of black subjects by black artists often serve as counternarratives to cultural and discursive meaning associated with blackness and black bodies. They also become locations for creating critical genealogies and archives that speak to very different audiences; many of these works play with vanity and excess. Powell argues that these portraits often included aesthetic and discursive severing, cutting, and splaying that reconstitute

> "black bodies from crude commodities and ciphers into fashionable actors performing in displays and expositions of their own making." (Powell quoted in Fleetwood 2011, 113)

Such depictions of resistance by black artists, whether in film, self portraitur or any other medium, reflect Wilderson's "grammar of suffering," which connects o the ontological position of the slave who is black.Within the context of film, this grammar of suffering, which also represents US antagonisms, "can be discerned in the cinematic strategies (lighting, camera angles, image composition, and acoustic design" in film (cite?). In his discussion of the film *Antwone Fischer*, Wilderson argues that these films with black subjects should not be simply seen within a narrative that poses a resolvable conflict (Wilderson 2010, 5). Rather films that feature blacks should be seen as functioning under an ontological and conceptual tension. Wilderson defines what he calls "the rubric of antagonism" as "irreconcilable struggle between entities, or positions, the resolution of which is not dialectical but entails the obliteration of one of the positions" (5). The position obliterated is that of the black, which necessitates that representations of blackness in music videos become liberated through transmogrification. The depictions of magic and agency in the videos of T-Pain are also intentional and represent a wellspring of images of blacks, which should be taken seriously as a reproduction of virtual agency that represents social death.

Analysis of 8 Scenes

In the following eight scenes I describe various representations of black mysticism and benign black magic that represent a virtual black humanity. The function

of T-Pain's allegory is not only linked to representations of impossible transformations; this is an allegory of social death. While many representations are problematic (those representations of his love-object might be deemed highly problematic), this video is nonetheless important in its representation of cinematic insurgency against common representations of blackness. In this representation of black post-humanity, how does T-Pain's "Can't Believe It" video function as a narrative of black resistance to codified forms of black caricature and art?

To begin with sartorial elements of the video, **"**Can't Believe It" opens with a representation of T-Pain in multiple versions of himself. Dressed in his trademark ringleader hat and white Oakley sunglasses, T-Pain's head is slightly titled down, facing to the right of the viewer. The coloristic texture of the scene's background is fused with shades of grey and violet. Appearing magically out of a swirling, amorphous white dust that rises from his right hand, T-Pain conjures a smaller version of himself. This conjuring is synchronized to a long Auto-tune sigh, first an exhalation and then an inhalation. Coordinated with this vocal expression of desire a dancing mini T-Pain sings, "she make me feel so good…better than I would by myself or … if I was with somebody else," with accompanying expressive gestures. While mini T-Pain is singing these words, the larger T-Pain figure appears stoic in comparison to the animated mini-version.

Illustration 5.2. T-Pain's Opening Conjuring Scene in "Can't Believe It"

In the backdrop of a faint circular light a silhouette of a woman appears center stage when T-Pain sings, "She make the people say yeah." The black woman emerging from the silhouette is his love-interest, also reading as his reason for disbelief at his good fortune. Changing quickly from a silhouette into an African American woman in a black miniskirt, T-Pain's object of affection walks suggestively on a celestial runway toward the viewer. Her transformation, like T-Pain's, happens out of clouds of dust fragments, although less dramatic than T-Pain's earlier manifestation in smaller form. In this sequence, we first see blue swirling rings. As a trope, these rings encircle the representation of the black female subject. The trope of the rings has multiple meanings. They remind the audience of the Thr33 Ringz theme and the T-Pain brand, they highlight

T-Pain's love-object, and they work as a segue device between the sequences of the music video. While his black female object of desire passively looks on, out of white dust, T-Pain conjures a gold antique frame. Through T-Pain's white dust, the frame erupts into a shimmering, gold, rectangular portal, which he uses to transport his love-object to seemingly random exotic locales. The notion of transforming one's experience through physical and imaginative travel has been prominent in the collective black imagination. In his book about Sun Ra, John Szwed has written on how the travel trope has historically existed in Black society through black literature and music. Szwed explains:

> Within this cosmology they are free to be transported out of the South, out of the country, out of this world. There is no necessary orthodoxy in black cosmological views, no agreed-upon astrophysics of faith, so within the same tradition… they are part of a shared vision of a black sacred cosmos, a spiritualized vision of the universe, where the pilgrim is comfortable wherever he or she may travel, but not as doomed wanderers in the endless cosmological emptiness of some other religions. This black cosmic vision is easily seen a part of the theme of travel, of journey, or exodus, of escape which dominates African-American narratives: of people who could fly back to Africa, travel in the spirit, visit or be visited by the dead; of chariots and trains to heaven, the Underground Railroad, Marcus Garvey's steamship line, Rosa Parks on the Mobile bus, freedom riders. It was a vision, which lurked distantly but stubbornly behind blues songs, which praised the technology of motion and travel…. (Szwed 1997, 134-135)

T-Pain's depictions of traveling to exotic locales with his love-object is linked with that cultural tradition of escaping ones present circumstances. Similar to Sun Ra, virtual space for T-Pain is a way "to relocate himself so as to embody all time and nature and to escape the confines and limits of life on earth" (Szwed 1997, 130).

A log cabin in Aspen, Colorado is the viewer's first destination. High on a snow-covered, sunny mountainside embraced by virtual clouds, a tree-lined multilevel log

cabin stands in exclusive and eerie isolation. Entering through a rear window adorned by transparent white curtains, the viewer is transported across a wooden table with place settings for six. Yet it becomes quickly apparent that two painted faced member of his T-Pain's entourage covertly join him and his love-interest in the log cabin behind the couch. The representations do not indicate why In this new scene the attire has also transformed, the changing of clothes with change of scene signal the new setting as well, showing a variety of black style and black wealth.

T-Pain's love interest is dressed in parachute-style white pants with a shiny red windbreaker; T-Pain has donned a black and white coat that appears to be made of exotic animal fur. He holds a cane for style. Both T-pain and his nameless love-interest are foregrounded with yellow translucent orbs that splash across their bodies, emanating from the sunlight hovering above in a linear relationship to the main subjects.

Illustration 5.3. T-Pain With Love Object in Log Cabin in Aspen

While at first glance the interior of this virtual log cabin appears to only inhabit the virtual human forms of T-Pain and his love-interest, menacing white-faced phantoms lurk and peer from behind the tan couch on the right side of the virtual room. I was only able to see these figures when I viewed the video frame by frame; with eyes trained on the central subjects, it would be easy to miss this covert symbolism. In the cabin's fireplace is a mantle adorned by a deer or antelope head. This sequence ends with the

scene enclosed in a snow globe (a snowy scene enclosed inside).

In Sequence 5 “Mansion in Wiscansan,” the viewer is immediately placed on a terrace of a multilevel mansion. T-Pain is dressed in a tangerine-colored vest, top hat, and trousers that hover at ankle length. His love-object is wearing a white dress. A hunched-down, pesky sidekick reappears on the terrace as well, but in a less covert manner.

Sequence 6 opens with T-Pain’s object of desire in front of a vertical knife-throwing table. Encircling both her and T-Pain, in front of the revolving, vertical knife-throwing table, is a circular stream of illuminated halos. There are also juggling pins and different-sized balls labeled with silver stars. T-Pain’s love-object appears on “stage” with tinsel curtains in the background, but is quickly transported away.

Continuing with the circus theme, a collage of white freak-show archetypes dance in the scene. Segregated from the rest of the characters in the video, the white circus archetypes are represented as static objects whereas the representations of T-Pain and the love-interest are animated. The images consist of red-masked, musclemen who carry chains and anchor in their teeth while holding a dumbbell, across from a scantily clad woman who also carries a cannonball in her teeth. Foregrounded in this scene is a sword-swallower in the motion of swallowing two swords, one in his right hand, another in his left. In front of this first muscleman’s right leg is the misspelled word “Aluring” in red ink, with an off-color background is framed in a circle. Despite the misspelling of the word, one gets the reference: the red-inked word in the circle is meant to associate to alluring thoughts, defined by Webster’s online dictionary as “the quality of being powerfully and mysteriously attractive or fascinating.” More representations in this sequence ensue. For example, double-headed bodies hang upside down amidst an obese

caricature of a blond woman dressed in blue and violet clothing. A two-headed, seemingly Egyptian woman stands with both hands extended in opposite directions, forearms perpendicular, flat hands perpendicular to forearms, in an archetypical pose. This Egyptian woman stands in a fire across from what appears to be a redheaded woman in a green bikini, who peers at herself in a mirror, admiring her beauty. Above her to the right side is a caricature of a grey-eyed brunette woman with a half-simian face. Directly across from her on the right side is more written text. In capital letters in black font the word "ALIVE" appears in a yellow circle. The stage recedes from the viewer while the gradations of deformity increase as the frame disappears into a cloud of smoke.

Illustration 5.4 Representations of White Otherness In Circus Theme

Sequence 7 opens up with another sartorial transformation. T-Pain is dressed in a

dark-blue fur coat that resembles a burlesque outfit, with charcoal-colored top hat wrapped in a band of dark blue, light blue, and silver around the brim. His top hat becomes a portal for a visual cacophony of circus characters that stream upward, like smoke, in interlocking figures. Contorted, digitized Asian circus acrobats do handstands, kicks and flips while two juggling, masked clowns in polkadot outfits follow them about. Amid this display are two female black-leather-clad African American dancers who, because they have no clear thematic connection to the circus theme, represent an anomaly in relation to the other characters. Immediately following this scene another appearance of T-Pain represents him dressed in his original ringmaster uniform. In the backdrop of fireworks, smoke and halos, which have combined to become a connective trope in these sequences, T-Pain sings and dances.

Illustration 5.5. T-Pain with Blue Top Hat as Portal

These transmogrifications of blackness by T-Pain and the other actors in the film suggest cinematic strategies of subverting historical racial stereotypes about black life in film. Other versions of black plasticity in music videos have predated T-Pain's work.

In her discussion of Hype Williams's direction of Busta Rhyme's music video "Gimme Some Mo" (1998), Kay Dickinson discusses how African American artists have used the music video format to challenge cinematic stereotypes about blacks:

> While they present a staggering ability to defy bodily limitations and to metamorphosize, these audio-visual ideas still maintain an aloofness within and cynicism about designated physical identity (something that becomes evident in Rhymes's incarnation in the video as a comical posturing and obviously artificially padded muscle man. However, these figures also acquire extra attributes…which when knitted into the fantastical license allowed to music video, can propel the surface of the human body somewhere else, somewhere, hopefully, beyond the confines of these pre-and post—civil rights imprisonments of African American physicality. Such limitations have been challenged for many years within African American music; namely, the ecstatic and temporary unfettering to be heard in, say, the voices of Mahalia Jackson or Aretha Franklin. However, it is doubtful that such ideas would make it onto the television screen with as much frequency were it not for the previously established power of African American music whose coattails directors like Williams catch hold of, use to ride into the visual mainstream, and then weave into innovative new patterns. Deriving from technological addition rather than narrative limitation, these televisual moments are part of a surprisingly beneficial synaesthetic strategy that is catapulting African American representation off into new and hopefully less constricted spaces—ones where more advantageous relationships between finance, music, and the moving image might possibly be achieved. (Dickinson 2007, 24)

Representations of defying bodily limitations have also been shown in the work of Ludacris, who has worked with T-Pain. "Roll Out (My Business)", a single from "Word of Mouf" (2001), is a music video by Ludacris, with its theme of anti-voyeurism, albeit in

a very public way, that contradicts the message, features a number of depictions of black male bodies that defy limitations. For example, Ludacris is shown executing boxing moves in sped-up motion while key words of the rap lyrics are splashed across the screen. Ludacris's body is deformed, with a large head and smaller body parts. Among these surreal scenes are converging frames of a pontificating Ludacris pictured driving through an urban neighborhood. Representations of materialism or black wealth include large, platinum neck chains, a handcuff pendant, a grey convertible Mercedes Benz, and a scantily clad female cook in "6-inch grey stilettos." "Get Back" (2004), also by Ludacris, features the rapper with oversized forearms he uses repeatedly to punch out opportunistic black men who are shown "craving" his wealth. The theme in "Get Back" also concerns Privacy and Personal Protectionism but through violence. Representations of black male anger against potential threats are pictured as Ludacris roams the streets, destroying property by knocking out a section of a brick building, and crushing a USPS Post Office Box, causing the mail to fly into the busy street. Ludacris's anger also chases two Labradors away. As Luda's head explodes into blue and white confetti that slowly falls into the streets, he is eventually pulled back by an unexplained force (hence "Get Back"). The grotesque caricature of Ludacris is a means to an end. Deformity represented here is showing agency derived from representations of social death. These rappers are presented in alternate realities that exist outside of mainstream representations of whiteness As Kay Dickinson remarks,

> Its means of representation and commentary are deliberately antirealist, as if to pour scorn on the project of realism ever being able to portray African American experience, and to rescue them from the often blunt unimaginativeness to which realism often adds up. Hype Williams's videos seem to campaign for the freedom to not be tied down to "keeping

> it real": for the dual privileges of fantasy and wealth, neither of which are self—deprecatingly effaced in the way he puts digital technologies to use. Williams repeatedly transforms musicians into bulbous, pulsating incarnations of themselves who bulge out of a screen that can only just contain them. At some level this is a synaesthetic extension of certain ideas that presented musically within hip hop, a genre where instrument use and voices are warped and stretched…here the power of a musical tradition is synaesthetically drawn from in order to innovate within the visual and narrative spheres, which is further buoyed along by music video's indulgence of fantasy and the self aggrandizement of its stars. (Dickinson 2007, 23)

Indeed, T-Pain's depictions of fantasy and travel extend from the sonic topography of his Auto-tuned voice. Auto-tune is the representation of alternate grains of voices that represent social marginalization even while he is in the spotlight.

At 1:32 we enter Sequence 8. On the right side of the scene, T-Pain with two open hands cast glittering smoke towards the feet of his love-object, who is encircled by blue-white light.

Illustration 5.6. T-Pain Conjuring Roller Coaster Car

With this spell, T-Pain conjures a red and yellow contraption that quickly forms into a roller coaster. Suddenly, T-Pain and the love-object are on the roller coaster, which now proceeds through a large mouth representing a portal, with swirling eyes and burgundy top hat, another representation of T-Pain. Entering through the portal on the conjured roller coaster, T-Pain and his love-object are immediately in the nexus of a metroplex with composite of urban, iconic skylines. As indicated by the visual sign above the city, this virtually-represented city is Toronto. As they travel down the unstable and slippery slopes of the roller coaster under a full moon, T-Pain sings, “She on the main stage, she make the people say yeah.” As the word “yeah” is repeatedly sung its text appears three

times, in different configurations, adjacent and free-floating to the architecture of the roller coaster. The visual text functions as a yellow and red neon billboard that emphasizes the sung text. The roller coaster, which passes under the text, leads the viewer to the next scene, now in a new locale.

A sign shaped as a red hat with yellow letters spelling "Three Ringz Condos," is above the entrance of a large building. Before the entrance, T-Pain and his love-object stand in front of a red Lamborghini Murcielago. Following this frame, a giant-sized T-Pain smiles and glances at a globe held in his right hand. As T-Pain sings about a "beach house on the edge of Costa Rica," we see the text "Costa Rica" on the globe, further emphasizing this next "exotic" location where T-Pain will transport himself and his love-interest. In this virtual Costa Rica, this virtual beach, T-Pain conjures a white, exotic flower from his left hand while singing that the flower is for his love-interest to put in her hair, "Put one of them little flowers in your hair, having you look like a fly mamacita, fuego (commonly defined as fire)." As a transitional device and thematic connector, three large golden rings follow the exotic beach scene, traveling from the middle of the screen towards T-Pain's torso. He subsequently casts these rings about as he sings "cause you look so good…you make me wanna spend it on all you." These three rings become a simulacrum for personal wealth; traces of golden light intersect with the golden rings that are cast upward. As the rings are cast into mid air, they also become portals for circus-themed events. The shiny golden rings frame the digitized circus characters, all returned from previous sequences. Juggling clowns, leather-clad dancers, tumblers and gymnasts, white-faced sidekicks, and black women dancing in stilts all erupt from the three rings that T-Pain has cast. The stilts then transform into his love-interest's legs. As we peer

through her legs, which are shown in color, we see the dancing T-Pain, dressed in black and white. The contrast of the bright color of the love object's legs and the black and white T-Pain is likely used to emphasize a contrast between the two representations. As the scene progresses, T-Pain and the love-object stand on pedestals of stars in a ring encircled in a field of pentagrams with white stars superimposed upon larger, dark grey stars. T-Pain and his cast of characters are in ascension, defying any notion or appearance of gravity.

Conclusion

In the expression of racial identity and social death in T-Pains use of Auto-tune, his musical agency is founded upon lack of ontological standing in civil society. While some may possibly view T-Pain's use of Auto-tune as a way of deconstructing stereotypes of the black male voice, I argue that his use of the technology accesses the natural an authentic sound represented in black male crooners such as Sam Cooke, Stevie Wonder, Cee Lo Green and R. Kelly. Moreover, as an Auto-tune improviser, T-Pain strives to sound like a saxophone; thus his work connects to the tradition of saxophone improvisation.

In "Can't Believe It" T-Pain composes a rhythmic scheme that represents fantasy and the spaciousness of travel, indeed, the lyrics of his music—which indicate various locations— inspires the visual representation of travel. He uses a sparse, repetitive rhythm, creating tension by emphasizing the third and fourth beats. Polyrhythms are manifested in the high-pitched finger snapping and complex syncopated bass lines. T-Pains Auto-tuned, heavy vocals drive the song. His performance of visual fantasy

represents his ontological status of social death, while also designed to inspire others (with no access to international travel) to imagine traveling through his improvised performance of the theme. While his video was produced by Syndrome, T-Pain influenced the way his body, and the bodies of others are represented in the music video. The black bodies in T-Pain's videos are not commodities; they represent vanity and excess in a world apart from earth. He defeats the bar lines through creating alternate depictions of black life in outer space outside of civil society. I end with the words of Sun Ra who explained, "Myth permits man to situate himself in these times and to connect himself with the past and the future. What I am looking for are the myths of the future, the destiny of man…. I believe if one wants to act on the destiny of the world, its necessary to treat it like a myth" (as quoted in Lock 1999, 61).

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to discover strategies of musical resistance in the work of African American improvisers and composers. Afro-pessimist theory, usually linked with film criticism, was applied to the musical data in order to understand how African American creative practice works outside the sphere of Wilderson's "civil society" (2010). In Chapter 1, I introduced the study, communicated its significance, and outlined the study and provided a literature review. I demonstrated why signifyin(g) theory—applied to African American music criticism in the last twenty-four years by various musicologists—was no longer a viable theoretical approach for analyzing black cultural practice. Additionally I argued for developing a conceptual schema to discover what compositional improvisational strategies African Americans use to express musical resistance to conventional forms of music. The conceptual schema was based on musical strategies of resistance. Finally, I explained the Afro-pessimist stance applied to excavate the ontological motivation behind the aforementioned strategies of African American musical resistance, which must be understood outside the sphere of universal humanistic notions of agency.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature on strategies of musical resistance to set up subsequent discussion of strategies of resistance in Chapters 3 and 4. The topics of strategies of political themes and references, strategies of unconventional music teachings, transnational strategies of musical resistance, strategies of reconceptualization of performance and strategies of integration of nonmusical elements were introduced.

Chapter 3 located compositional musical strategies in the intervallic patters of melodic writing in of Andrew Hill's "Ashes," and the angularity of melodic writing in such compositions as his "Dance with Death." I also demonstrated innovative melodic and rhythmic structure in Stanley Cowell's "Prayer for Peace" and "Equipoise."

In Chapter 4 I analyzed Ambrose Akinmusire's "Confessions To My Unborn Daughter" and "My Name Is Oscar." In Akinmusire's trumpet solo on "Confessions To My Unborn Daughter," I analyzed unconventional intervallic configurations and avoidance of cliché. I also analyzed "My Name Is Oscar," a fragmented, poetic, improvised piece, accompanied by a pre-recorded drum solo, which is a protest against police brutality.

In Chapter 5, I analyzed the cinematic and musical representation of fantasy and travel in T-Pain's video "Can't Believe It." I examined his use of sonic and visual representations of black agency within the context of social death. I used the cinematic history of representations of blackness as a context to understand T-Pain's representation of himself and events—such as the conjuring of a roller coaster and the conjuring of himself in various locales—as representing a peculiar type of agency. I also examined T-Pain's eight-bar rhythmic scheme as a representation of black fantasy and unconventional notions of musical space.

The Afterlife of Slavery: Interpretation of Findings

The theory I derive from these various musical data shows that the thread of what Saidiya Hartman calls the "after life of slavery" (2007) runs through all artifacts analyzed in this study. The study's findings underscore that African American musical and

cinematic strategies can be analyzed as representative of social death, while maintaining their agency. Whereas Afro-pessimist scholars such as Wilderson have used this theory to critique films (2010), it is also a vital tool for understanding musical representations of social death across the various genres. Such analysis demonstrates the questionable dominance and effectiveness of Western musical analysis by its ability to sketch out the slippery, radiant nature of black music objects. To paraphrase the pianist-composer Joshua White, there is a limit to how far a black musician can go with Western theory. This study shows that the music of the socially dead can be represented artistically, but can never be truly codified since black artists function as phantasmagoria in relation to social institutions that still deny their full humanity. This study is not meant to be Afro-centric or nationalist. Rather the findings of this study are meant to document how social death—related to slavery—are still expressed through the black music imaginary. Saidiya Hartman has explained the long lasting effects of slavery,

> Slavery had established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black Americans, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days of the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery. (2007, 6)

Indeed the "skewed life chances" that Hartman discusses inspire the creative practice of those who still choose to strive.

Analyzing black musical data from the afro-pessimist standpoint as a valid and vital contribution to critical musicology rests on more than a taxonomy of strategies of musical resistance. My goal in this study was to find out how "the grammar of

suffering"—that which comes from lived blackness—is represented in unconventional musical techniques. How do these musicians defy or defeat the bar lines? In examining the compositional and improvisational and cinematic processes of African American musicians, evidence of musical strategies of resistance is consistent in character across the data of various artists. Musicians have used unconventional musical strategies such as peculiar interval configurations that create melodic angularity, ambiguous harmonies, and asymmetrical harmonic movement that resist conventional cadences. This manipulation of space is connected to the fragmentary poetic, protest speech spoken to a recorded drum solo, or a sparse beat track designed to represent limitless travel through the virtual topographies of black fantasy. What is also consistent across musical and visual data is the artistic representation of the defiance of space and time.

The manipulation of space is found in the intervallic configurations of melodic invention in Hill's "Ashes" or "Dance With Death," or the hemiola patterns in Cowell's "Equipoise," forming a musical call for moral balance through the musical representation of imbalance through shifting rhythms that avoid alignment, or in the sparse 8-bar rhythmic scheme that represents fantasy and social death in the sound and visual representation of T-Pain's lack of personhood. All of these strategies respond and connect to the afterlife of slavery, or social death. In an interview, flutist-composer James Newton expressed the essence of this notion,

> That's what our music is about; its about telling our story in a way that is so unique to who we are as a people. And part of that uniqueness is the otherness…we exist in this other reality so we have a very different story to tell for many different reasons, and we have been outsiders all along. Even though we have a black president [Barack Obama], in some ways we are even further outside because of the backlash of that reality, which has been incredibly severe. (J. Newton, interview, March 10, 2013)

My interpretation of findings is based in the spirit and reality of Newton's words. The creative practice of African American musicians must be understood from a perspective of denied ontology linked to the institution of slavery. What has also been consistent—demonstrated especially in the musicians I interviewed—is that these musicians want and deserve the same recognition given to white musicians.

Sharing the Intellectual Space

The musicians I interviewed complained that they must compete for intellectual space in the academy. Such competition is manifested by lists of grants or commission awardees, and those able to realize their work on a larger scale, such as symphonic or operatic genres. Some musicians state that even the physical location, their office or studio, within a music department building indicates the level at which that department or the academic institution values their work. African American musicians want their music and ideas to obtain the same rights, and accord the same intellectual space, as white composers. But, as Newton states, they also understand that their music is the product of the afterlife of slavery. Still, through musical practices, they strive to defeat such modern realities of racial inequality, through expression of strategies that defy the metaphorical and musical constraint of the Western bar line.

While strategies of resistance have been discussed in previous literature, my research design has specifically located strategies of music resistance through close score analysis and readings of music videos. My findings suggest that studying strategies of

musical resistance through Afro-pessimism theory reveal a deeper understanding of what the strategies might mean.

Limitations

There were five limitations to this study. The musicians I interviewed, for example, were all men. This was not by intentional design, and, as men still dominate the jazz industry, researchers must work harder to find representative samples of women in the field. Though valid attempts were made to locate women for interview, none were obtained for this study, partly due to logistical issues with touring and availability (also common for obtaining men interviews). A number of unknowns may have made contact with men easier. For example, I have worked with more male musicians, which may have resulted in hidden biases for research subjects. I still contend—though I have failed in this study to represent the belief—that the creative practice of African American women, and women in general, is equally vital and will also reveal musical strategies of resistance that represent social death.

This study is also limited in its avoidance of writing about strategies of resistance in history. I was instead concerned with talking about musical strategies of resistance in modern times, and connecting those strategies of resistance to past movements moved beyond the scope of the study. Following the argument and strategies of Wadada Leo Smith, imposing a historical timeline on musical data encourages the use of too much data and does not promote thorough analysis of artifacts.

This study could have created clearer connections between Afro-pessimism and musical analysis in combination to study the work of African American musicians. The

task of implementing the analysis of musical strategies of resistance from Afro-pessimist theory presented the challenge of moving between the disciplines of writing music analysis and critical theory, discourses which do not easily fuse, in fact, have for the most part, historically, been separated. A goal of this study was to bring these divergent conversations into play.

The IRB approved questionnaire I distributed to improvisers/composers proved largely an ineffective tool since musicians did not respond as fluidly and openly to written questions. Some musicians approached the questionnaire as a bothersome writing assignment, a task they may have been unaccustomed to completing. In addition to being guarded, their responses may have been distorted or limited because of the nature of the writing exercise. Limitations to the questionnaire approach were also manifest in the resistance some musicians had to committing to writing. There was a marked contrast when I was able to interview musicians in person.

Finally, the scope of this study was limited to African American musicians because of its focus on how their life experiences manifested through music. Thus it was necessary to focus on the data derived from that experience.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study might contribute to future studies, which might be developed in the following ways: 1) expand the type of data for research to include “concert music”; 2) include works by black composers and incorporate more analysis of popular music and technology (how exciting it would be to develop an Afro-pessimist study of the music of

the band Earth, Wind and Fire); and 3) include the work of female improvisers and composers.

In introducing an Afro-pessimist reading of musical strategies in this study, I would invite other music scholars to contribute ideas to how Afro-pessimism theory and musical theory could be integrated.

Critical musicologists can further profit from close readings of Afro-pessimism as a viable analytical framework for studying African American music. Afro-pessimism allows theorists to look at institutional factors that black musicians face in relation to institutional racism and to understand—in a nonessentialist way—how the music manifests agency in its fight against antiblackness.

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