

Faculty of English

**Improvising Resistance:  
Jazz, Poetry, and the Black Arts Movement,  
1960–1969**



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**Abstract**

This thesis is an interdisciplinary analysis of jazz music and poetry produced by African-American artists, primarily in New York, over the course of the 1960s, set within the broad context of the civil-rights and black-nationalist movements of the same period. Its principal contention is that the two forms afford each other symbiotic illumination. Close reading of jazz musicology in particular illuminates the directions taken by the literature of the period in a manner that has rarely been fully explored. By giving equal critical attention to the two artistic forms in relation to each other, the epistemological and social radicalism latent and explicit within them can more fully be understood.

Through this understanding comes also a greater appreciation of the effects that the art of this period had upon the politics of civil rights and black nationalism in America – effects which permeated wider culture during a decade in which significant change was made to the legal position of African-Americans within the United States, change forced by a newly, and multiply, vocalized African-American consciousness.

The thesis examines the methods by which jazz and literature contributed to the construction of new historically-constituted black subjectivities represented aurally, orally and visually. It looks at how the different techniques of each form converse with each other, and how they prompt consequential re-presentations and re-cognizations of established forms from within and without their own continua. That examination is conducted primarily through forensic close readings of records made between 1960 and 1967, which though of widely differing styles nevertheless can be said to fall under the broad umbrella term of 'post-bop' jazz, alongside equally close readings of poetry written primarily by members of the New York wing of the equally broadly-termed Black Arts Movement [BAM] between 1964 and 1969.

*For Mum, Dad,  
Mamgu, Dacu, Gran,  
and Uncle Haydn.*

# Declaration of Length

This thesis is 73,664 words long.

## Acknowledgements

First of all, a disclaimer: the number of people I would like to acknowledge by name is so enormous that it would at least double the length of the thesis, and nobody wants that. In the space of a couple of pages, I will inevitably miss out some people who are deeply important to me and have played significant roles in this production. As an opening catch-all, therefore, I will say that if I have been in your presence at any point since 10 October 2013 and have had reason to smile, then you have helped me reach this point, and I am deeply grateful.

The people I must acknowledge a little more closely, however, are those who have been there from the outset and those who have kept me sane. As more people know than is probably healthy, this thesis was written almost entirely on location in the Café at Fitzwilliam College. Therefore, to Magda, Attila and all those who have stamped my loyalty card and topped up my teapots; along with Donna, Julie, Jackie and all the others in the buttery: you've kept me going, and I will always be grateful.

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Likewise to the fellows, staff and students – undergraduate and, particularly, graduate – at Fitzwilliam College in the last five years. Never was the label 'friendly' applied so aptly to a group of people united only by a coincidence of timing and a quite ugly set of buildings; and never was there a better home away from home.

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There is no thesis without a Supervisor, and it has been my great fortune to have discovered, met and worked with the best: Dr Michael Hrebeniak, one of the most intelligent people I have ever known, who – from his first entirely positive email about my very earliest, most tentative and least coherent thoughts to his approval of the final full-stop over eight years later – has been a phenomenal source of support and wisdom, a deeply judicious user of both carrots and sticks, and a privilege to know. Thank you, sir.

And finally, to my extended family, of whom I have seen far too little in the last five years, and especially the five superheroes to whom this thesis is dedicated: my thanks and my love, always.

## Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed 80,000 maximum word limit for the English Faculty Degree Committee.

### Notes on Music Sources and Musical Quotations

The thesis makes reference to multiple audio recordings which have been sourced from a mixture of CD, digital, and in a very few cases, vinyl recordings of the author's possession, and from Spotify and YouTube. The sheer amount of such material and the variegated nature of its media makes the provision of a CD or Memory Stick for the examiners' reference impractical. It is, however, recognized that easy access to the material will make for a much more enjoyable and useful reading experience. To that end, therefore, I have compiled two public YouTube playlists which can be accessed via the URL's below.

1. **Primary Recordings:** <https://tinyurl.com/ybj943va>
2. **Secondary Recordings:** <https://tinyurl.com/yato9wd2>

The first of these contains the principal recordings under discussion, ordered according to their appearance in the thesis. The other contains all other records cited,

according to the order in which they are presented in the discography. References and time-stamps within the text relate to the sources cited in the footnotes and discography.

Transcriptions of musical quotations in sheet-music form have been kept to a minimum, owing to the difficulties inherent in forcing improvised music into a written system which was designed centuries earlier for very different forms of music. Those examples that are included are – unless stated otherwise – the author's own, transcribed from the cited recordings.

### **A Note on the Poetry**

The primary poems and – where applicable – lyrics discussed in the thesis are reproduced in full in the appendix.



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# Introduction: 'What we are asking for is a new synthesis'<sup>1</sup>

*Not enough work has been done linking musicological concerns to cultural movements.*

— James C. Hall.<sup>2</sup>

*It is important to note that the jazz musicians merely emphasized artistically and musically what the more aware members of the black community were realizing extra-musically.*

— J. E. Berendt and G. Huesmann.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis is an interdisciplinary analysis of jazz music and poetry produced by African-American artists, primarily in New York, over the course of the 1960s, set within the broad context of the civil-rights and black-nationalist movements of the same period. Its principal contention is that the two forms afford each other symbiotic illumination. Close reading of jazz musicology in particular illuminates the directions taken by the literature of the period in a manner that has rarely been fully explored. By giving equal critical attention to the two artistic forms in relation to each other, the epistemological and social radicalism latent and explicit within them can more fully be understood.

Through this understanding comes also a greater appreciation of the effects that the art of this period had upon the politics of civil rights and black nationalism in America – effects which permeated wider culture during a decade in which significant change was made to the legal position of African-Americans within the United States, change forced by a newly, and multiply, vocalized African-American consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Neal, 'And Shine Swam On', in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, ed. by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 2007), pp. 638–56 (p. 654).

<sup>2</sup> James C. Hall, *Mercy, Mercy Me: African-American Culture and the American Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> J. E. Berendt and G. Huesmann, *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to the 21st Century* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009), p. 26.

The thesis examines the methods by which jazz and literature contributed to the construction of new historically-constituted black subjectivities represented aurally, orally and visually. It looks at how the different techniques of each form converse with each other, and how they prompt consequential re-presentations and re-cognizations of established forms from within and without their own continua. That examination is conducted primarily through forensic close readings of records made between 1960 and 1967, which though of widely differing styles nevertheless can be said to fall under the broad umbrella term of 'post-bop' jazz, alongside equally close readings of poetry written primarily by members of the New York wing of the equally broadly-termed Black Arts Movement [BAM] between 1964 and 1969.

The choice of 1960–1969 and of New York as the temporal and primary-geographical locales stems from situations shared by jazz, African-American Poetry, and the politics of the time. In 1960 the Newport Jazz Riots were triggered when thousands of students, mostly white, stormed the venue on 3 July, having been unable to gain access legitimately. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported it the following day, this 'millionaires' playground' was turned 'into a debris-laden shambles'.<sup>4</sup> Newport also provoked more than youthful insurgency that year, as black jazz musicians Charles Mingus and Max Roach – increasingly disgusted both at the dominance of white artists on the Festival's bill and at the iniquities of the white-dominated music recording and publishing industries more widely – set up their own counter-festivals, with the aim of securing due regard and due money for African-American musicians, whose music they firmly believed it was.<sup>5</sup>

Robert K. McMichael argues that it was only by the early 1960s that division by race (as a biological taxonomy – i.e., black skin/white skin) rather than ethnicity (as

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<sup>4</sup> 'Riot by 12,000 Ends Newport Jazz Festival ' (July 4, 1960), *L.A. Times* <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/thedailymirror/2010/07/riot-closes-newport-jazz-fest.html>> [Accessed 8 January 2018].

<sup>5</sup> Robert K. McMichael, "'We Insist-Freedom Now!': Black Moral Authority, Jazz, and the Changeable Shape of Whiteness', *American Music* 16. 4 (Winter, 1998), 375–416 (p. 385)

determined by social and geographical origin – i.e. Italian-American, Irish-American, African-American) became entrenched in United States society, a development which 'crossed class lines and – for the purposes of the racist state – oversimplified social relations into largely black–white configurations'.<sup>6</sup> 'White', therefore, became a catch-all term for the racism against which African-Americans were fighting, a paradigm shift that coincided with the growth of a more aggressive alternative approach to the acquisition of civil rights to that advocated by Dr Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Committee (SCLC). Though not hugely successful, Mingus and Roach's counter-festivals gave an early taste of a more proactive approach that advocated like-for-like response to the racist acts which continued to be perpetuated against black people in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus using the national guard to prevent black children attending Little Rock's public schools in 1957; Bull Connor, Police Chief of Birmingham, Alabama, driving a white tank through the city to intimidate demonstrators and firing water cannon at black children in May 1963; the Ku Klux Klan's murder of four black schoolgirls at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in the same city in September of the same year; and the killings of civil rights activists James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner in Mississippi in 1964.<sup>7</sup>

This more confrontational style of black consciousness would come to be most publicly associated with Malcolm X, along with the Nation of Islam (NoI) (with whose leader, Elijah Muhammed, Malcolm X had a very public falling-out in 1963/4) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).<sup>8</sup> King insisted on Ghandi-like nonviolence as a strategic way to highlight the disproportionality of white institutional behaviour as a means to garner public sympathy against those institutions. Malcolm X, however, while explicitly claiming not to 'advocate violence'

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<sup>6</sup> McMichael, p. 380.

<sup>7</sup> McMichael, p. 380; Cf. Amiri Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by William J. Harris. 2nd edn (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. xxxi; Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 280.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (London: Penguin, 2007) pp. 410–426.

was nevertheless clear that 'if a man steps on my toes, I'll step on his [...] whites better be glad Martin Luther King is rallying the people because other forces are waiting to take over if he fails'.<sup>9</sup> Scott Saul also posits that Malcolm X's was an approach which broke with the governing consensus of the 1950s, namely that 'freedom' and the 'free market' were synonymous and mutually dependent, and that the absence of public dissent was an intrinsic part of 'free' society.<sup>10</sup> Malcolm X's stance was that with which writer LeRoi Jones – later Amiri Baraka – most sympathized, and it was in the wake of X's assassination that Baraka left his wife Hettie Cohen, moved to Harlem, declared himself a black cultural nationalist ('that is, one who is committed to black people as "a race, a culture, a nation"'), and founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater School (BARTS) out of which the wider Black Arts Movement stemmed.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the confrontational nature of Malcolm's rhetoric and political stance informed much of the Movement's aesthetic approach thereafter.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, New York was also the centre of the jazz industry – as by then it had been for over thirty years. It was home to the most famous venues both historical (the Cotton Club, Café Society, the Harlem Apollo, the Royal Roost, Minton's) and contemporary (the Five Spot, the Village Vanguard, the Half Note).<sup>12</sup> New York was also the locus of the recording companies and their studios. In consequence, musicians wishing to earn a living through their craft were inevitably drawn to the city.

In November 1959, Ornette Coleman arrived in New York for a two-week residency at the Five Spot. Playing a plastic alto saxophone, the self-taught, largely-unknown Texan brought with him and his Los Angeles-based group (Don Cherry on cornet,

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<sup>9</sup> Said while in Selma, Alabama, just weeks before his assassination in 1965. (Malcolm X and Haley, p. 51.)

<sup>10</sup> Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Baraka, p. xxxi.

<sup>12</sup> Ashley Kahn, 'After Hours: New York's Jazz Joints through the Ages' (2017 <<https://jazztimes.com/features/after-hours-new-yorks-jazz-joints-through-the-ages/>> [Accessed 10 January 2018].

Charlie Haden on bass and Billy Higgins on drums) a style of music which appeared to depart entirely from anything that had preceded it. What would come to be known as 'free' improvisation signalled a direct challenge to the by-then ossified conventions of the once similarly revolutionary bebop and its derivatives, such as the gospel-inflected 'hard' bop. In its dynamic, energized approach Coleman's 'new thing' also provided a complete antithesis to the 'cool' style led by Miles Davis. BAM writer James Stewart would later describe it as 'the most meaningful music being created today'.<sup>13</sup> Coming in the wake of Coleman's own, presciently titled, 1959 album *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, the November 1959 Five Spot residency presaged a period of seven years which would see some of the most controversial and innovative developments in the music's history. From 1960 to 1967, players such as Coleman, along with Max Roach, Archie Shepp, Albert Ayler, Sonny Rollins, Cecil Taylor, Pharoah Sanders, Sun Ra and others, combined differing forms of technical and aesthetic radicalism with a newly outspoken and uncompromising political stance – as per Malcolm X – which overtly protested the inequalities of treatment meted out to African-Americans both within and without the culture industry.

African-American writers took a little longer to adopt the approach of the musicians. Coleman arrived on the Lower East Side at a time when the 'New American Poetry' was an almost entirely white bohemian preserve, as indicated by Donald Allen's failure to include any African-American poets other than LeRoi Jones in his seminal anthology of the same name, which had its first publication in 1960.<sup>14</sup> Jones at this stage was in the middle of what William J. Harris categorized (with Baraka's approval) in 1991's *LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka* reader as his 'beat period', in which he socialized with bohemian figures such as Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, Gilbert Sorrentino, and 'beat' writer Allen Ginsberg, and in which his poetics were heavily

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<sup>13</sup> Stewart, pp. 3–10 (p. 5).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*, ed. by Donald Allen. New edn (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1999).

influenced by the white avant-garde: 'Charles Olson, O'Hara and Ginsberg, in particular, shaped his conception of a poem as being exploratory and open in form'.<sup>15</sup>

However, in the early 1960s the East Village would also experience an influx of black intellectuals and artists whose literary influence would steadily increase over the course of the decade. Alongside Jones were fellow writers Lorraine Hansberry, Claude Brown, James Baldwin, A. B. Spellman, saxophonists Marion Brown and Archie Shepp, drummer Sonny Murray, and painters Bob Thompson and William White. Poets such as Calvin Hernton, David Henderson, Ismael Reed and Lorenzo Thomas, who together formed the Umbra group who published a magazine of the same name in 1963 and 1964, also lived there. These artists, influenced by one another and by the politics of Malcolm X, and finding in one another a mutual aid community, would follow Baraka's lead in forging a literary space, formed on explicitly racial lines, into which a new African-American subjectivity could be constituted.<sup>16</sup> Many would go on to be significant contributors to the literary output of the BAM in the second half of the decade.<sup>17</sup>

Jazz music was another crucial enabling model for the Black Arts Movement. As Smethurst interprets it: 'Black Arts writing, particularly poetry, and the theorization of a usable cultural past based on black music, often had a dialectical relationship'.<sup>18</sup> While the line connecting jazz and African-American literature had been configured for over forty years by Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin, among others, the text which launched the idea that jazz music could serve as the catalyst for a distinctly African-American historical consciousness was LeRoi Jones' *Blues People*, published in 1963, the middle of what Harris categorizes as the two-year 'transition phase' between his 'beat' period and the

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<sup>15</sup> Baraka, pp. xviii–xxi; William J. Harris, 'Introduction', in *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by William J. Harris (New York: Basic Books, 2009), pp. xvii–xxx.

<sup>16</sup> James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 78.

<sup>17</sup> Saul, p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Smethurst, p. 66.

'black nationalist' period.<sup>19</sup> In the book, Jones traced the history of the African-American through music. He argued that the African-Americans' historically suppressed contribution to American cultural history was both crucial and unique. Jones also established a paradigm of reading musical performances as indices of historicized black subjectivity.<sup>20</sup> The need to stake a claim for a distinct cultural identity was one of the founding principles behind the same author's move to begin the establishment of the BAM in New York in 1965 with the opening of the BARTS in Harlem.<sup>21</sup>

The cultural-nationalist position that the Black Arts Movement took as its motivation and purpose was refined within Baraka's writing from 1963 to 1964, with his play *Dutchman* (1964) setting out many of the positions he would later take in his prose, poetry, and public speech. As McMichael writes, Baraka's writing in the second half of the decade, 'adopts a race-essentialist ideology, often constructing a type of "authentic" black subject, which is indicative of a black cultural nationalist strategic essentialism'.<sup>22</sup> For its definition, the 'authentic' black subject also necessitated an inauthentic black subject, which for Baraka could be found within what he labelled the 'black middle class', a grouping which, 'from its inception [...] has formed almost exclusively around the proposition that it is better not to be black in a country where being black is a liability', and whose members 'thought that the best way for the black man to survive [in America] was to cease being black'.<sup>23</sup> The nature of McMichael's contention, the internal tensions within the BAM caused by debates around what it was to be 'Black', and how they manifest in the poetry, will be further

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<sup>19</sup> Harris, in Baraka, pp. xxi-xxviii; LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980).

<sup>20</sup>As Jones put it himself: 'the African cultures, the retention of some parts of these cultures in America, and the *weight* of the stepculture produced the American Negro. A new race. I want to use music as my persistent reference just because the development and transmutation of African music to American Negro music (a new music) represents to me this whole process in microcosm.' Jones, pp. 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Harris, pp. xvii-xxx (p. xxiv).

<sup>22</sup> McMichael, pp. 375-416 (p. 404).

<sup>23</sup> Jones, pp. 123-4.



discussed later in this thesis. An interrogation of what it was to be 'black' would be apparent in Baraka's mid-sixties poetry, and its germination could be found in *Blues People*, in which Baraka claimed also that 'what these musicians have done, basically, is to restore to jazz its valid separation from, and anarchic disregard of, Western popular forms', and that the techniques of jazz 'must be *used* not canonized' in wider African-American cultural practice.<sup>24</sup>

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In 1960, Harlem remained the central topographical space for African-American culture, as it had been since the 'Renaissance' of the 1920s.<sup>25</sup> Malcolm X had his home there on 97<sup>th</sup> Street. The area north of Central Park also held attractions for minority political groups whose ideologies ran counter to the prevailing orthodoxy in the United States, but which were not defined by discourses of racial identity. With the Cold War approaching the peak of the 1962 Cuban Crisis, Harlem's counter-cultural claims were symbolically reified in 1960, with Fidel Castro making Hotel Theresa his base when he visited the UN.<sup>26</sup> In the year before his death, Malcolm X himself began to draw the currents of black nationalism and international socialism into more proximate ideological positions than even the BAM ultimately would hold. As he said on 29 May 1964, at a symposium organised by the Militant Labor Forum of New York:

I'm flexible . . . As was stated earlier, all of the countries that are emerging today from under the shackles of colonialism are turning toward socialism. I don't think it's an accident. Most of the countries that were colonial powers were capitalist countries, and the last bulwark of capitalism today is America. It's impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism. You can't have capitalism without racism.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jones, pp. 225, 230.

<sup>25</sup> Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. 2nd edn (New York; London: Norton, 1983), p. 409.

<sup>26</sup> Smethurst, p. 113.

<sup>27</sup> Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. by George Breitman. 1st Grove Weidenfeld Evergreen edn (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), p. 69.

Black Arts Movement writer Harold Cruse, meanwhile, credits Castro's visit and the example of the Cuban revolution with stirring 'the latent nationalism of many Negroes'.<sup>28</sup>

In Baraka's wake, poets A. B. Spellman, Jayne Cortez, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni and Ted Joans in New York, and Don L. Lee / Haki Madhubuti, Ron Welburn and others elsewhere in the United States, set about creating in their works a distinctly African-American cultural voice which held jazz as a key influence, under the umbrella label of the 'Black Arts Movement'. Within this, as Iain Anderson suggests:

They sought to uncover or frequently to construct a myth of origins for their work in a common African past. This task required distancing black art from European precedents and defining its racial character. The notion of a black aesthetic rejected the pluralism of African-American writers such as Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, who stressed the transformative influence of black artistic values on a broader American culture and the pursuit of universal criteria of excellence.<sup>29</sup>

The ambiguity encoded within jazz performance praxis is part of what drew those poets to it. In the multi-faceted elements of jazz as an episteme these writers saw an indicative template for a new kind of African-American identity. They were attracted to the spaces the music opened through its fluidity, along with its engagement through improvisation with composition as process; its involvement of its audience in the production of meaning and the constitution of subjectivity; its open-endedness; its breaking-down of boundaries and its liminal behaviours, alongside its ability to blur the New Critical distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture, and its status as a democratic metaphor. All of these served for the BAM poets as methodological templates for the poet's intermediary creativity; templates that could be remediated into a similarly iconoclastic reworking of available poetic formal vehicles.

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<sup>28</sup> Harold Cruse, 'Revolutionary Nationalism and the African-American', in *Black Fire*, ed. by Baraka and Neal, pp. 39–63 (p.45).

<sup>29</sup> Iain Anderson, *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia; Bristol: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 97.

As will be explored at length in the final chapters, saxophonist John Coltrane emerged – after Malcolm X and Baraka – as the third key figure in the history of the Black Arts Movement's formulation of the 'authentic' black subject. Along with Malcolm, Coltrane became an icon and a thematic locus for much of the BAM poetry written following his death in 1967. James Smethurst believes Coltrane offered 'an objective correlative for the integrity of radical nationalist leaders, specifically Malcolm X'.<sup>30</sup> The apogee of this from a poetic perspective came in 1969, when Cortez, Sanchez, Spellman, Lee, and others all published what are now their best-known poems about Coltrane. Such is the critical mass of poetry about the saxophonist that in 2000 Kimberley Benston identified the 'Coltrane Poem' as a subgenre of the BAM in its own right.<sup>31</sup> This thesis ends its analysis in 1969 in part because the number of Coltrane poems published that year marks a natural cadence within the BAM's history, and in part because from 1970 onwards both the BAM and jazz stratified and diverged internally to an extent that renders it difficult to argue for an ongoing active relationship. As the collapse of BARTS in 1967 due to disagreements among the founders and members symbolized, the Black Arts Movement was never reducible to a single homogenous entity.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, 'jazz' was a singular term which covered a widely heterogeneous range of styles, and which was in fact rejected by Archie Shepp and, later, Max Roach as the invention of white America and a symbol of white control of the 'product' which had been generated as art by black musicians.<sup>33</sup>

However, as Jürgen Grandt has identified, the kinetic effect of the pulling and pushing of the different influences and ideas contained within the overarching terms was the creation of energies that could then be harnessed and re-mediated within the

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<sup>30</sup> Smethurst, p. 75.

<sup>31</sup> Kimberly W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 26 and *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> Harold Cruse, 'The Harlem Black Arts Theatre – New Dialogue with the Lost Black Generation', in *SOS – Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader*, ed. by John H. Bracey, Sonia Sanchez, and James Smethurst (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), pp. 39–45 (p. 46).

<sup>33</sup> Roach, quoted in Paul Douglas Lopes, *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 256.

cultural productions of the period. It is precisely those negotiations between what Grandt calls the 'dialectical tensions' of African-American literature that allowed its radical, rebellious, discourse-altering energies to be unleashed.<sup>34</sup> It is the intention of this thesis to illustrate how those tensions were navigated, and how they inform the heterogeneous aspects of the work that falls under the names of 'jazz' and 'Black Arts Movement', while also establishing the points of commonality that validate those categorizations. Throughout, the thesis proposes to extend Alfred Willener's contention – first made on behalf of free jazz in 1969 – that dialectical tensions, both within the art and its social context, give rise in negotiation, experimentation, play, replay and deferral to 'dialectical syntheses'; and that the most successful aspects of both art forms' innovations in the 1960s are those which attempt to synthesize aspects of their respective traditional inheritances that are, or were, more commonly held in arbitrary binary oppositions.<sup>35</sup>

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Jazz and its practitioners have been widely acknowledged as major influences upon the aesthetics of the Black Arts Movement in all its literary manifestations. Larry Neal, co-founder, with Baraka, of the BAM, put the hierarchy of the relationship between jazz and BAM literature very clearly in 1968: 'The key to where the black people have to go is in the music. Our music has always been the most dominant manifestation of what we are and feel, literature was just an afterthought.'<sup>36</sup> Neal was by no means alone among the BAM vanguard in making the link explicit. So too did many of the authors published in *Black Fire* (1968), the first literary anthology exclusively featuring work by black writers (edited by Neal and Baraka). Fellow BAM theorist James Stewart wrote, in the same collection, that 'our music [...]

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<sup>34</sup> Jürgen E. Grandt, *Kinds of Blue: The Jazz Aesthetic in African American Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), p. xiii.

<sup>35</sup> Alfred Willener, *The Action-Image of Society, on Cultural Politicization*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), p. 230.

<sup>36</sup> Neal, pp. 638–56 (p. 654).

happens to be the purest expression of the black man in America [...] jazz music, in particular, is a social activity, participated in by artists collectively. Within a formal context or procedure, jazz affords the participants a collective form for individual group development in a way white musical forms never did'.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, in 'The New Breed' fellow-writer Peter Labrie said that 'the mixture of the spirituals and blues, the new expressions in jazz, all are indications of deeply rooted ferment within black culture. Old forms are being discarded or improvised upon. New, different and freer forms are being created'.<sup>38</sup> And A. B. Spellman wrote – with specific reference to Coltrane – that 'all of the writings of [Ralph] Ellison, [LeRoi] Jones, [James] Baldwin et al., all of the paintings of [Jacob] Lawrence, do not weigh as much as one John Coltrane solo in terms of the force of its thrust, the honesty of its statement, and the originality of its form'. Spellman also contends that the reason black literature lacked the force of black music is 'that poem, play, novel and canvas are, for us [African-Americans] *learned forms*'.<sup>39</sup>

Neal was emphatic when he wrote in 1968 that 'our music has always been far ahead of our literature',<sup>40</sup> and when viewed in simple chronological terms it is apparent that the main literary 'movements' subsequently linked to jazz have been much-delayed reactions to their musical influencers. The blues – to which Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks and many of the artists of the so-called 'Harlem Renaissance' were most clearly responding in the 1920s – had been a part of African-American culture for over a decade before these writers began to use its style. Ralph Ellison's many essay responses to jazz (collected in *Shadow and Act*) were always written in response to particular events or aspects of the music, and the same author's novel *Invisible Man* was a 1952 reaction to what, by then, was over thirty-

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<sup>37</sup> James T. Stewart, 'The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist', in *Black Fire*, ed. by Baraka and Neal, pp. 3–10 (p. 9).

<sup>38</sup> Peter Labrie, 'The New Breed', in *Black Fire*, ed. by Baraka and Neal, pp. 64–77 (p. 65).

<sup>39</sup> A. B. Spellman, 'Not Just Whistling Dixie' in *Black Fire*, (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 2007), pp. 159–68 (p. 162).

<sup>40</sup> Larry Neal, 'And Shine Swam On', in *Black Fire*, ed. by Baraka and Neal, pp. 638–56 (p. 653).

years' worth of musical history, stretching from Louis Armstrong to Charlie Parker.<sup>41</sup> The genesis of bebop took place in the midst of the 1942–44 Musicians' Union ban on recording during the Second World War, and thus specific moments of origin remain difficult to pinpoint. However, we do know that Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg did not formulate their literary responses to it until the early 1950s.<sup>42</sup> The Black Arts Movement, meanwhile, only came into being in 1965, fully six years after Ornette Coleman first introduced the concept of 'free' jazz in New York.

Given the evident priority afforded to jazz by the writers in the vanguard of the Black Arts Movement, it is noticeable that – in the critical literature which treats both subjects to some degree – priority is usually given to examination of the poetry. Furthermore, the manner in which that interrelation has been examined in scholarship tends to predicate analysis on over-determined attempts to render the discourses and techniques of one form (usually jazz) subservient to the other (poetry). Even those who have examined the relationship between jazz and literature at some length – such as Tony Bolden, Kimberley Benston, Iain Anderson, Scott Saul and Gayl Jones, among others – seldom discuss the music in musicological terms. Meta DuEwa Jones' description of the 'musicality' of poems is indicative of the wider trend; her examination of the intersections between jazz, poetry and gender treats jazz quite literally as an accompaniment to poetry readings.<sup>43</sup> Tony Bolden's assertion, made in 2014, that 'the notion that black music and black writing are interrelated is commonplace today', is perhaps over-optimistic; the opportunity to read the sonic production as a text is too frequently passed up.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 236–273; and also James Lincoln Collier, *The Making of Jazz: A Comprehensive History* (London: Hart-Davis MacGibbon, 1978), p. 355.

<sup>43</sup> Meta DuEwa Jones, *The Muse Is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), p. 2 and *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Tony Bolden, 'The Funk Aesthetic in American Poetry', in *Black Music, Black Poetry: Blues and Jazz's Impact of African American Versification*, ed. by Gordon E. Thompson (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 79–89 (p. 79).

This imbalance of emphasis may have come about in part because the music is epistemologically unique. The Eurocentric tradition of 'classical' music has produced written scores to which its scholars can turn. Recordings, and even live concert performances, are essentially mediated representations of that written score. Rock and pop music recordings seldom have textual scores, but, emerging in an era when the recording industry was established, their live performances are largely designed (in response to audience demand and expectation) to reproduce preceding studio recordings note-for-note.<sup>45</sup>

Jazz recordings, however, are not necessarily representative of the more common experience of live performance; indeed they would better be described as congruent to the major activity of jazz performance praxis, namely live music. This is a consequence both of the limitations of the prevailing recording technologies of the first-half of the twentieth century (whose early 78-rpm discs restricted recordings to a maximum four-minute duration), and particularly of the music's unique emphasis on improvisation.<sup>46</sup> That improvisatory commitment means no individual performance – even in the more 'arranged' music of the 1920s and '30s big bands – is ever the same as any other, and thus no version of any jazz tune can be said to be definitive. For scholarship, therefore, jazz is a particularly elusive form.

The literary focus of academic writing that treats poetry and jazz together is also a consequence of an academic culture where the metaphorical walls separating literature and music in their differing discursive procedures and symbolic forms find a physical manifestation in the differing departments that house their practitioners. The author's experiences at the Universities of York, Newcastle and Cambridge are that, despite often having neighbouring buildings, the one-time socially close relationship between music and literature still functions largely on the terms of the

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<sup>45</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 118.

<sup>46</sup> Susan Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound: Technology, Culture, and the Art of Studio Recording from Edison to the LP* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 21.

*decree nisi* that Gutenberg's Press stamped between the two in the Fifteenth Century.<sup>47</sup>

In that many of those who have written at length about the connections between 1960s black poetry and jazz have either been academics in English departments and faculties or writers themselves, or – frequently – both (Sascha Feinstein, T.J. Anderson, Gerald Early, Gayl Jones, Meta DuEwa Jones, Kimberley Benston), it is perhaps unsurprising that the poetry has received the bulk of the attention.

Yet the transformations wrought upon poetry after the example of jazz are highly significant and form a vital aspect of the new black cultural and nationalist awareness which increased exponentially as the 1960s unfolded. Part of the aim of this thesis is to illustrate the value of an equally weighted analysis for the illumination of those significant connections between jazz's implicit and explicit political subcultures, and their reflection and refraction in the poetry of African-American avant-garde artists working in the 1960s alongside and in the shadow of those musicians. Through forensic close readings of both the poetry and the music being produced in that decade, the thesis argues that jazz anticipates and catalyses the proliferation of different channels of agency and exteriority within poetry, and that both must therefore be treated with equal emphasis. No art is autotelic, and the poetry, jazz, and political and cultural developments of that time can best be understood as distinct critical creative occasions which occur within a shared cultural field.

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However, this is not by any means the first examination of the relationship between jazz and Black Arts poetry within the context of the politics of civil rights and black nationalism, nor is it exhaustive. Stephen Henderson's introduction to the anthology *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (1973) was one of the earliest studies in which the

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 200.



intersections of the music and the literature were proposed as representations of a distinctly black cultural aesthetic, the poets he anthologized first being cited by Henderson within a distinctly racial context. His work has subsequently been developed by many, including Gayl Jones in *Liberating Voices* (1991). Focusing on poetic technique and practice across the twentieth century, Jones opened the idea that the ambiguities inherent in the music's relation to 'meaning' marked the truly distinct break with the 'either/or polarity' of Western ontology. Developing the possibilities of this theme from a sub-sub-cultural sociological position, the practitioners of the Black Arts Movement were thereby liberated to reconstitute imposed authority and moral systems.<sup>48</sup>

Gayl Jones' construct has been extended by Lorenzo Thomas – himself a member of the Black Arts Movement – in *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and 20th-Century American Poetry* (2000). Thomas places the Black Arts Movement as one distinct era of Afrocentric American poetry across the twentieth century. He cites music as a force for the renewal of a communal cultural perspective which enables its poetic correspondents to transcend Eurocentric approaches to poetry, while taking care to avoid being drawn into the attempts made by some of his poetic contemporaries to claim that their work is the result of what Thomas calls an 'atavistic inheritance' from an unrecoverable 'African' past. For Thomas, this is still first and foremost, as his title suggests, *American* poetry. Thomas then developed this idea in *Don't Deny My Name*, which was the first work since Baraka's *Black Music* to offer a book-length study (as a collection of essays) of the relation of blues-based musics to the social lives of African-Americans written by a black author.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Stephen E. Henderson, *Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References* (New York: Morrow, 1973); Gayl Jones, *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African-American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Lorenzo Thomas, *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Tuscaloosa; London: University of Alabama Press, 2000), p. 116; Thomas, and Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Don't Deny My Name: Words and Music and the Black Intellectual Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

Alongside but distinct from the 'black aesthetic' proposed by the critics above, one of the most prevalent critical ideas imposed upon the literary work of this period – one with which the present author disagrees – is that of an identifiable 'jazz aesthetic' which is recoverable from the poetry. T. J. Anderson in *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right* and Jürgen Grandt in *Kinds of Blue: Jazz Aesthetic in African American Narrative* (both 2004), and Sascha Feinstein in the introductions to two volumes of the *Jazz Poetry Anthology* (1991, 1996), and *Jazz Poetry from the 1920s to the Present* (1997), all advocate this concept, contending that a series of mimetic transfers can be identified as having occurred from the music of free improvisation to the literature inspired by it.<sup>50</sup>

This thesis adheres more to the view held by Erik Redling (*Translating Jazz into Poetry*, 2015), Eric Prieto (*Listening in: Music, Mind and the Modernist Narrative*, 2002) and Werner Wolf (*The Musicalization of Fiction*, 1999) that the crucial relationship between jazz and literature is metaphorical rather than mimetic, although it does not go as far as Prieto does when he declares the relationship to be *exclusively* metaphorical. This is also the approach of Kimberley Benston's *Performing Blackness* (2000) – the work that is perhaps closest to this thesis in the approach it takes to the poetry – his emphasis being on the performative nature of black art as a feature which particularly distinguishes it from its white-originated counterparts, and in some of the conclusions he draws from it. Yet even Benston is drawn towards descriptions of 'musical' poetry rather than close analysis of the texts of the music.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> T. J. Anderson, *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right: Four Innovators of Jazz Poetry* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2004); Sascha Feinstein and Yusuf Komunyakaa (eds.), *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Feinstein and Komunyakaa (eds.) *The Second Set: The Jazz Poetry Anthology Volume 2* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Feinstein, *Jazz Poetry: From the 1920s to the Present, Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance*, (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> Eric Prieto, *Listening In: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 17; Erik Redling, *Translating Jazz into Poetry: From Mimesis to Metaphor* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999);

There is a burgeoning body of literature on the African-American oral tradition which has also informed many of the readings in the present work. In addition to sections in the books by Scott Saul and Gayl Jones, this study has been informed by Daniel Karlin (*The Figure of the Singer*, 2013), Tricia Rose (*Black Noise*, 1994), Aldon Lynn Nielsen (*Black Chant*, 1997), and the contributors to Ronald Jackson and Elaine Richardson's *Understanding African American Rhetoric* (2003). On the particular subject of African-American vernacular speech, Clarence Major's *From Juba to Jive* (1970) is an indispensable guide to the vernacular terminology of the period, while Henry Louis Gates' *The Signifying Monkey* (1986) remains the most thorough documentation of the strategies that lay and lie behind the tropes of African-American literature and the speech patterns of its populace. His work at times leans heavily upon work done in the 1960s and 1970s by Walter Ong, whose *Orality and Literacy* (1964) and *The Presence of the Word* (1980) have also contributed much to this thesis.<sup>52</sup>

For in-depth histories of the Black Arts Movement and its period, James Smethurst's already much-cited 2005 study offers a comprehensive overview of the development of the Black Arts Movement nationally across the United States, and Scott Saul's *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't* (2003) affords a valuable historical perspective to the jazz developments of 1960–1965 among its broader concerns. William Van Deburg also elucidates many of the parallels between Black Power and the BAM in *New Day in Babylon* (1991), his history of the former from 1965 to 1975.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Karlin, *The Figure of the Singer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Rose, Tricia, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH; London: University Press of New England, 1994); Ronald L. Jackson and Elaine B. Richardson (eds.), *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003); Clarence Major, *From Juba to Jive: The Dictionary of African-American Slang* (New York; London: Penguin, 1994); Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. Twenty-fifth-anniversary edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, *New Accents* (London: Routledge, 2002); Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

<sup>53</sup> William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

The Black Arts Movement's elevation of John Coltrane as the musical figure above all others has commonly been critically acknowledged, and equally commonly left unchallenged. He is, for instance, described by Saul as 'freedom's saint', the man who unified W. E. B. Du Bois's 'Double Consciousness'.<sup>54</sup> The section on Coltrane in Benston's *Performing Blackness* also features dubious assertions of the kind that 'Trane's was the most magical of formal revolutions',<sup>55</sup> that are then justified primarily by second-hand sources, such as those in the poetry, rather than to a critically-distanced examination of the music. All support the concept of the relationship between music and poetry proposed by Daniel Karlin, after Walter Pater, where 'art aspires to the condition of music'.<sup>56</sup>

Coltrane appears throughout the present thesis, too. He occupies a central position at the junction between jazz and the Black Arts Movement that is perhaps as significant as that of Malcolm X at the junction between black art and black nationalism.

However, while Coltrane's elevated status necessitates his music occupying more space than his contemporaries within the confines of this study, his contemporaries' achievements demand they occupy more space than is often granted them in work devoted to the crossover between the Black Arts Movement poets and jazz. Benston, for instance, has an entire chapter on Coltrane but devotes almost no space to other musicians. He also underestimates the BAM poets' and free-jazz musicians' reliance upon older, 'traditional' forms in his enthusiasm for siting Coltrane as the 'heroic figuration of a revolutionary blackness'.<sup>57</sup>

For counterbalance, Frank Kofsky (*Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, 1970) and A. B. Spellman (*Four Lives in the Bebop Business*, 1966), along with Scott Saul more recently (2003), most fully acknowledge the roles the likes of Max Roach, Ornette

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<sup>54</sup> Saul, p. 209; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. by Brent Hayes Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 8 and *passim*.

<sup>55</sup> Benston, p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> Walter Pater, quoted in Marc Berley, *After the Heavenly Tune: English Poetry and the Aspiration to Song* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2000), p. ix.

<sup>57</sup> Smethurst, p. 75.

Coleman, Albert Ayler, Sonny Rollins and Cecil Taylor played in the formal changes that took place across the decade.<sup>58</sup> Kofsky gives a Marxian reading of the transformations wrought in both music and society by the development of free-form improvisation. He devotes as much space to musicians other than the saxophonist as anyone who has written on the subject since. Yet his (or perhaps his publisher's) own later acceptance of the Coltrane myth and the manner in which commerce demands sanitization was indicated by the change of the book's title to *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s* for its expanded second edition in 1998. In largely glossing over the presence of those other than the saxophonist Coltrane, scholarship has in fact followed the lead of popular culture and memory. The result of this is the frequent attribution to Coltrane of some things he simply did not do, and the obscuration of the depth of the relationship between the Black Arts Movement poets and the developments of jazz in the 1960s as a whole.

For first-hand insight into the theories and manifestos that underpinned the BAM's politics and aesthetics, Baraka and Larry Neal's 1969 anthology *Black Fire*, and Sascha Feinstein, James Smethurst and John H. Bracey's *SOS – Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader* provide wide-ranging collections of writings by contemporary contributors which outline the motivations and principles that underpin the BAM and its adherents' approach to art, literature and music, and give theoretical groundings which frequently have been used in support of this study's readings of the restless, energized activity that characterizes the poetry discussed herein.

Of the individual poets discussed, Baraka is the equivalent of Coltrane as the most written-about of the BAM's protagonists (many of the works mentioned above devote entire sections to him and his work), and is much the most prolific theorist of

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<sup>58</sup> Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*. Expanded and rev. 2nd edn (New York: Pathfinder, 1998); A. B. Spellman, *Four Lives in the Bebop Business* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967).

his own movement. The essays he wrote in the early- and mid-sixties – gathered in *Black Music* (first published in 1967) – are an illuminating companion to the poetry he produced in the same period. Meanwhile, the articles, plays and poems collected in the *LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader* enhance the understanding of the programmatic intentions behind the establishment of BARTS and the BAM.

Work devoted to specific analysis of the work of Steve Jonas is – by stark contrast – almost non-existent outside of T. J. Anderson's chapter on him in *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right*. Jayne Cortez and Sonia Sanchez fare better on account of the greater longevity of their careers coinciding with the increase in critical interest on the subject, but no full-length study of either of their lives or work yet exists. While there are many articles about their work which emphasize their own poetic innovations, and both receive due attention in D. H. Melhem's *Heroism in the New Black Poetry* (1990), that which pertains to the Black Arts Movement maintains the focus on Coltrane in its emphases on Cortez's 'How Long has Trane Been Gone' and Sanchez's 'a/coltrane/poem'. Much the same pattern is in evidence with A. B. Spellman and Don L. Lee, whose best-known 'Coltrane Poems' are given attention in many of the books and articles which cover the wider subject, but whose own lives and wider work are not afforded anything like the attention given to Baraka, whose higher profile and strength of view mean that he becomes the official media go-to *provocateur* of the movement.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, the overarching history of jazz – from its uncertain genesis in the Mississippi Delta around the 1890s and 1900s through to its fragmentation in the 1970s and 1980s – has been expertly written by Ted Gioia in his book *The History of Jazz* (1998). Scott DeVaux's *The Birth of Bebop* is an exhaustive description of that particular jazz epoch, whose influence was inescapably part of the musical developments of the 1960s. DeVaux, in collaboration with Gary Giddens, is also

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<sup>59</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Black Music: Essays*, (New York: Akashic Books, 2010); D.H. Melhem, *Heroism in the New Black Poetry: Introductions and Interviews* (University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

responsible for *Jazz* (2001), which covers the same ground as Gioia, but at considerably greater length. Free jazz, specifically, has been written about at length by Ekkehard Jost in *Free Jazz* (1974); he being the first to give long-form treatment to the style through a series of portraits of the musicians at its heart (and of some, such as Charles Mingus and Sun Ra, who would not necessarily today be bracketed with the form). His work has been of particular use in the section of this thesis that concentrates on Ornette Coleman. The section on 'Free Jazz' in Alfred Willener's *The Action-Image of Society* (1969) contains in its short length a significant number of observations on the social and aesthetic functions of the music, and has been a key influence on the perspectives of the current study. Lewis Porter, similarly, in book and article formats, is by some distance the single most significant contributor to the musicological understanding of the sections on Coltrane herein. Ashley Kahn's book outlining the making of *A Love Supreme* (2003), does however give an illuminating sense of the quotidian processes and pressures that gave rise to such a seminal recording, and is a useful reminder that Coltrane's music came to be as it was thanks to the collaborative input of many others as well as the title artist himself.<sup>60</sup>

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In 1986, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. lamented the 'lack of sophisticated scholarly attention' that had been devoted to the 'Black artistic tradition', and expressed his hope that 'decades of careful collection and establishment of texts will be followed by decades of close reading, interpretation, speculation'.<sup>61</sup> This thesis aims to do some of the former, and a lot of the latter. Albeit that a huge amount has been done since Gates voiced that wish over thirty years ago, there is still a lack of work which treats the

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<sup>60</sup> Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Gary Giddins and Scott DeVeaux, *Jazz* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009); Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (Graz: Universal Edition, 1974); Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Creation of John Coltrane's Classic Album* (London: Granta, 2002).

<sup>61</sup> Gates, p. xii.

music and the literature of the period as essentially connected but distinct entities, with their own codings, histories and influences. To that end, there follow five chapters which apply the methodology of textual close readings and interpretations both to the jazz and to the literature of the time. Through this, it is purposed that the connections between the forms can be rendered apparent, whilst a hierarchical ranking and lazy transposition of one to the other can be gainsaid.

To this end, the thesis uses five seminal jazz recordings released in the period from 1960 to 1965 as framing discursive devices for the deconstruction of aesthetic practice at work both in the music and, subsequently, in the Black Arts Movement poetry that responded to it. The methodology and structure of the thesis are accordingly simple. Each chapter opens with a close reading of a recording – either a whole album or an individual track – which has been selected on the basis that it can lay claim in some regard to having altered the existing paradigm, be that for reasons of political explicitness, of technical radicalism or of influence on wider culture. Critically prioritizing the music, the chapters are ordered chronologically according to the release date of these records, a pattern which moves the thesis musically from January 1960 through to November 1966, eight months prior to John Coltrane's death.

Given that the vast bulk of the 'jazz poetry' produced within the temporal limits of this work by those who would claim to be part of the Black Arts Movement was written in 1969, such orderly chronology is not possible for the poems chosen. The poetic half of the thesis does however begin with Amiri Baraka's 'Black Art', written in 1965, the year that the BAM was founded. Thereafter, the poems have been selected on two bases: that they respond directly to the work or the artist under discussion in the same chapter; and that they are of sufficient interest to justify the length of analysis applied to them. As far as the author is aware, the close readings of Jonas's 'One in Three Musicians', Cortez's 'Ornette' and Spellman's 'John Coltrane' herein are the first of their kind.



Chapter One examines two texts which set the scene for the heightened political engagement of both jazz and poetry whilst also establishing the historical continuum against which these artists and their contemporaries were pushing. Bebop alumnus Max Roach's *We Insist! Freedom Now* suite from January 1960 opens the decade under discussion here as a parallel to its opening of a new directness of engagement for African-American musicians with the iniquities of their lived histories at the time of its release. Amiri Baraka's 'Black Art', while not a direct response to Roach's record, nevertheless performed a similar service for the Black Arts Movement, distilling ideas previously expressed in his prose and dramaturgy into a self-reflexive manifesto advocating what he believed black poetry should be, how it should serve the cultural nationalist aims of the movement, and what it needed to define itself against. Both Roach and Baraka manipulate the given techniques of their forms in ways indicative of the overall aesthetic shift that this heightened political engagement engendered, and establish patterns of aesthetic behaviour which we will see repeated in the texts discussed thereafter.

Chapter Two looks at the manner in which black artists appropriated and transformed material which originated in white culture in order to unleash radically new forms under the cover of familiarity. John Coltrane's 1961 recording of 'My Favorite Things' is discussed in comparison to the original version from Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Sound of Music*. Sonia Sanchez's 'a/coltrane/poem', written in 1969 and inspired by Coltrane's take on the track, is examined here as a response to both, using the manner in which Coltrane synthesizes given materials into new forms as a template which consequently enables Sanchez to offer her own radically original take on the poetic form.

Chapter Three then examines the attitudes black artists brought to bear upon the traditions of black art and history in the service of the constitution of a new black subjectivity. Ornette Coleman's seminal 1961 album *Free Jazz* is shown to be an iconoclastic record constructed on a foundation of traditional material; a conclusion

which questions the received historical narrative propagated by Ken Burns' *Jazz* series, whose narrative – seeing *Free Jazz* as such a complete departure from everything preceding it that the 1960s are then treated as an embarrassing endnote to the jazz glories of 1920–1959 – is deeply compromised by the revisionist tendencies of its principal artistic contributor (and executive producer), trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. The kinaesthetic effects of the art of this period are also under discussion here, with Coleman's record engaging the listener as a crucial agent in the record's performance, which eschews passive consumption in favour of ritualistic immersion; the listener becoming an agent in the realization of meaning to a greater extent than in any previous recorded jazz performance. On the poetic side, Steve Jonas's 1961 poem 'One in Three Musicians' illustrates how the synthesis of historical tradition with iconoclastic novelty that Coleman demonstrated could be brought to bear within the poetic form while enhancing its literary distinctiveness. Jayne Cortez's 'ORNETTE' (1969) then brings both biological and historical together, and serves as an overdue reminder that Coleman was by several years the pioneer of the kind of aesthetic radicalism for which John Coltrane would ultimately receive the greater recognition.

Chapter Four returns to Coltrane to begin a two-chapter examination of the mythical mediation and production of the saxophonist in the poetry of the late 1960s, beginning here with readings of 1964's *A Love Supreme* alongside two poems by A. B. Spellman: 'John Coltrane' (1965) and 'Did John's Music Kill Him?' (1969). The recording once again challenges the received wisdom, perpetuated in much BAM poetry and theoretical writing, of Coltrane as a violent and angry political totem, while Spellman's poems challenge the conventions of the poetry that established that myth, offering a distinct aesthetic and rhetorical contrast to the work of Spellman's one-time Howard University classmate Baraka.

Chapter Five then concludes the thesis with readings of two of those more aggressive responses to Coltrane, Don L. Lee's 'Don't Cry, Scream' and Jayne Cortez's 'How Long has Trane Been Gone', framed through a discussion of Coltrane's sonically radical 1965 album *Ascension* and 1966's *Meditations*. The aim is to establish an understanding of the motivation behind the Black Arts Movement's poetic impulse to establish a mythology for Coltrane that, as is also demonstrated, is productively problematized by close reading of even Coltrane's most radical work, and to offer the parallel hypothesis that the 1969 'Coltrane Poem' sheds analogical light on some of the internal divisions that – by the same year – were opening fissures within the BAM as a whole.

Reviewing the preceding five chapters, the concluding coda briefly looks at the manner in which jazz and the BAM fragmented to the point of incoherence in the years immediately following 1969, before summarizing how the works discussed in the previous chapters shed new light onto the debates and discussions surrounding the Black Arts Movement, jazz, and their relationship to one another.

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In *Noise, Water, Meat*, (1997), Douglas Kahn suggests that 'within the American context, [study of] the achievements and influences on the rest of the arts of the music of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman and others, and of African-American poetics and linguistic play are necessary for a more complete representation of aurality in the 1950s and 1960s [...] the screaming [...] needs to be joined by a chorus of saxophones'.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT, 1999), p. 14.

Well, here they come...

## Chapter One: Identity Riffs

### *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*, and Amiri Baraka's 'Black Art'

*I really think we should be about the business of redefining everything about us as Black people.*

— Max Roach.<sup>63</sup>

*Black Arts Movement artists valued jazz musicians such as Max Roach and Charles Mingus who were fairly traditional in formal terms but whose work was often politically radical as much as they valued those musicians – especially John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, and Cecil Taylor – who created relatively few overtly political pieces but whose formal experimentation was seen as analogous to the search for social liberation.*

— John Bracey, Sonia Sanchez and James Smethurst.<sup>64</sup>

In its title alone, Max Roach's 1960 album *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* announces its explicit intentions to engage in contemporary social and political life, and to transgress dominant racial codes in order to potentialize African-American agency.<sup>65</sup> Roach was not the first jazz musician to explicitly link his music with civil rights struggles at home and abroad. Two of Roach's regular collaborators, bassist Charles Mingus and saxophonist Sonny Rollins, had both released music in 1956 which had begun to evince direct social engagement, in the respective forms of *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, and *Freedom Suite*.<sup>66</sup> However, with *We Insist!* Roach went further than either of his former collaborators, or anyone else in jazz, had previously. Through the album's title; its cover art (a photograph, taken at a lunch counter sit-in

<sup>63</sup> Max Roach, 'Self Determination and the Black Aesthetic: An Interview with Max Roach', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 185–87 (p. 187).

<sup>64</sup> John H. Bracey, Sonia Sanchez, and James Smethurst, 'Editors' Introduction', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 1–10 (p. 7).

<sup>65</sup> Max Roach and Oscar Brown Jr., *We Insist!: Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* (1960), Max Roach, et al. (Candid Records, B01KAWIH0M, 2009) [on CD].

<sup>66</sup> Charles Mingus, *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (1956) <<https://open.spotify.com/album/4kZ55sjjRKgCphjOmSMR7o?si=6Ajj0-sqQjxzatLo52Yvw>> [Accessed 30 June 2016]; Sonny Rollins, 'Freedom Suite', *Freedom Suite* (1958), Sonny Rollins, Oscar Pettiford and Max Roach (Riverside, 00682, 1986) [on CD].

in Greensboro, North Carolina in February 1960, just days before the album's release, showing a group of African-American protesters staring, unabashed, at the camera. (see figure 1.<sup>67</sup>); the titles and lyrics of the songs; and the music itself, Roach created the first single musical artefact that evinced a complete commitment to the civil rights movement, made in emphatic, explicit terms, across and through all its musical and extra-musical elements. This was part of what prompted Frank Kofsky, later in the decade, to call him 'the single most unabashedly radical black nationalist in jazz.'<sup>68</sup>



Figure 1 - Cover of We Insist! Featuring Greensboro protesters.<sup>69</sup>

Born in 1924 in North Carolina, but raised in New York, Roach was the son of a gospel-singing mother and the nephew of a pianist aunt. His own musical career began as a child at the Bible School of the Concord Baptist Church, and he was drumming in gospel bands by the age of 10. As a teenager, he haunted the jazz clubs at 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, and in 1941 he played his first gig at Monroe's with Charlie Parker. From then, Roach rapidly became a go-to player for many of the biggest names in jazz at the time. Duke Ellington had him deputize for Sonny Greer in 1942, and in

<sup>67</sup> McMichael, p. 389.

<sup>68</sup> Kofsky, p. 123.

<sup>69</sup> 'Max Roach - "We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite"', *Discogs* <<https://www.discogs.com/Max-Roach-We-Insist-Max-Roachs-Freedom-Now-Suite/master/64368>> [Accessed 9 January 2018].

1943 he replaced his hero Kenny Clarke in Coleman Hawkins' band. 1944 saw him take the drum chair with Dizzy Gillespie. He played regularly with Charlie Parker in the late 1940s, and can be heard on many of Parker's records. By this stage, his drumming had taken on a polyrhythmic quality which effectively defined bebop drumming praxis.<sup>70</sup>

Signalling both versatility and a willingness to experiment, he joined Miles Davis in 1949 on the seminal *Birth of the Cool* session. Through the fifties, he completed a BMus degree in classical percussion at the Manhattan School of Music (1950–53), a period in which he also continued to play regularly with Parker, sat in – for Clarke once again – with John Lewis's Modern Jazz Quartet, and began his collaboration with Mingus – the two founding Debut Records in an attempt to wrestle control of the revenues of their recordings away from an industry which, at the time, was largely white-controlled. Debut put out a recording of a 1953 concert, *Jazz at Massey Hall*, featuring Parker, Gillespie, Bud Powell, Mingus and Roach, effectively a bebop supergroup. From 1953, Roach led a quintet alongside trumpeter Clifford Brown, with tenor saxophonist Harold Land (whose departure in 1954 paved the way for Sonny Rollins' collaborations with Roach), Bud Powell's brother Richie on piano, and bassist George Morrow. This group's sound, combining elements of gospel and the blues with bebop, came to define 'hard-bop' – the dominant sound of mainstream African-American-led jazz in the 1950s.<sup>71</sup>

By 1960, therefore, Roach was well established as a musical pioneer. Towards the end of the fifties he began to include experimentations with time signatures and timbres, including African and Latin percussion, and vocalese, as provided by his then-wife Abbey Lincoln.<sup>72</sup> The results of this stylistic evolution would coalesce on *We Insist!*, in which Lincoln's voice was a crucial feature. Roach was also 'an early and ardent

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Anthony Brown, 'Modern Jazz Drumset Artistry', *The Black Perspective in Music* 18. 1 (1990), 39–58 (p. 47).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Gioia, pp. 313–15.

<sup>72</sup> Gioia, p. 315.

supporter of the civil rights movement', and in an early 1970s interview he explained why:

'Two theories exist. One is that art is for the sake of art, which is true. The other theory, which is also true, is that the artist is like a secretary. . . . he keeps a record of his time so to speak . . . my music tries to say how I really feel, and I hope it mirrors in some way how black people feel in the United States'.<sup>73</sup>

The Greensboro sit-in, and the spread of the 'sit in', as a form of civil rights protest, across the South of the United States in January 1960, prompted Roach to accelerate the development of a long choral work designed to be a 'synoptic work of black history', that he was gestating in collaboration with Oscar Brown, Jr., a songwriter who had spent the fifties satirizing the oblique, indirect 'cool' pose towards civil rights that characterized black musicians' engagement – such as it was – with the political events of that decade.<sup>74</sup> Originally commissioned with a view to its debut performance being in 1963 at the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, Roach brought the project forward and – in its rapidly completed, truncated (five-track) form – the work became *We Insist!*. The whole record's strategic evocation of the experience of African-American slavery, its linking of the struggles of that time to those of 1960, and, ultimately, its use of music in the service of the programmatic intent of the title, are the focus of the first half of this chapter.

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'Driva Man' – the opening track of the album – begins with a short, vigorous tambourine shake by Abbey Lincoln, a moment of anticipatory tension which soon finds its release in a sharp staccato hit on the skin of the instrument. The sound of this suggests that Lincoln is playing with a flat, open palm – a technique offering maximum aural and symbolic impact – evincing the same directness as the album's title. This sound is repeated with metronomic relentlessness – and is the only sound

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<sup>73</sup> Gioia, p. 315; Roach, quoted in Gioia, p. 315.

<sup>74</sup> Saul, pp. 90–91 (p. 93).



accompanying Lincoln's vocals – throughout the first minute of the track, and immediately establishes repetition as a strategic trope through which the record evokes slave-era life. These tambourine strikes accrete to create the aural image of a whip being cracked, an accretion which in turn retrospectively reinvents the opening shake of the tambourine as a symbol of impending threat.

This sense is then supplemented and deepened by Roach's bass drum and snare drum from 1:00. Playing the rim-shots on the snare on the first beat of each 5/4 bar over the ensuing three minutes, these techniques create an aural bridge from the musical text to the vicious bodily experience of slave-era punishment; an association which – in conjunction with Lincoln's tambourine – links rhythmic stability inexorably with the physical techniques of oppression.<sup>75</sup>

The absolute lack of variation in the rhythmic patterns that Roach plays in 'Driva Man' can also be metaphorically equated to a set of shackles. Even within the most tedious swing patterns, jazz drumming praxis would ordinarily lead the listener to expect to hear variations in at least *some* element of the playing; often in the patterns deployed by the right hand or the placement of open hi-hat beats.<sup>76</sup> On 'Driva Man', however, rhythmic freedom is entirely absent. Roach plays and then exactly repeats just one one-bar pattern (see figure 2). The ceaselessly metronomic nature of this pattern must be presumed to be designed to draw attention to externally imposed

Ride cymbal  
Snare drum  
Bass drum  
Hi-hat w/foot

Figure 2: Max Roach's 'Driva Man' drum part

limitations, both historical and current. That this is played by Roach, whose own considerable technical abilities and ability to improvise within any beat were well-

<sup>75</sup> The rim-shot (a concurrent strike of the centre of the snare drum and the rim) is so called as the sound it produces is reminiscent of a gun being fired.

<sup>76</sup> For examples of such tedium, witness any of the Glenn Miller Band's recorded output.

established, ensures that the lack of expansion here comes over in a yet more startling manner.

The same sense of repetitiveness, both rhythmic and harmonic, can be heard in the brass parts of 'Driva Man', played by Booker Little (trumpet), Walter Benton and Coleman Hawkins (tenor saxophone), and Julian Priester (trombone). From 1:00, they follow a repeating C-minor blues i-iv-v chord progression, and on each occasion of that sequence each musician plays the same two notes on beats one and three of each bar. Still more repetition is apparent in James Schenk's bass part, which, also from 1:00, uses the same five notes for each chord of the sequence. The chord progression itself is also of note, as it is the I-IV-V progression of the twelve-bar blues, but compressed into six bars. The compression symbolizes a complete style being restricted or a nascent style only partly formed, its potential not fully realized.

The only player allowed a degree of flexible manoeuvre outside the restrictive repetitive structure of 'Driva Man' is Coleman Hawkins. Hawkins' presence on the session joins together over thirty-years of jazz history, the saxophonist's career having begun in earnest alongside Louis Armstrong in the Fletcher Henderson band in the early 1920s. Hawkins' solo on 'Driva Man' is therefore infused with the sensibility of a player who – more than anyone else on the record – embodied the experience of the twentieth-century African-American jazz musician. His presence lends tacit historical approval to both the musical and historical approaches that Roach was taking with *We Insist!*. Beginning at 1:37, the solo maintains the sense of slow, effortful progress that the accompaniment has by that stage firmly established. Yet, all the while through the two minutes and twenty-two-second-long solo, Hawkins is permitted to improvise his own melodic line. Set against the restrictions maintained by the rest of the playing on the track, this symbolizes the role that jazz as a whole would play in establishing a new African-American aesthetic paradigm for the twentieth century – one born out of the experiences of the slave era.

Maintaining a speech-like quality through his predominantly mid-register playing within a small tonal range, and with liberal use of pitch-bending and sudden drop-offs, Hawkins conjures the sound of a moaning, burdened voice responding to the continuing whips in the percussion. From 2:14 things become a little more animated, and the peak of the solo comes at 2:30, where he plays a long (four/five second) note that lies between an Eb<sub>4</sub> and an E<sub>4</sub>. Sitting outside the norms of diatonic tonality, it is the first sound on the record which explicitly rejects the imposition and restrictions of an arbitrary, externally determined system. That sense of nascent transgression is then deepened with an audible squeak at 3:04 – an imperfect, uncontrolled sound that Hawkins insisted remain in the final edit.<sup>77</sup> However, the relative freedom of Hawkins' solo is swiftly and abruptly curtailed by the re-entry of Abbey Lincoln's tambourine 'whip' and vocals at 3:57. Dramatizing the notion that the memory of the 'Driva Man' continues to affect African-American behaviour in the present of 1960, this terse transition silences not only the soloist, but also all the other horns and Roach's drumming, leaving only Schenk's bass to accompany Lincoln in a near-recapitulation of the opening minute.

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Track two, 'Freedom Day', moves *We Insist!*'s illustration of the African-American story forward to the Proclamation of Emancipation in 1863. Whatever the immediate legal freedoms engendered by the proclamation, the psychologies of the slave-era would have a lasting impact. One symptom of this was described by W. E. B. Du Bois' as African-American 'double consciousness': 'this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'.<sup>78</sup> And as West Indian psychiatrist and post-colonial theorist Frantz Fanon put it as late as 1952, 'The Negro, however

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<sup>77</sup> Nat Hentoff, 'Liner Notes', *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* (1960), Max Roach, et al. (Candid Records, B01KAWIH0M, 2009) [on CD].

<sup>78</sup> Du Bois, p. 8.

sincere, is the slave of the past.<sup>79</sup> Dramatizing both sides of this psychological division, Roach's 'Freedom Day' alternates between two distinct moods, most easily identified through their respective fast and slow tempi, which when juxtaposed speak to a tension between celebration and doubt that sonically allegorizes this double consciousness. Slavery may have been abolished, but in no sense were African-Americans subsequently free to live the lifestyles of their former masters, or to wholly escape being defined through slavery's insidious memory.

However, in accordance with the significance of the historical moment, the opening thirty-four seconds of 'Freedom Day' create a soundscape of regimental pomp and circumstance. The horns, after Roach has used the bell of his ride cymbal to prefigure the rhythm of the phrase, perform what is essentially a grand fanfare, repeated twice over chord I of the C-minor key, then moved up and played once on chord vi (Ab minor), before returning to chord I, out of which a fast bebop-style section then develops. Having hinted at the development of the blues in 'Driva Man', this progression now hints at the subsequent development of the I-vi-ii-V sequence, one of the foundational 'turnaround' sequences of jazz of all kinds up to at least 1960. In the opening of this track, however, as with the blues sequence in 'Driva Man', that potential is only half-formed, and the militaristic sound of the horn (enhanced by Little occupying the high end of the trumpet's range, which lends a cornet or bugle-like timbre to the sound) leaves a spectral trace of nineteenth-century oppressive culture within the melody.

The opening fanfare is controlled and disciplined, a carry-across from the sounds of 'Driva Man'. Yet a stately 6/4 tempo here smooths out the rhythmic displacement of the opening track's 5/4, and in the interstices of the melodic pattern lie some initial hints of a breakaway from control and discipline evidenced in Hawkins' solo on the

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<sup>79</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles L. Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 175.

previous track. Some notes in the brass chords are fractionally out of tune, giving an effect which ever so subtly bends the sound away from the technical discipline of a military band and indicates the arrival of a new, looser, subversive musical element that again points towards the development of jazz in New Orleans in the 1900s and 1910s. The same subversive element is evident in the fills that Roach plays against the brass textures. They are neither quite in time with the other instruments, nor absolutely rigidly within the 6/4 pulse. Roach therefore competes against temporal discipline, but – in these thirty seconds or so – only cautiously. This opening does not suggest emancipation as a moment heralding a revolution, but acknowledges the presence of the potential to deviate from others' rules that emancipation heralds.

By the time of Roach's later drum solo, which begins at 3:47, we hear an altogether less cautious celebration of the liberating opportunities available to the African-American drummer of 1960. In stark contrast to the repetitive, simplistic rigidity of Roach's part on 'Driva Man', technical possibilities proliferate throughout this solo's forty-second duration. For the first time on the album, no effort is made to render the basic pulse explicit. Roach's phrases instead imply the pulse with a mixture of drags, ruffs and single-stroke rolls of regularly varied lengths, through which he also explores the full sonic and dynamic range of the kit, and does so at a continuously and unapologetically loud dynamic. This is drummer-as-synecdoche for black people, the player confidently asserting technical ability within a newly available transgressive space that he himself is able to engineer.

The progression towards this climactic section is prefigured from the moment the stately opening gives way to the arrival of a modern-day jazz soundscape, a change which, when juxtaposed with the suggestions of subversive play in the opening, demonstrates how far African-American music has moved from the ordered approach of the mid-nineteenth century, and even that of jazz in its earlier twentieth-

century epochs. Out of an aural cross-fade effect created by the simultaneous diminuendo of the horns' final *tutti* C-minor chord and the crescendo into audibility of Roach and Schenk on bass and drums, there emerges the sound of the culmination of the artistic flowering only hinted at in the opening section. Playing at a lightning-quick 310 beats-per-minute [bpm], Roach and Schenk are very swiftly joined by the three horn players, who are no longer playing isorhythmically as per the opening fanfare, but are instead improvising contrapuntal lines independent of one-another over the basic C-minor blues chord sequence that Schenk now implies rather than stating outright. Above this sonic *mêlée*, meanwhile, Abbey Lincoln's vocal line recapitulates the melody of the opening theme, a device which layers the historical evocation of the sound in the opening section atop the contemporary instrumental sounds, establishing a temporal continuum between the music of both eras and anticipating the similar literary claims made by LeRoi Jones on the music's behalf.

This fast section of 'Freedom Day' is effectively a carnivalesque site for the licenced exploration of new forms. Booker Little's trumpet solo, a technical *tour de force*, takes full advantage. Played over four eight-bar sections – the first two of which are accompanied by drums and bass alone, the third by the other horns playing chromatic rising figures, and the fourth divided into two four-bar sections with the horns dropping out for the first and returning for the second – Little embarks on a series of figures with descending semiquaver scales as a recurring motif. The effect is giddy: combined with the pace of the rhythm instruments it forges a path concerned entirely with what comes next, moving on to the next idea, the next innovation. It is an indication of a commitment to the process of creativity which, as will be seen, would come to further characterise both jazz and the Black Arts Movement throughout the 1960s.

And yet, the whole-tone rising and descending chords that the saxophone and trombone play beneath Little in those eight- and four-bar phrases also inject a spectral dissonance into the texture, ensuring that the darker elements of the African-African past remain an audibly restrictive presence within what could otherwise be a moment of complete liberation. Indeed, the injection of harmony at all indicates here that freedom is being deliberately constrained, since, having removed the piano from the instrumentation, there is no need for even-tempered chord-based harmonic didacticism unless it is designed to make that very point.

Jazz had re-recognized the organizing structures of Western harmony throughout its history, moving away particularly from equal-temperament tuning, a method invented in the eighteenth century which Frank Kofsky hyperbolically claims exemplifies

that passion for order, systematization, simplification, rationalization, and control of all variables (an infinity of possible musical tones drastically reduced to a very finite eighty-eight) that has in every case characterized the bourgeois mentality.<sup>80</sup>

From the use of the flattened third, fifth and seventh degrees of the scale ('blue notes') in the heterophony of early jazz in New Orleans, then through the bebop movement's use of scales and harmonics alien to the organizing strictures of Western music, jazz signalled a particular willingness to transgress what were previously considered to be normative forms. In his 'Freedom Day' solo, however, Little (and the same applies to Julian Priester and Walter Benton's solos which follow) is pointedly prevented from playing entirely unfettered by the pull of the harmony. Coming and going within each solo, the brass accompaniment symbolizes the always-present dialectical tension between moments of greater and lesser liberation which is metonymic of African-American history. The to-and-fro between the slow and quick sections (another slow, stately, isorhythmic twenty seconds beginning at 4:29 later separates the drum solo and the return of Lincoln's vocals) is another structural

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<sup>80</sup> Kofsky, p. 228.

indicator of the sense that almost all of the techniques employed in 'Freedom Day' point towards: that it is an aural metaphor for the ambiguities of identity that emancipation unleashed for the African-American community. By historicizing his music this way, Roach makes his listeners privy to an extended piece of dramatic irony.

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The lyrics of 'Freedom Day' – written by Oscar Brown, Jr. and sung by Abbey Lincoln – enhance exactly the same feeling, created in the music, of a continual dialectic tension between the known experience of slavery and, what would have been, for those slaves, the alien feeling of legally assured freedom. From the opening instructions to 'whisper, listen', the words further conceptualize the psychological divisions unleashed by Emancipation Day. Indeed, the lyrics greet the 'news' of emancipation with deep suspicion.<sup>81</sup> Brown's words characterize it as 'rumours', announcing that the people saying such things 'must be lying', and that the recipient of this legal freedom 'can't conceive it, can't believe it'. Ironically, the only confirmation is afforded by the granting of deference to the perceived authority of the words of the white master ('but that's what they say').

Lincoln's delivery of Brown's words to 'Freedom Day' enhances their oppressive sense still further. Her singing combines the sound of excitement and potential with the linguistic signifiers of caution and disbelief such that words and delivery are themselves in tension. The opening lines are delivered with utterly clear, crisp intonation. Nothing about the delivery denotes the caution inherent to the semantics of 'whisper' or 'listen'. It is instead the sound of a confident, modern

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<sup>81</sup> As Tejumola Olaniyan says, 'the euphoria over political decolonization [...] subsided quickly to the sobering realization of unabated *cultural imperialism*'. (Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 3.



African-American voice commentating on the experience of its racial forbears, and doing so with a tone that just edges on bitterness – not towards emancipation-era African-Americans, but towards the idea that legal emancipation did not automatically lead to cultural or social emancipation. By singing 'can't conceive it, can't believe it' at the loudest dynamic of all, Lincoln indicates that this is the message she and Roach wish to resonate most strongly in the present day.

However, optimism is also present in Lincoln's delivery – further symbolizing the double-consciousness of the situation. The constant assonant 'ee' sounds – which unify the text through both internal and external rhymes, and bring the listener's attention back, always, to the 'freedom' of the track's title – suggest a more optimistic quality lies alongside the ironic bitterness in Lincoln's vocals. This is particularly true in the elongated iterations of 'freeeeeedom day', through which, each time, Lincoln glissandos down from a D<sub>4</sub> to a C<sub>4</sub>, then climbing back up to the D<sub>4</sub> on 'day', up again to an Eb<sub>4</sub> on 'it's' which follows, and then back down the slide on the next 'freeeeeedom'. That sense of repeated excitement is compounded in the opening lines of each verse, which are placed on the first and second crotchets of each bar, with a slight emphasis on the second of the pair. If one halves the tempo-marking and treats the crotchets as quavers, this gives a repeating rhythmic figure that is reminiscent of a heart beating at approximately 150 beats per minute, a (human) pulse which is indicative of either extreme stress or excitement, a moment of heightened awareness and pumping adrenaline. All of these feelings and contradictions are inherent in Brown, Roach and Lincoln's fusion of language and music, forming a full interpretation of Emancipation Day and its impact, both upon those who lived through it and upon his present-day contemporaries.

Wordless sound is nevertheless at the heart of 'Triptych: Protest/Prayer/Peace', the third track, which sits at the centre of the suite, and in which the threat of productive disruptive chaos is made overtly manifest by Lincoln's screaming in the 'Protest' section.<sup>82</sup> The initial 'Prayer' section of the track (0:00–3:36), is however – in accordance with the name – altogether more meditative. Lincoln in this section carries the long vowel sounds 'ee' and 'oo' over from 'Freedom Day', to form legato lines of melody which are performed predominantly in the resonant middle register of her *tessitura*, accompanied solely by Roach playing two short, *piano* ostinati in repeating alternation. Through each of the long notes Lincoln sings with just a hint of vibrato, the pitch moving away and back to the tonal note very slightly in another implicit rebuke to even-tempered control.

This sense of calm does not last. Between 3:38 and 4:54 comes the 'Protest', where both Roach's drumming and Lincoln's vocalese move into the sphere of the chaotic. The mood switches suddenly and is signalled by Roach playing a *sforzando* roll which crescendos back to what then remains a *fortissimo* dynamic of furious activity. Lincoln's voice comes in at 3:39 and for the next eighty seconds produces a barrage of howls and screams of anguish and rage. Nat Hentoff's liner notes describe 'Protest' as 'a final, uncontrollable unleashing of rage and anger than have been compressed in fear for so long that the only catharsis can be the extremely painful tearing out of all the accumulated fury and hurt and blinding bitterness'.<sup>83</sup> Particularly interesting is Hentoff's contention, later reiterated by Scott Saul, that 'it is all forms of protest, certainly including violence'.<sup>84</sup> It is a useful idea when one considers the use of the scream as noise. Free from language, free from any connection with tonality, the scream is as direct an outpouring of bodily intensity, freed from the limitations of socially-determined linguistic signification, as the human voice can generate. In this

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<sup>82</sup> Wordless singing had, of course, been a continuous feature of jazz since Louis Armstrong invented 'scat' singing in the 1920s. That method, however, was designed to enable the voice to imitate an instrument. Lincoln's use of sound here ensures that it remains inextricably connected to the human voice.

<sup>83</sup> Hentoff, 'Liner Notes'.

<sup>84</sup> Saul, p. 91.

regard, these ninety seconds of Roach's album can be heard as a direct illustration – six years before Amiri Baraka wrote 'Black Art' – of what Baraka means, in that poem, by 'live flesh and coursing blood hearts brains souls splintering fire'. Lincoln's performance does indeed splinter. The voice itself in the act of screaming splinters into uncontrollable multiphonics which break linear tonality (and also break the limiters of the recording technology). The act itself *is* the protest.

Roach's drumming accompaniment to Lincoln's screaming, meanwhile, provides those vocal sounds with a backdrop of unrelenting, powerful noise. Beginning on the snare only, Roach builds tension by sequentially adding in the sounds of his bass drum, toms, and then finally cymbals, playing them at such a pace that the ear comes close to hearing the sounds as simultaneous. A monophonic collage of discontinuous individual moments is therefore created, with Lincoln's screams another layer in the sound. The combination of vocal sound freed from linguistic boundaries and an equally unfettered instrumental accompaniment effectively fuses voice and music into one in a manner which duly defies all prior controlling systems of order.

The end of 'Protest' is then delineated as abruptly as the start, with a thunderous cymbal/bass drum crash and a moment of silence before the final 'Peace' section returns the overall 'Triptych' to the mood of its opening 'Prayer'. However, where 'Prayer' was a preparation, sonically pregnant with the possibility of Kahn's havoc, 'Peace', signalled by the sigh with which Lincoln opens her contribution to the section, represents catharsis. Roach himself told Lincoln that the feel of the section 'is the feeling of related exhaustion after you've done everything you can to assert yourself. You can rest now because you've worked to be free. It's a realistic feeling of peacefulness. You know what you've been through'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Hentoff, 'Liner Notes'.

That sense is also apparent in Roach's playing on 'Peace', which returns to the quieter principles of 'Prayer', but now with a new, continually repeated pattern which he plays exclusively with his feet, putting the music – which hitherto has lacked a fixed pulse – back into 5/4 (see figure 3).



Figure 3: Bass drum (indicated by the whole notes) and hi-hat (crosses) pattern which underscores 'Prayer'

Order is thus restored, but, coming after the outpourings of 'Protest', and minus the harsh, hand-led, sounds of *We Insist!*'s opening track, it is now a product of African-American agency, no longer dictated by the 'Driva Man', who has been expelled in 'Protest'. Indicating the arrival of even greater rhythmic freedom, Roach's hands play a variety of rudimental fragments over the foot patterns: A drag at 5:12; four hi-hat strokes at 5:15; a much faster, Buddy Rich-esque set of rolls on the hi-hat (5:30–5:34); rapid rim-clicks (5:37–5:40) which recur at 6:08 and 7:15; three sets of three-stroke ruffs at 5:47; and a single stroke roll at 6:38. Now able to play fragments of rhythm rather than needing to perform as a metronome, the drummer finally acquires the same freedom the more familiar melodic instruments obtained in 'Freedom Day'.

And there is one feature of 'Peace' which also sees Roach accepting that the past is something which still has much to offer to the African-American in the present. From 6:14 to 6:21, and then again from 7:36 to the end, Roach plays a standard 4/4 swing ride cymbal pattern. The sound of this would have been utterly familiar to anyone with an awareness of jazz after 1930, yet here it is rendered startlingly unfamiliar by its appearance in a context which would seem to have been designed to steer far away from any such 'standard' performance practices. Roach's use of it suggests that with the 'peace' that follows a protest well-made comes the sort of freedom that enables worn-out techniques to be reconstituted. In that regard, this understated

section of *We Insist!* strikes as radical a sound as anything on the better-remembered *Free Jazz* of the same year.

Coming as it does after 'Driva Man' and 'Freedom Day', 'Prayer and Protest' can be seen as the last moments of the narrative of 'We Insist!' which look backwards. Roach's cymbal crash acts as the narrative pivot into which 'Peace' can be seen, not solely as a coda to the exploration of the indignities and phenomenological tensions of the African-American past, but also as an introduction for the possibilities that will be illustrated in the tracks which remain in the suite. Lincoln's laughs – a sound certainly not audible in the first two tracks – indicate the awakening of a consciousness that a different kind of subjectivity could be constituted within the texts of the music.

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The final two tracks, which segue straight into one another, move the focus of *We Insist!* firmly to Africa, and point towards what would be an increasing fascination among the 1960s African-American artistic avant-garde with the aesthetics of their imagined African heritage, a fascination LeRoi Jones would begin to explore in *Blues People*. The lyrics of 'All Africa' – a title which itself appeals to a form of experiential universality – play with the word 'beat':

The beat has a rich and magnificent history  
 full of adventure excitement and mystery  
 some of it bitter, and some of it sweet,  
 but all of it part of the beat, the beat, the beat.

In the context of *We Insist!* the 'beat' of the whip/tambourine in 'Driva Man' has now been fully reclaimed on the terms of the performers. The 'bitter' negative connotations of slavery and American life supplanted syntactically by the 'sweet' reference back to the drumming of Africa which can be used as a model for the future acquisition of agency. It is used as an origin story here: 'they say it all began with a chant and a hum and a black hand laid on a native drum', a sound loudly

evoked by the presence of Afro-Cuban drummers Raymond Mantilla and Thomas Du Vall alongside Nigerian Michael Olatunji, who generate with Roach an extended percussion-ensemble 'outro' from 3:50 in 'All Africa'. The additional personnel enable significant polyrhythmic activity to take place and for the drums to be heard as 'voices', reminiscent of the 'talking drums' of the Yoruba tribes of Africa from which Olatunji himself heralded. Polyrhythms were by no means unfamiliar within jazz, especially not since 1942. Having four percussionists was, however, decidedly unusual, and the accumulated effects, even within the (unusually regular, for this album) 12/8 pulse not only form a hybrid of American and African styles but also productively confuse the listener's sense of rhythmic order and stability.

The lyrical emphasis on 'beat' also puns on the name of the Ginsberg/Kerouac school of writers, illustrating how easily African-American artists could borrow from the techniques of white Americans who themselves, in the form of West Coast 'cool' jazz, borrowed techniques and attitudes implicit in African-American art of the 1950s. Here is a model for a move away from subjectivity determined exclusively by race, but which could be led by black artists utilizing a heritage that was not available to their white countrymen. Emphasizing the exclusivity of that heritage, the long list of thirty-six African ethnic groupings, each of which Lincoln recites to the same two notes between 1:27 and 3:50, is answered by Olatunji uttering a dialect word from each of those groupings' languages which refers to the concept of 'freedom'. A synthesis of African and American is therefore designed to be seen as synonymous with 'freedom' for the African-American citizen.

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'All Africa' elides into 'Tears for Johannesburg', which is Roach's response to the Sharpeville massacre which befell apartheid South Africa on 21 March 1960; white police shot sixty-nine black Africans dead and injured one-hundred and eighty –

many were shot in the back.<sup>86</sup> The piece returns to the 5/4 of 'Driva Man' and thereby provides a rhythmically circular conclusion to the whole suite, although this time the regular pulse is provided by James Schenk's ostinato bass figure rather than by the percussion. Although the opening ensemble playing by the melody instruments, in a minor key, has hints of mournfulness, the piece on the whole steers clear of introspective sentimentalism in favour of a lively sense of liberation which signals defiance against the violent racism that Sharpeville underwent. With the percussion section continuing in full flow out of 'All Africa', the switch back to the unusual time signature liberates Roach to conjure his most expansive, loose performance of the whole suite. His hi-hat and ride cymbal playing swings ferociously but is audibly relaxed, in deep contrast to the studied rigidity of his playing in 'Driva Man'. While the right-hand keeps things moving, the left-hand engages in constant chatter with the congas and cowbells; chops and single-hand rolls appear with a great sense of spontaneity, pushing the trumpet, saxophone and trombone solos which interpose before the drummers' soli from 7:28.

Those solo sections are also imbued with an orchestration that is reminiscent of the Count Basie Orchestra, with tight riffs played by the non-solo instruments beneath the solo top-lines, over no more than two chords. With the African percussion continuing throughout, 'Tears for Johannesburg' indicates Roach's conception for a new kind of African-American artistic endeavour six years before Baraka's cry for the same in 'Black Art'. Coming at the end of an extraordinary five-part suite, the indignities visited upon the African-American in the course of the centuries prior to 1960 are pulled apart in the new metrical and aural world of the suite. It marks a statement of intent and defiance that would stimulate further endeavours in the same field over the decade to come.

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<sup>86</sup> Hentoff, 'Liner Notes'.

*And so struggle, change, struggle, unity, change, movement and more of, the movement, the motion.*

— Amiri Baraka.<sup>87</sup>

In 1965, five years after *We Insist!*, during which the breadth and scope of the soundscapes of jazz were dramatically altered, Amiri Baraka's poem 'Black Art', was published in *The Liberator*. Where *We Insist!* serves as an initial template for musical engagement with the politics of Civil Rights, 'Black Art' can be seen as an early manifestation of the jazz methodologies which Baraka felt could be usefully co-opted to the service of creating a new sensibility within black poetry and wider culture.<sup>88</sup> The call for an active, urgent, programmatic response to the inequities of historical and present-day life for black Americans that *We Insist!* both makes *and* responds to, in its transgressive musical and lyrical strategies, is here made equally emphatically within a poem which distils its author's aims and strategies for the then-nascent Black Arts Movement.

Baraka was born Everett LeRoi Jones in Newark, New Jersey, on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1934, into a 'stable lower-middle-class, upper-working-class black family'. His love of poetry and jazz were inculcated while he was one of very few black faces attending Newark's Italian-American Barringer High School. He excelled academically, and earned a scholarship to study literature at Rutgers University in 1951 at the age of seventeen, though he transferred to Howard University in 1952, where he would meet Toni Morrison and Andrew Young, as well as fellow Black Arts Movement poet A. B. Spellman. He did not complete his course there, however. As his biographer Komozi Woodard contends, Jones' 'love of music, art, and literature made him feel alienated in the midst of the careerist ethos of the Cold War University'. He did, however meet Harlem Renaissance poet Sterling Brown, who empathised with Jones' immersion in the music of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, and introduced him to

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<sup>87</sup> Amiri Baraka, 'Preface to the Reader', in *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by Harris, pp. xi–xiv (p. xii).

<sup>88</sup> Amiri Baraka, 'Black Art', in *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by Harris, pp. 219–20. The poem is reproduced in full in the appendix.



the historiography of the blues, something which would have a vital effect on his later literary work.<sup>89</sup>

This was not enough to keep him at Howard, however, and, rather than return to Newark a failure, in 1954 he enrolled as a gunner in the United States air force, or 'Error Farce' as he would term it in his 1984 autobiography. A voracious reader, some of his chosen reading material was of a nature deemed 'subversive' within the febrile political atmosphere of the 1950s, and after a protracted investigation stemming from a colleague anonymously informing on him, in 1957 Jones received a dishonourable discharge – and thereafter the ongoing attention of the FBI – for violation of his oath of duty.<sup>90</sup>

It was after this that Jones moved to Greenwich Village in New York, where he fell in with the poets of the New York School, and of the Beat Movement. He was a regular attendee at poetry readings and jazz gigs, meeting Langston Hughes after a performance Hughes had done with the accompaniment of Charles Mingus in 1958. It was, however, Allen Ginsberg, particularly through 'Howl', who was the main formative influence on Jones' poetics at this time: 'his [Ginsberg's] language and his rhythms and the poem's content were real to me', as Baraka later recalled.<sup>91</sup>

In 1959 he founded Totem Press, which published work by Kerouac and Ginsberg among many others, including Jones' own first volume of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, in 1961. In 1960 he also set up the journals *Floating Bear* and *Kulchur*, which he edited until his switch to nationalism in 1965. That switch would also precipitate his falling out with Ishmael Reed, co-founder of the UMBRA poets workshop, of which Jones was a member from 1962–64. As the sixties progressed, so

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Jerry Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 20–26 (p. 20); Komozi Woodard, 'Amiri Baraka and the Music of Life', *Transition* 114 (2014) 2–12 (p. 5).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2012), pp. 175–178, 219.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, pp. 175–178, 219.

too did Jones' interest in nationalism. A visit to Fidel Castro's Cuba in 1961 was an initial catalyst for his beginning to move away from the self-consciously disengaged bohemian attitudes of the Village. *Blues People* evidenced the direction in which his cultural outlook was beginning to move by 1963, as well as indicating the maturation of his own distinct writing style. Malcolm X, whom Jones met in 1964, was the decisive catalyst for Jones' turn to black nationalist ideas, and it was X's assassination in 1965 that, in Haki Madhubuti's words, 'lit a fire that started a movement', or, as Baraka put it, 'pulled the trigger', prompting Jones to change his name to Amiri Baraka, move to Harlem, declare himself a black 'cultural nationalist', and found the Black Arts Repertory Theater School, which led directly to the founding of the Black Arts Movement. Baraka from hereon became 'the most vociferous articulator of black rage'.<sup>92</sup>

Although neither is named outright in 'Black Art', Baraka uses the poem to make clear the alignment of his aesthetics with the political activism of Malcolm X, as distinct from the nonviolent approach to civil rights protest of Martin Luther King.<sup>93</sup> Both leaders are described in the generically anonymous form of the two 'negroleaders':

There's a negroleader pinned to  
a bar stool in Sardi's eyeballs melting  
in hot flame. Another negroleader  
on the steps of the white house one  
kneeling between the Sheriff's thighs  
negotiating coolly for his people.

The flaming intensity of Baraka's language here chimes with his description of Malcolm X's words as 'fire darts' in 1965's 'A Poem for Black Hearts', and anticipates his description of Malcolm X in 1979's 'AM/Trak' as 'new super bop fire'.<sup>94</sup> This last

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. Watts, pp. 27–43; Woodard, 2–12; Haki Madhubuti, 'Amiri Baraka (1934–2014): Missed Melody, Magic and Revolutionary Song', *Chicago Review*, 58.3/4 (Summer, 2014), 341–345 (p. 343); Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, p. xii; Watts, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. James H. Cone, 'Martin and Malcolm on Nonviolence and Violence', *Phylon* 49.3/4 (Autumn/Winter, 2001), 173–83.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Amiri Baraka, 'A Poem for Black Hearts', and 'AM/Trak', in *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by William J. Harris, p. 218 and pp. 267–73.

image also illuminates Baraka's desire to channel the intensity of performance inherent in the improvisatory playing of the free and post-bop jazz musicians – and X's own particularly firebrand-like oratory – into a new black poetic idiom. Choosing to melt 'eyeballs' not only deepens the involvement of the physical body with the poem's politics but also indicates the physical proximity and depth of involvement with which Baraka by 1965 believed the challenge to white-America ought to be performed.

The passive, King-like alternative, 'Another negroleader', is portrayed in such a humiliating, supplicatory position that the notion of that leader 'negotiating coolly for his people' becomes the object of bitter sarcastic ridicule. 'Negotiation' of this sort is nothing of the kind. Instead it is a linguistic substitute for action, the sign designed to obscure the situation it ought to signify. Access to the house of any white – here explicitly rendered analogous with the eponymous US presidential dwelling – is firmly policed such that the established power-relations are never seriously threatened. We are invited to assume from Baraka's portrayal that the voice of the 'negroleader' is equally humiliatingly gagged. Baraka's image performs a version of blackness that the oppressing party wishes to see, with the extant power-relations not only left unaltered and unchallenged, but perhaps even reinforced.

The tone of the two descriptions furthers the contrast between them – the short, plosive syllables used to describe the Malcolm X-like 'negroleader' ally with the imagery to create a sense of urgent activity which trips over itself into the second image. Similarly, the first languorous internal 'ee' assonance of this 'negroleader' is instantly submerged beneath the dynamic short-breath 'ih' sounds of 'pinned', 'in', 'melting' and 'in', creating an image that is textually dynamic and forward-moving.

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By contrast, introducing the King-figure mid-sentence with the capitalized 'Another' ensures that the reader's experience of the text is interrupted, and so makes 'Another negroleader' the textual embodiment of a deadening, impetus-ending force. In the case of this 'negroleader' the 'ee' sounds are repeated in 'kneeling' 'between' and 'people', effecting a significant reduction of pace and impetus which is then supplemented by the long-vowel sounds of 'cooly', 'thighs' and the fourth syllable of 'negotiating'. This effect becomes so pronounced that the poem eventually pauses with a caesura – the influence of the other 'negroleader' is so deleterious to progress that the poem is ground to a temporary halt even in the act of describing him.

The clear message, therefore, is that, if the African-American of 1965 wishes to be heard, passive protest strategies are no longer valid. From a literary viewpoint that deficiency therefore necessitates a move away from the parodic nature of African-American linguistic-signifying to a direct relationship between connotation and denotation of the kind that the Imagist poets had advocated since William Carlos Williams first declared there to be 'no ideas but in things' in 1946.<sup>95</sup> Baraka was a confirmed admirer of Williams, and his own work up to around 1963 owed much to the techniques employed by the white Beat poets with whom he lived in Greenwich Village.<sup>96</sup> 'Black Art' proves that the same technical inheritance was still much in Baraka's mind. However, where the Imagists' concern was with returning poetic language to a clarity of representation – an attempt to establish a one-to-one relationship between sign and signifier for the sake of the poetic form – the work to which Baraka puts his imagery moves the Williams aesthetic into the service of Baraka's ideas for black nationhood. It is not enough for the poem simply to refer to other things that *are*, it must 'be reality in motion alive in flame to change' itself, as Baraka would later write in 'AM/Trak'.

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<sup>95</sup> William Carlos Williams, 'Book I', in *Paterson*, ed. by Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1992), pp. 1–40 (p. 6).

<sup>96</sup> LeRoi Jones, 'How You Sound?', in *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by William J. Harris, pp. 16–17 (p. 16).

That poetry and language need to be seen as living things is also articulated explicitly in 'Black Art':

We want live words of the hip world live flesh &  
coursing blood.

This is one of the most crucial aspect of Baraka's, and ultimately the Black Arts Movement's, aesthetic conception, bolstering the rhetoric of revolutionary violence that the surface of the poem presents most clearly. In writing that

We want "poems that kill"  
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot  
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys  
and take their weapons leaving them dead  
with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland,

Baraka, like Roach, is recounting the actual, physical techniques used against African-Americans, both historically and in the present, in order to urge the adoption of those techniques within African-American culture. Baraka demands active, engaged forms of art that move from the abstract realm into the realm of lived experience, imbued with sufficient energies such that they can enable meaningful retaliation against the historical injuries caused by white suppression to take place on terms led and defined by the black poet. Of course, a poem cannot actually kill or assassinate. The point of Baraka's repeated riffing on that theme is to say – over and over again so that the point is unmissable – that every image in every poem must both *do* something and also have some relevance to the lived experience of its readers and authors.

Baraka demands that the body itself be re-formed in fragments in 'Black Art', asking for 'Hearts Brains / Souls splintering fire' to lead on to 'Black poems to / smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches / whose brains are red jelly stuck / between 'lizabeth Taylor's toes.' As the final act of textually conceived escalations of bitterness, replacing the initial 'E' of Elizabeth with an apostrophe textually decapitates a symbol of 1960s white celebrity. In 1959's 'How You Sound?', Baraka wrote that 'we

want to go into quantitative verse . . . The "irregular foot" of Williams . . . The "Projective Verse" of Olson'.<sup>97</sup> In this section, we do see an element of Charles Olson's exhortation, made in 'Projective Verse', for an idea to 'move, INSTANTER' to another.<sup>98</sup> With textual and bodily unity now disrupted into a newly-contestable space, the whole being can be re-cognized through the process of writing, with the component parts providing a trace recognition of the whole that once was and thereby serving as a continuing basis against which the projective momentum can push. It is the same use of historical tracings that rooted *We Insist!*'s innovations to the African-American past. Baraka's 'splintering fire' indicates both the frictions that the process creates and the dynamic energy that can be harnessed as a result.

'Hearts brains / Souls splintering fire', is just one of a series of deconstructive images which pervade the text. Calls for 'fists beating', 'dagger poems', 'poems that kill', 'Poems that shoot guns' establish the tone of the poem as unrepentantly aggressive. 'Poems', is repeated regularly throughout 'Black Art', serving effectively as a riff, a reference point from which the controlled improvised thoughts that surround it can take flight. The riff, most idiomatically associable with the jazz music that came out of Kansas City in the 1930s, is a short ostinato figure, often of no more than two or three notes, which was repeated either in support of solos or as part of a carefully layered collage of other riffs contributed by the other sections of the big bands that popularized the technique.<sup>99</sup> For jazz soloists, the underlying riffs served as beginning- and end-reference points, out of which their melodic improvisations would grow and back to which they would always be destined to return. In its reduction of the musical locus to a series of short segments rather than one long melody line, the riff could even be seen as a necessary precursor to the more radical

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<sup>97</sup> Jones, pp. 16–17 (p. 17).

<sup>98</sup> Charles Olson, *Projective Verse* (New York: Totem Press, 1959), p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> Gioia, p. 160. Listen to The Count Basie Orchestra's 'One O'Clock Jump' for an exemplary illustration of this building of separate, ever-repeating ostinato figures into an ecstatic ensemble climax. Count Basie, 'One O' Clock Jump' (1937)  
<<https://open.spotify.com/track/5gJZQQg6xNGs32Nd5w9pMV?si=8hbWRq-RemWmVQFzeAmfA>>  
[Accessed 1 April 2014].

and audible fragmentations of metric regularity that Charlie Parker and the beboppers revelled in exploring in the 1940s and 1950s. That disturbance to linear form would, in turn, inspire the narrative approach of Jack Kerouac and the Beats, and would ultimately find its zenith in the free jazz forms that inspired the Black Arts Movement.<sup>100</sup>

'Poem' acquires gravitational weight in 'Black Art' as its central riff; a centripetal force that binds the text together but from which other, new forms of identity can also proliferate. The plosive 'p' – which recurs and is magnified by the semantic senses of 'puke', 'pissing', 'politicians', 'poison' 'pinned' 'put it on him' is used by Baraka to create a sense of rhythmic propulsion and a tone of bitter intensity. It gives the poet processual and referential conviction, serving as an anchor point through which the poet is able to work through his improvised thoughts in the manner of a jazz soloist. This then enables the poet's thinking to evolve from an initial uncertainty – the opening statement that 'poems are bullshit' and the contradictory senses of 'Fuck poems / and they are useful' in the fifth and sixth lines – to the increasing clarity at the end of the second stanza:

let Black People understand  
that they are the lovers and the sons  
of lovers and warriors and sons  
of warriors Are poems & poets &  
all the loveliness here in the world.

The interplay of the generic abstract nouns here – their re-ordering, the rhythmic acceleration caused by the absence of punctuation and the jerky interruptions to that sense caused by the caesurae – combines to disrupt their signficatory stability, effectively resulting in their being merged into one. The capitalization of 'Are' focusses the reader's attention back to 'poems and poets', and in so-doing presents those nouns to the reader with greater clarity of definition than any of the productively-confused 'warriors, sons and lovers'. That capital 'A' also forms a visual

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<sup>100</sup> Michael Hrebeniak, *Action Writing: Jack Kerouac's Wild Form* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), p.258.

link back to the section on 'Another negroleader'. Now, however, with the poetic form having been exhorted to 'clean out the world', what results is no longer the humiliating prostration of an externally defined 'negroleader' within the symbolic confinement of the 'white house'. Instead, there is now a self-created identity of 'poems' – no longer 'bullshit' – and 'poets', thereby liberated to enjoy 'all the loveliness here in the world.'

However, given that Baraka lived, as Walton Muyumba puts it, 'in a battle against a cultural system that denied his individuality and humanity as an African American', it is impossible to read that final line non-ironically.<sup>101</sup> Instead it should be read as the poem's own moment of double consciousness; the *potential* for genuine 'loveliness' does exist, and Baraka makes it clear in the final stanza of the poem where that potential can be found:

We want a black poem. And a  
Black World.  
Let the world be a Black Poem  
And Let All Black People Speak This Poem  
Silently  
or LOUD.

The poet – responsible for the sprawling sentences of the thirty-six-line opening stanza – now has his sights focussed firmly. His thoughts, having been unleashed in stream-of-consciousness style in the opening, are now distilled and compressed into a six-line manifesto. This new confidence can also be seen in the brevity of the section, the use of only one polysyllabic word other than 'poem' among otherwise punchy monosyllables, and in the way that capitalization now proliferates throughout the short stanza.

This final stanza also suggests that 'Black Art', if created according to the processual principles outlined in the previous lines, will become indistinguishable from the identity of 'Black People'. Baraka wrote in 1965 that 'Black People are a race, a culture

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<sup>101</sup> Walton M. Muyumba, *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation, and Philosophical Pragmatism* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 129.



a Nation', and here the poetic riff confirms the unity of the art form with the world and the people it describes.<sup>102</sup> It also goes some way to undermining those, such as Robert K. McMichael, who accuse him of racial essentialism. Instead of a being determined entirely by race, the poetic meme encourages the thought that 'black' need not be necessarily connected to race in the first instance, that the whole of what it is to be 'black' contains an enormous amount more. 'Loveliness' *can* therefore be found, but only in a 'Black' world.

Even some of the more prominent members of the early BAM took a little while to fully understand the implications of this 'Black World'. In an anecdote worth quoting at length, Harold Cruse recounted a discussion with a young man about black theatre at the BARTS shortly after it opened in 1965:

He said, in effect, that *a black theater should be about black people, with black people, for black people, and only black people*. Immediately, there are startled objections from the audience: "This is impossible, impractical and anti-humanistic EXTREMISM!" . . . "Black people cannot close themselves off in a compartment separate from whites" . . . "Art is universal" . . . "Art is for everybody" . . . and so on. Then came the question: "Suppose the Black Arts Theater wanted to put on a play with Negro and white characters?" "You see," said the opponent with a smug smile, "you would have to eliminate such a play. You would limit the repertory of the Black Arts Theater. You would limit the range of your playwrights to writing only about black people." But the young man, the ranting extremist, said: "Oh, no, it won't be that way – you dig? We have black actors who can play white roles – you dig? *They can be made up to play white people.*" In other words, this young man was intent on having a truly *black* theater, come what may. And the whole historical truth is, *that this young man was absolutely right.*<sup>103</sup>

Cruse's final statement (the emphasis on the final clause is mine) is critical when it comes to understanding what Baraka and the BAM's conception of a 'Black World' meant. It was a conception of a world in which black people took responsibility for *everything* that was their own, and yielded nothing to whites.

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<sup>102</sup> Amiri Baraka, 'The Legacy of Malcolm X, and the Coming of the Black Nation', in *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by William J. Harris (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), pp. 161–69 (p. 167).

<sup>103</sup> Cruse, pp. 39–45 (p. 41).

Baraka's conception of blackness, as indicated here in 'Black Art', is indeed frequently described in categorical, essentialist terms. We saw McMichael's description in the introduction, and to that opinion can be added Baraka's one-time friend Frank O'Hara, who was 'disappointed' when Baraka moved towards the 'separatist and militant black power movement'. Alfred Willener calls him a 'virulent militant', and Michele Wallace calls him 'ground clearing' but also 'reductive', claiming that his emphasis on blackness 'not only doesn't challenge racism but may in fact corroborate it'.<sup>104</sup> A clue to why this kind of interpretation dominates was provided four decades later by Baraka himself, who admitted that 'we had initially cloaked our call to battle in the starkest terms of cultural nationalism and Hate Whitey language',<sup>105</sup> something also abundantly apparent in the language of 'Black Art', with its demands to leave 'cops' 'for death', for 'setting fire and death to whities ass', and, particularly, in three unpalatably anti-Semitic sections. All of which echoes similar language in his earlier poetic work, such as the passage in 1964's 'Black Dada Nihilismus' calling to 'Rape the white girls. Rape / their fathers. Cut the mothers' throats'.<sup>106</sup>

The three dicta to which Baraka and Larry Neal committed the BAM were, however, couched in broader, less binary terms:

1. An art that is recognizably Afro American
2. An art that is mass oriented that will come out the libraries and stomp
3. An art that is revolutionary, that will be with Malcolm X and Rob Williams, that will conk klansmen and erase racists.<sup>107</sup>

And, as Walton Muyumba also suggests, it is critically important not to view Baraka's idea of a 'Black World', as a *solely* militant, essentialized, nationalistic concept, however tempting the semantic surfaces of Baraka's writings of this time

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<sup>104</sup> Brad Gooch, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 427; Willener, p. 243; Michele Wallace, quoted in Christopher Winks, 'Amiri Baraka: Phenomenologist of Jazz Spirit', in *Black Music, Black Poetry: Blues and Jazz's Impact on African American Versification*, ed. by Gordon E. Thompson (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 99–109 (p. 103).

<sup>105</sup> Amiri Baraka, 'The Black Arts Movement', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 11–19 (p. 17).

<sup>106</sup> Amiri Baraka, 'Black Dada Nihilismus', in *The Dead Lecturer*, (Newark: Grove, 1964), p. 61.

<sup>107</sup> Baraka, pp. xi–xiv (p. xi).

make such a reading.<sup>108</sup> The processual, developmental nature of 'Black Art' is not *ended* at the apparent monolithic definity of 'Black World'. Instead the poet offers a choice:

Let All Black People Speak This Poem  
Silently  
or LOUD

The poet's personal preference is clearly indicated by the block capitals, but it is not a definitive instruction – in marked contrast with much else in the poem. The long white space that follows 'Silently' – the poem's only one-word line – confirms the poet's commitment to a pluralistic conception of blackness by opening space to the possibilities of everything *in-between* silence and LOUD.

That this world must be 'Black' is clearly not designed to be under discussion, but what form that blackness takes *is* left open to continual redefinition and reshaping by those ('All Black People') who commit themselves to the 'Black Art' aesthetic of improvisatory process. Baraka leaves the interpretation of this new black-self open to contestation, a product finally not of essentialism, but 'of spontaneous and continual alteration'.<sup>109</sup> Taking the elegiac trope of rebirth and applying it to the living, 'Black Art' also makes clear what a significant, serious commitment that is. One must commit to the possibility of one's own destruction in order to allow the possibility of new identity creation. Poetry, just as 'New black music', 'is this: find the self, then kill it'.<sup>110</sup> The Malcolm X 'negroleader' figure is presented, phoenix-like, 'melting in hot flame' just a few lines after 'Hearts Brains / Souls splintering fire.' Baraka even demands the convergence of reader and poem in aggressively sexual terms: 'Fuck poems / and they are useful, wd they shoot / come at you'. Just as Baraka once wrote that the free jazz aesthetic pioneered by Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor had led, 'music and musician' to be brought 'face to face', here, poem and poet are brought

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<sup>108</sup> Muyumba, p. 131.

<sup>109</sup> Muyumba, p. 130.

<sup>110</sup> Baraka, 'New Black Music: A Concert in Benefit of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School Live', in *Black Music*, pp. 196–201 (p. 201).

into the same position.<sup>111</sup> The full bodily commitment of self to the poetic form, led by a textually improvisatory aesthetic, can allow the reader to access the possibilities of transforming identity which is in permanent, flame like flux. On acceptance of these terms, Baraka will finally have potential respondents to his previously answerless 1964 poem 'SOS':

Calling black people  
 Calling all black people, man woman child  
 Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in  
 Black People, come in, wherever you are, urgent, calling  
 you, calling all black people  
 calling all black people, come in, black people, come  
 on in.<sup>112</sup>

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A different perspective upon the strategic purpose of 'Black Art' – and with it the BAM's aesthetic relationship with jazz – is also offered by Baraka's reading of 'Black Art' on a recording made with drummer (and Baraka's early-sixties East Village neighbour) Sonny Murray for the album *Sonny's Time Now*, released in 1965 on the provocatively named Jihad Records.<sup>113</sup> As Bracey et al. say, one aspect of 'the political mission of BAM' is its 'emphasis on the performative and on artistic genres that lent themselves to public performance and potentially reach masses of people'.<sup>114</sup> While at rallies or meetings BAM poetry readings were commonplace, very few are documented. This recording of 'Black Art' therefore offers an immensely valuable insight into the differences between textually and orally-mediated versions of the same poem, and of how poetry and jazz function when they are deliberately yoked together.

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<sup>111</sup> Jones, *Blues People*, p. 227.

<sup>112</sup> Amiri Baraka, 'SOS', in *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by William J. Harris, p. 218.

<sup>113</sup> Amiri Baraka, Sonny Murray, and Albert Ayler, 'Black Art' (1965)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRjIAli9eRA>> [Accessed June 29 2017]; 'Sonny Murray: Sonny's Time Now', *Discogs* <<https://www.discogs.com/Sonny-Murray-Sonny-Stime-Now/release/1532940>> [Accessed February 7 2017].

<sup>114</sup> Bracey, Sanchez, and Smethurst, pp. 1–10 (p. 2).

The tone of the instrumental accompaniment to Baraka's reading is particularly interesting when set against the linguistic attitude of Baraka's poem. While the fragmented, riffing tendency of the text is mirrored in the playing, the volume is not. Baraka's voice dominates the texture, with only occasional moments of the instrumental ensemble playing (as at 4:50) coming close to matching the vocal aggression. The accompaniment does however strongly reinforce the poem's commitment to a fragmentary aesthetic. Murray's drums repel regular, metrical subdivision. Throughout, the manner in which he plays his ride cymbal – audibly using the shaft rather than the tip of the stick and hitting the edge rather than the top of the cymbal – renders the playing effectively sibilant rather than plosive; a continual wash of sound rather than a divisible series of individual hits which thus refuses to be policed by notions of musical time. Ironically, the only metrical regularity is provided by Baraka's syllabic recitation, with the speed of each of his syllables remaining relatively consistent throughout

Baraka wrote about Murray's playing on this album in the liner notes to *Sonny's Time Now*, referring to him as 'a conductor of energies, just scraping a cymbal this time, smashing it the next'.<sup>115</sup> The 'smashes' Murray plays at 0:24, 0:37, 0:53, 1:29, 1:51, 2:26, 3:04 and 5:14 indicate no sort of pattern other than a transgressive refusal to be forced into one.<sup>116</sup> As will be seen, even on records as (ostensibly) rhythmically formless as Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* (1961) or John Coltrane's *Ascension* (1965), cymbal crashes are usually played with the purpose of accentuating other elements of the music or of announcing moments of heightened expression. In more-formally constructed music, cymbal crashes often delineate a switch between musical sections, as, for instance, when Roach dramatically separates the 'Protest' and 'Peace' sections of 'Triptych' on *We Insist!*.<sup>117</sup> Here though, Murray's cymbals act, as Baraka suggests, in a manner that

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<sup>115</sup> Amiri Baraka, 'Sonny's Time Now', in *Black Music: Essays*, (New York: Akashic Books), pp. 204–05 (p. 204).

<sup>116</sup> Ordinarily, cymbals are described as 'crash' or 'splash', however, given the nature of Murray's playing, one can see why Baraka might have deemed 'smash' the more appropriate verb.

<sup>117</sup> At 4:49.

accords with the processual demands of the poem itself, exteriorizing the expression of bodily energy played in the moment it is felt.

Albert Ayler and Don Cherry's work on the track also manifest as musical responses to Baraka's poetic demands. Cherry, by this time an alumnus of Coleman's *Free Jazz* double-quartet, plays piccolo trumpet on this recording, pitched an octave higher than the regular Bb instrument, and stretched in this performance to the very uppermost limits of that high range. The disruption of the listener's expectations – caused by the already-unusual register of the instrument – is then further problematized by Cherry's intermittent use of the mute, which changes the instrument's timbre and which Cherry moves onto and away from the bell of the horn with the same lack of discernible pattern as Murray's cymbal crashes. This process of alienation from comfortable aural territory is a process that then reaches its zenith in Cherry's playing from 3:50 to 3:55. In those few seconds the trumpeter uses a tight embouchure to create a constricted sound, straining against bodily and instrumental physical limits, pushing at the boundaries of his own and his instrument's physical possibilities. Embodying Baraka's idea of music and musician meeting face to face, body and sound are audibly engaged as one, the 'live flesh and coursing blood' of 'Black Art' brought to audible rendition.

Ayler's saxophone playing meanwhile takes a similar approach in as much as it is largely riff-based, but the way he utilizes the technique is very different to Cherry. The more arresting moments of his performance in 'Black Art' are in fact those where he plays in the lower register, such as at 2:44. Those sounds break through the texture, creating aural fissures that further interrupt any sense of narrative linearity and enhance the player's engagement with the improvisatory process. He also makes use both of a characteristically wide vibrato (throughout) and of flutter-tonguing (such as at 4:15), creating tonal movements back and forth which challenge the constraints of even-tempered tuning, and are pregnant with the same fluid,

transformational possibilities of uncertain definition – much as the space between 'Silence' and 'LOUD' in Baraka's poem.

Baraka describes Ayler's playing as 'freedom', a means by which 'you can go anywhere, you can'.<sup>118</sup> There is some irony therefore that with such expansive, unconstrained playing accompanying Baraka's words, the poem, in recitation, itself rather loses some of its own literary 'fire' by comparison. The relatively blunt sounds of the words seem stodgy in comparison with what is going on around them. The sound of the English language itself acts as a deadening weight to its own sharp, hard-edged semantics. In this regard, Baraka's tone of voice, which is never less than urgent, and at times moves into straightforward shouting, seems to be attempting to compensate for this disconnection. For instance, the prominence of the voice within the texture (if the two named bass players, Henry Grimes and Louis Worrell, are playing on this track, the mix has rendered them inaudible), leads to further inertia. The correlation between the significations of the imagery and Baraka's onomatopoeic rendering means they acquire a didactic, essentialized, sense which they lack when rendered alone.

This sense is made more apparent in the 'airplane poems' section quoted above, a moment which stands out as successful synthesis of music and poetry, where Baraka switches to noise rather than language, in the manner of Lincoln's 'Protest' on *We Insist!*. It is moments like this which allow us to move into the territory that Douglas Kahn explores in *Noise, Water, Meat*; territory which demonstrates the negotiations between orality, aurality and the visual. Discussing the manner in which sound and the visual relate to space, Kahn writes in prose what Baraka demonstrated thirty-five years earlier in his poetry:

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<sup>118</sup> Baraka, pp. 204–05 (p. 204).

Our eyes create parallax across the bridge of the nose, but are dependent on light from elsewhere to constitute space, whereas our mouths emit sound that can be heard internally and at a distance and can fill its own space.<sup>119</sup>

To privilege the visual is also therefore to privilege the exterior, and to render transgressive and taboo the interiority that aural and oral cultural productions represent. By drawing our attention visually and symbolically to the manner in which sound is constituted in a literary context, Baraka breaks that taboo, and in so doing moves the mimetic function of the visual across to the aural – a non-didactic illustration of bodily involvement that is perhaps more successful than the more direct appeals to the same idea made elsewhere in the poem. By turn, the construction of new identity – necessary for the ultimate success of a 'black nation' – is returned to the body of the self rather than to the eyes of the beholders

Kahn also said that 'imperfections in script, verbal pauses, and poor phrasing are regularly passed over in the greater purpose of communication, yet they always threaten to break out into an impassable noise, and cause real havoc'.<sup>120</sup> Visually, Baraka largely eschews the opportunity to engage in this. Whereas the *mise-en-page* is utilized to the full in other examples of his poetry from the period, such as 'Black Dada Nihilismus', 'Black Art' is on the whole typographically straightforward, conforming to the neatly-organized norms that would be familiar in the work of Keats or Shelley. The only moments where 'havoc' is threatened are in those literary transgressions briefly mentioned above, where language is abandoned altogether. Emphasizing the communicative value of oral poetry, it is in sound rather than vision that this effect works most clearly.

[...] slick halfwhite  
 politicians Airplane poems, rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr  
 rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . . tuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuh  
 . . . rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . .

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<sup>119</sup> Kahn, p. 28.

<sup>120</sup> Kahn, p. 25.



Baraka's reading of these lines on Murray's record pulls his voice into the same plane as the instruments, and the lack of semantic boundaries in the written symbols of those noises enables him to pull them into an elastic sound-world in which meaning, already absent, is dispersed across the whole text of the recording, rather than locked into the sound of the words in the rest of the recitation. The first 'rrrrr' is pitched at such an intensity that it briefly overwhelms the limiters – Kahn's 'real havoc' made audible, the smoothed-out perfection of the recording studio actually overwhelmed. This happens again with 'Arghh!', which is sounded at 3:39, Baraka modulating his cadences up so that they sound as a scream of anguish, at exactly the same time as Cherry also pushes his trumpet up to the highest end of its range and Murray strikes the snare drum with additional vigour.

With language fragmented into noise allied with the fragmented sound of the instrumental accompaniment, the poem and the music finally coalesce into a whole work in these moments. The indignities visited upon the African-American in the course of the centuries prior to 1960 are re-dispersed into the newly liberating, transformative spaces that the poem – like Roach's album – has established. The works discussed in this chapter can be seen to represent statements both of artistic intent and of political engagement and defiance. A conscious awareness and interpolation of the historical contexts from which the African-American artist had come would be characteristic of all the works which followed – in both art forms. The manner in which both Roach and Baraka manipulate and re-order given forms, and appropriate previously oppressive symbols and methods to their own, liberated ends, would also stimulate further endeavours in the same field over the decade to come.

## Chapter Two: Cover stories

### John Coltrane's 'My Favorite Things' and Sonia Sanchez's 'a/coltrane/poem'

John Coltrane's public utterances gave little sense of any strong political inclinations. In a 1958 interview, the saxophonist described the 'code' by which he lived in terms which strongly emphasize autodidactic artistic improvement rather than collective political action or didactic programmatic instruction: 'keep listening. Never become so self-important that you can't listen to other players. Live cleanly... Do right... you can improve as a player by improving as a person. It's a duty we owe ourselves.'<sup>121</sup> In a lengthy interview with Frank Kofsky almost a decade later, Coltrane re-affirmed his personal belief that self and music were the key tools for improvement in this approach: 'I think I can truthfully say that in music I make or I have *tried* to make a conscious attempt to change what I've found, in music'. In other words I've tried to say "Well *this* I feel, could be better in my opinion, so I will try to do this to make it better."<sup>122</sup> Elsewhere in that interview, despite Kofsky's leading questions, Coltrane demurs from expressing political opinion, with answers such as 'I don't know' and 'could be, could be Frank' predominant.<sup>123</sup>

Despite Coltrane's own ambivalence, it was apparent by the mid-1960s that symbolic value was being imposed upon the saxophonist's work via ideological decodings performed by members of the Black Arts Movement. Amiri Baraka, continuing the symbolic violence of his poetry, said that Coltrane's example 'shows us how to murder the popular song. To do away with weak western forms'.<sup>124</sup> However, close listening to the music reveals a sense of dissolution much more than a sense of 'murderous' destruction, of definition troubled rather than destroyed. One hears the

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<sup>121</sup> Ira Gitler, 'Trane on the Track', in *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews*, ed. by Chris DeVito (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press, inc., 2012), pp. 41–44 (p. 43).

<sup>122</sup> Coltrane, quoted in Kofsky, p. 435.

<sup>123</sup> Kofsky, pp. 417–462.

<sup>124</sup> Baraka, pp. 196–201 (p. 198).

desire for freedom being performed through the production of non-productive surplus rather than the annihilation of the given forms which underpin the work. None of Coltrane's musical statements can be regarded as politically definitive, and thus all of them move within a framework of excess.

French sociologist Alfred Willener claimed in 1969 that the absence of political rhetoric was, in fact, an implicit political statement on Coltrane's part, aligning him with the aesthetic developments of the Black Arts Movement:

by the absence of political declarations and by the fact that it does not put much emphasis on what it *denies*, but reveals, on the contrary, a total commitment – the term 'total music' has also been used – in a music that affirms a 'beyond' (cultural, social, and political, by implication).<sup>125</sup>

Mark Gridley makes a different claim for John Coltrane's music, saying in 2007 that, 'unlike the political slant that some writers put upon his music, most of Coltrane's performances [in the early 1960s] derived from pop tunes'.<sup>126</sup> Gridley's implied judgement that popular music in the hands of a jazz musician was incompatible with political activism does not map easily onto Coltrane's *oeuvre*. Using the most famous of these 'pop tunes', the 1961 track 'My Favorite Things', and Black Arts Movement poet Sonia Sanchez's 1969 'a/coltrane/poem', which in turn takes 'My Favorite Things' as its musical inspiration, this chapter looks more closely at early-sixties musical responses to white American and Eurocentric art-forms, and the re-interpretation of those aesthetics within the poetry and politics of the Black Arts Movement towards the creation of Baraka's new kind of 'Blackness', as discussed in the opening chapter.

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John Coltrane was born in Hamlet, North Carolina, in September 1926. Living there until the age of seventeen, he learned the Eb alto horn, clarinet, and, latterly, the alto saxophone. In 1943, a series of deaths struck the family, with Coltrane's aunt,

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<sup>125</sup> Willener, p. 246.

<sup>126</sup> Mark C. Gridley, 'Misconceptions in Linking Free Jazz with the Civil Rights Movement', *College Music Symposium* 47. (2007), 139–55 (p. 141).

grandparents and father all dying within months of one another. This precipitated a move to Philadelphia, and Coltrane's enlisting at the Ornstein School of Music, where he stayed for just two years, before joining the navy on 6 August 1945. On returning to civilian life, Coltrane switched to the tenor saxophone in 1947, gradually becoming better known on the bebop circuit through engagements with groups led by Jimmy Heath, Earl Bostic and Dizzy Gillespie. Playing with Gillespie's sextet in New York in 1951 led to work with Bostic in 1952, and, by 1954, Coltrane was a member of Johnny Hodges' septet. His playing in that band attracted the attention of Miles Davis, who hired Coltrane to replace Sonny Rollins in his 1955 quintet alongside Red Garland, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones.<sup>127</sup>

In these years Coltrane had a serious heroin addiction, and the unreliability this engendered led an increasingly exasperated Davis to temporarily cut him loose on two occasions: in October 1956 and April 1957. The second dismissal prompted Coltrane to transform his habits. He went back to Philadelphia, and when he returned to New York in September 1957 he had foresworn tobacco, alcohol and narcotics. He re-joined Davis for the seminal *Milestones* and *Kind of Blue* sessions, while also recording his first albums under his own name: *Coltrane* and *Blue Train* for Blue Note, and several albums for Prestige records, before signing for Atlantic Records, with whom he recorded *Giant Steps* – his first album consisting entirely of his own, original compositions, and 'the culmination of Coltrane's interest in third-related chord movement' – in 1959.<sup>128</sup> By now, he had developed a technique, based on chords, in which he played vast numbers of notes 'at a murderous pace', exploring every inch of the harmonies those chords supported, at rapid pace. This renders his playing on the harmonically static *Kind of Blue* somewhat incongruous when set against that of Davis and Julian "Cannonball" Adderley. *Down Beat* reviewer Ira

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Louis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Barry Kernfeld, 'Coltrane, John (William)', *Grove Music Online* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.6002278200>> [Accessed 28 January 2016].

<sup>128</sup> Lewis Porter, 'Coltrane, John (William)' (26 November 2013), *Grove Music Online* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2249004>> [Accessed 28 January 2016].

Gitler labelled this playing 'sheets of sound' in 1958.<sup>129</sup> Coltrane would, however, come to embrace the so-called 'modal' harmonies that Davis introduced to jazz, most notably on the recording of 'My Favorite Things', made by his own quartet and released in 1961 on the album of the same name, and as a 45-rpm single.

The Coltrane quartet's recording of 'My Favorite Things' says much about the use to which re-performances of extant and widely penetrative 'pop' cultural material could be put in the service of African-American identity formation.<sup>130</sup> In order to understand how it does so, it is first necessary to look at the original Broadway version of the tune. A song in Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II's 1959 musical *The Sound of Music*, the first version of 'My Favorite Things' is sung by the character of Maria to suppress her fear of an enforced change of circumstance.<sup>131</sup> The lyric comprises a long list of signifiers which describe an idealized cultural norm; a norm which, perhaps coincidentally, is almost entirely white: 'cream colored ponies', 'girls in white dresses', 'snowflakes', 'silver white winters'. However, in the music the harmonic base alternates with disconcerting effect between D-minor and D-major; although the audience is ultimately returned to the stabilized 'normality' of a warm D-major conclusion, an effect reinforced by the music's rigid metrical regularity, its melodic simplicity, and its connection with dramatic place.<sup>132</sup> Dramatically, lyrically, rhythmically and melodically, the song as originally conceived is designed to contrapuntally impose the comforts of structure and stability upon potentially destabilizing circumstances, and the lyrical content reinforces a particular, sentimentalized sign system portrayed in overtly positive terms (because 'then I don't feel so bad').

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography*, (London: Macmillan London, 1990), p. 207; Gioia, p. 270; Gitler, pp. 41–44 (p. 43).

<sup>130</sup> Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II, 'My Favorite Things', *My Favorite Things* (1961), John Coltrane, et al. (WEA/Warner, 25104, 2006) [on CD].

<sup>131</sup> Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II, 'My Favorite Things', *The Sound of Music*, Original Broadway cast (Columbia, CK-32601, 1959) [on LP].

<sup>132</sup> The main theme is composed of just three notes, the first, second and fifth degrees of the scale.

That sense of controlled structure in the original melody is continued rhythmically.

The two opening plucked chords instantly establish:

1. the 3/4 tempo;
2. the emphasis on beat one of each bar, and,
3. in their staccato nature, a soundscape which is tightly ordered.

Those plucked chords then continue, reifying the sense of control, as Mary Martin sings the musical A-section (the 'raindrops on roses...' melody) for the first time. The second A-section establishes the rhythmic pattern (bass note on beat one, and plucked chords on beats two and three). This pattern is thereafter maintained each time the A-section returns. Also established in the second A-section is the harmonic base; the bass alternating from the tonic to the dominant of each new chord in standard Broadway show-tune style. This means the chords are always stated with absolute clarity, and that the key centre (D) remains stable. Above this, the melody, sung first by Martin playing Maria and then by Patricia Neway as the character of the Mother Abess, is the same every time, with partial unison accompaniment from the flute, oboe and clarinet. In this arrangement, the expectations established for the audience in the first iteration of the section are always met in full, and are even, ultimately, literally doubled. No harmonic or melodic variation is permitted to challenge expectations or to involve the watching/listening audience in a transactional creative relationship with the song. The B-section, which is heard first at 0:53, then again at 2:04 and 2:25, offers harmonic variety in contrast with the A-section, but in each of its appearances it also conforms absolutely to the consistent, repetitive mode. Both melody and accompaniment are once again identical each time. The song is fully designed to transmit to a passive theatre or home audience, expected and expecting to receive those transmissions with complicit acceptance.

Every element of the song and its orchestration, in fact, is designed with the aim of coercing its audience into a specific set of emotional reactions, to ever more deeply embed them in the work's fictional landscape. The waltz time-signature evokes Austria almost as vividly as Roach and Lincoln's whips do the plantations on 'Driva

Man'.<sup>133</sup> The one element of emotional ambiguity in the song – the minor key opening beneath the complicit imagery of Maria's 'favourite things' – is soon superseded. The B-section ends in the major key, and the whole track ends with the B-section sung twice. Moreover, the join between the two repetitions of the B-section makes use of abrupt upward modulation by a whole tone, a musical effect designed specifically to communicate an increase of emotional intensity and to generate a sense of excitement for the listener, deployed here to ratify the message of reassurance, communicated implicitly through the major key and explicitly through the lyrics.<sup>134</sup>

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In the Coltrane version, the lack of sung lyrics is the most immediate difference and automatically establishes that the Coltrane quartet will operate within a fundamentally different discourse system, one which positively celebrates the liberating power of new circumstances in a manner that builds on many of the tropes in Roach's *Freedom Now Suite*. Far from being 'murdered' in Baraka's sense, the original version has a vital ongoing role to play in informing the Coltrane version. The first statement of the theme, played by Coltrane from 0:21–0:37, is melodically almost identical to its antecedent, and it is restated several times throughout Coltrane's thirteen-minute version.<sup>135</sup> McCoy Tyner's solo section, beginning at 2:21, and Coltrane's at 7:21, are both introduced by this theme, and both players return to it in the course of their subsequent improvisations.

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<sup>133</sup> The Austrian setting of the musical conforming with the location of the origins of the waltz and the area in which it was most popular. Cf. Andrew Lamb, 'Waltz' (2001), *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press

<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000029881?rsk=y=zGX7GQ&result=2>> [Accessed 11 December 2017].

<sup>134</sup> John Bell and Steven R. Chicurel, *Music Theory for Musical Theatre* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), p. 37.

<sup>135</sup> Mary Martin sings the song on the 1959 *Sound of Music* Broadway cast recording. Mass culture's power to re-work memory is indicated, as Ingrid Monson notes, by the fact that the Coltrane Quartet's version predates Julie Andrews' version, recorded for the film adaption of *The Sound of Music*. Yet, in comparative readings, Henry Gates Jr., among others, treats the 1965 version as if it preceded Coltrane's. (Ingrid Monson, 'Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, and Ethnomusicology', *Critical Inquiry* 20. 2, (Winter, 1994), 283–313 (p. 292)).

There the melodic similarities end, however, as Tyner and Coltrane's improvisations remediate the theme into a performative fabric of play and replay, producing a surplus of new ideas which refute singular readings of the kind signified in Hammerstein's lyrics. Improvising modally, predominantly over an E-major/E-minor vamp, Tyner and Coltrane create motifs using figures and voicings which use the source material in order to repeatedly remake it anew. They demonstrate that even apparently limited material can be extended almost infinitely, actively reworking inherited cultural modes. Furthermore, these strategies occur within a soundscape which, thanks to the raga-like pedal-point harmony and the modal sequences placed above it, is meditative, symbolic and potentializing: Coltrane's 'My Favorite Things' refuses to transmit fixed representations, and does so through the transformation of a given set of forms which originally acted to reinforce exactly that symbolic certainty. Remediating those given norms through its performances of play and repetition, the quartet problematizes the authority of origins underneath a mask of cultural normativity.

Indeed, within its first fifteen seconds Coltrane's 'My Favorite Things' eschews almost all of the controlling principles established in the original. Considerable difference is even established in just the first chord. Instead of the clear delineation between sound and silence that the pizzicato strings offer in the *Sound of Music* version, the bass and drums emphatically open the track with Jimmy Garrison plucking an E<sub>2</sub> and a bass drum/cymbal crash from Elvin Jones. The sounds of the cymbal and bass could be choked into the metrical order of the plucked strings, but they are not. Jones' cymbal is allowed to decay (and rivets drilled into the cymbal create a 'sizzle' of sound which washes over the mix and extends the life of that decay), while Garrison plucks his bass so firmly that the sound sustains almost without decay until he plays it again six beats later. Immediately, an unresolved tension not found in the Broadway recording is established between attack and decay, the absolute temporal rigidity of the original pizzicato strings dispersed into fluidity.



The first chord of the original also immediately establishes beyond peradventure that the key of the piece is D-minor. Ambiguity meanwhile suffuses the harmony of the first chord of the Coltrane version. Harmonic certainty is, albeit only for a second, deferred. It is only later in the bar that McCoy Tyner finally plays the mediant  $G_4$  of the chord to make clear that the key is E-minor rather than the  $G\#_4$  which would signal E-major. In the prior moment, therefore, ambiguity proliferates, and, though the key centre is rapidly clarified, the delay firmly establishes the difference of approach between the two pieces.

A temporal mirroring of this harmonic deferral then begins at 0:10 and continues throughout the following thirteen minutes in the form of Garrison playing the Dominant  $B_2$  for a quaver on the first beat of each bar and then the tonic  $E_1$  on the second quaver. Played this way, Garrison shifts a familiar pattern into an unfamiliar locus. The listener versed in regular bar hierarchy would ordinarily expect the unstressed  $B_2$  to fall a little ahead of beat one, as an anacrusis (or 'pickup'). The stressed tonic  $E_1$  would then be expected to follow as the 'strong' downbeat. By shifting the pattern forward, such that the unstressed note is played *on* the downbeat and the stressed note on the *second* quaver, the pulse is thus prevented from ever settling on a solid metrical foundation of even crotchets. The position of Garrison's notes creates a productively problematic aural effect between what is expected and what is felt. The displaced stress is therefore another moment of deferral, and while the rest of the ensemble keeps the position of the pulse clear, that delayed movement inserts a sense of uncertainty into the meter of the piece, far removed from the metrical certainty of the original, which then prevails throughout.

Temporal ambiguity proliferates elsewhere in the recording, too. As becomes clear when the introduction segues into Coltrane's soprano saxophone statement of the theme, the Coltrane version eschews the singular definitive claim of Rogers and Hammerstein's  $3/4$  waltz meter, and instead embraces an ambiguous exchange between  $3/4$  and  $6/8$ . With the piano and the bass playing both of these time

signatures across one another, it is unclear which of them the piece is actually in. Garrison's motif is reiterated every three beats as per  $3/4$ , but with the defamiliarizing delay described above. Tyner, comping, places the chords such that the effect of the original is simultaneously evoked and eschewed. In the introduction, he does this in two-bar phrases that suggest  $6/8$ , playing on beats two and three of the first bar and then on the second quaver of the second. Yet this is never allowed to settle into a pattern: underneath the statement of the theme, as at 0:18–0:26, he plays on beats two and three, seeming to indicate  $3/4$ . Then, when the melody reaches what would be the 'brown paper packages' line, he joins with the bass in placing the emphasis on the second quaver of each bar. And *then* in the two-bar 'turnarounds' between each A-section, he places the chords on the first beat and the *fourth* quaver, before once more emphasizing the second quaver in the second bar. Temporal certainty is then yet further denied the listener by the fact that the piece is swung, with all the freedom from absolute metronomic precision that swing allows. The sense is fundamentally ambiguous, licensing the individual auditor to make whatever interpretations she or he wishes. Within the first fifteen seconds of the quartet's recording, therefore, the listener, excluded by design from the production of meaning in the texts of the original, is unavoidably involved in the production of the cover version's meanings by their interior negotiations with it.

The cyclical and ongoing nature of those negotiations, a constant interplay of back-and-forth exchanges between the music, its performers and its audience, is further established in the introduction by the opening two bars being thrice-repeated, and by Tyner's repeated right-hand part, which hints at the melody but never completes it. Instead, it is always forced back on itself, beginning again and again in order to be remade again and again. Whereas for the Broadway stage form and content are locked together in the explicit didactic service of a specific function (to implicitly suppress the fear of change), the implicit and non-didactic effects of the temporal play in the Coltrane Quartet's recording make the fundamentally arbitrary and subjective nature of divisional notions such as time signatures audibly apparent. This then enables the

musicians to illustrate the symbolically liberating potential that could be felt through the exploitation of taxonomic boundaries' fundamental elasticity. 'My Favorite Things' under their aegis still has a clear form, but the techniques of deferral and ambiguity enable the quartet to alter that form from within.

The introduction also establishes a methodology for the improvisations that follow. At 0:18 Coltrane's soprano saxophone enters the track and states the A-section melody of the original in full for the first time. On this first occasion, the notes are the same as those in the source material, yet Coltrane uses the methodology of syncopation to rhythmically defamiliarize the phrase. He elongates some notes, shortens others, moves the start of the second phrase back by a quaver and plays with the dynamics within notes such that, while the outline of the melody is entirely familiar, its performance is an exercise in the kind of ironic signification that Henry Gates Jnr. identifies as central to African-American artistic culture, of 'repetition with a signal difference'. Doing this further foregrounds productive tensions between old and new forms.<sup>136</sup> Mediated through Coltrane's saxophone, the source material is simultaneously retained and discarded, Coltrane's brand-new version building upon the traces of the original that the sequence of notes suggests; a trace which serves as both a base and a mask for the reworking to which he in fact subjects it.

From 0:35 to 0:45 – after Coltrane's first statement of the theme – McCoy Tyner leads a two-bar vamp which goes on to link each A-section throughout the rest of the piece, and then Coltrane returns with another variation on the theme of the original melody. However, the saxophonist now moves much further away from the original notes. The theme having been established once, its trace thereby encoded into the minds of the listener, the performance becomes a space licenced for multiple *radical* reworkings of the given material, thereby enabling the complete transformation of the European-American popular aesthetic basis of the Rogers and Hammerstein tune

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<sup>136</sup> Gates, p. xxiv.

into the distinctively African-American improvisational mode of jazz. The performer's growing confidence in this becomes apparent in the second linking interlude, in which, unlike the first, Coltrane keeps playing, improvising further up the register of the soprano over the repeated two-bar phrase (which has no parallel in the original version) with what comes across as a carefree abandon. At 1:18, the third statement of the A-section is then the first in which Coltrane threatens to abandon the original melody altogether. He instead implies that melody in fragmentary form, around which is threaded new, improvised material. This is the first moment at which we can clearly hear that the performers are willing to challenge the comfortable boundaries of their listeners' expectations to the extent that dissolution into disorder becomes a possibility. There is no guarantee that the tune will re-emerge once it is abandoned, and so 'easy lateral slidings' to the associational semiotics of the original are prevented.<sup>137</sup>

That this material is entirely under the *control* of the performer, however, with the risk of collapse established as an authorial choice, is then made abundantly clear by Coltrane at 1:26, with a powerfully accented B<sub>4</sub> pushed ahead of the beat, which is then held before he swoops down a fifth to the E<sub>4</sub>, sounded dead-on the first beat of the bar, to begin one more statement of the original melody's notes.<sup>138</sup> That phrasing also draws the listener's attention to the sub equal-temperament spaces *between* the notes. Instead of a single melody line, the music is disrupted into fragments – a

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<sup>137</sup> William Carlos Williams declares that a 'lack of imagination' results in the 'false' application of 'associational or sentimental' meaning to an object. This is an 'easy lateral sliding'. (Williams, quoted in M.L. Rosenthal, 'Introduction', in *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, ed. by M.L. Rosenthal (New York: Published for J. Laughlin by New Directions Pub. Corp, 1966), pp. i–xxxvi (p. xv)).

<sup>138</sup> This was a motivic technique that had even more dramatic precedent in Coltrane's playing on 'Afro Blue' in 1959, and an antecedent later in 1961 in Coltrane's version of 'Greensleeves' on the album *Africa/Brass*. In both cases Coltrane's ownership of the source material is declaimed with a glissando down a twelfth (from A<sub>5</sub> to D<sub>3</sub>) to land exactly on the first beat of the next bar and commence the opening phrase of the familiar theme. (John Coltrane and Mongo Santamaria, 'Afro Blue' (1959), *Best of Afro Cuban Jazz* <<https://open.spotify.com/track/0Dx18erM98PwKpuVvPAgRK?si=hx2iTnE-RSi6uUkvPsdZtQ>> [Accessed 18 August 2015]; John Coltrane, 'Africa', *Africa / Brass* (1961), John Coltrane, et al. (Impulse!, 602517486225, 2007) [on CD].)

method – though so implicit as to be easily missed by the casual listening ear – of evident valence in the context of Black Arts Poetic form later in the decade.

Gradually, over the course of the opening three minutes, the entire structure of the piece is inverted. The two-bar vamp which began as a turnaround link between the Broadway A-sections is slowly extended: from four bars in its first two appearances, with McCoy Tyner's comping as the dominant voice in the texture, to twelve in its third (1:01–1:26), back to eight bars (2:01–2:18), before being stretched to sixteen bars in its fifth appearance before Tyner's extended solo (2:36–3:08), equalling the length of the A-section to which it was originally structurally subservient.

In this fifth vamp-section Tyner's performance also satirizes the affective techniques of Euro-American popular music evidenced in the original by the abrupt upward key change before the final B-section. Now playing alone again having been accompanied by Coltrane, Tyner's right hand simply plays the two chords of the minor mode vamp (E-minor-7+9+11; F#-minor-7+9+11-with-E-in-the-bass), and intones them a single inversion higher every four bars. The sound of the same chord, rising in pitch, and the subtly, but audibly, increased intensity of each new intonation together create layer upon layer of additional tension for the listener. However, in another instance of content dictating form, instead of providing release and thus fulfilling the conditioned expectations of the listener, Tyner – in the twelfth of those sixteen bars – drops the chords back down to the root position from which they started. The tension is therefore dispersed but not dissipated, and the cycle begins again.

The vamp sections further demonstrate the quartet's commitment to form as a product of the development of content. Firstly, this occurs in the length of the piano and saxophone solos. Both of these are long modal improvisations over the two-bar vamp, separated into two halves by a restatement of the A-section. Yet there is

dramatic variance in the length of these sections. Tyner's solo is divided into a first part of seventy-eight bars and a second of just sixteen, while Coltrane's lasts for two sets of sixty-eight bars on either side of the dividing A-section.

The second demonstration of that commitment occurs in the pattern of modes employed. Where the switch from minor to major occurs in the eighth bar of each A-section of both performances, the vamps of the Coltrane version offer no such alternating consistency. Instead they proceed as minor, minor, major, minor, minor (the first part of Tyner's extended solo), major (the second part), minor, minor, minor, major – suggesting that both solos' durations were dictated not by a pre-conceived structural decision but developed through collective spontaneity, engendering something almost entirely new.

The vamp which immediately precedes Tyner's solo is the point at which the structural inversion, in progress over the preceding three minutes, is completed, with the same vamp now continuing, and providing the modal basis for both Tyner (seventy-four and sixteen bars) and Coltrane's (sixty-eight and sixty-eight) long solo sections. The A-section verse chords of the original are now reduced to the role of turnaround link that the Coltrane-original vamp fulfilled at the opening. The symbolic inversion that therefore accompanies this, of a gradual takeover of the original material until it is unquestionably made part of the African-American improvisatory aesthetic, is plain. Coltrane's approach to 'My Favorite Things' brings a piece of Eurocentric music, which reifies a set of values that best fit the white world, into the black artistic world, and then synthesizes the two into something new again. The way he does so illustrates that there is a far more sophisticated set of forces in dialogue within the work of art than structuralist binary oppositions of 'black' and 'white' can or will admit.

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Sonia Sanchez, named by Andrew Salley as 'one of the precious few true poets of revolution and reclamation in our time', was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in September, 1934 and was named Wilsonia Berita Driver.<sup>139</sup> Her mother died in childbirth a year later, and the remaining family moved to Harlem, New York, in 1943. When young, Sanchez had a pronounced stutter, which led to her being, in her own assessment, 'a very introspective kind of a child as a consequence', an introspection which found an outlet in the poetry she began to write not long after the move to New York, where she also began to study the writing of 1920s black poets Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen at the Schomburg Library.<sup>140</sup> As a teenager, Sanchez studied at Hunter College and graduated with a BA in Political Science in 1955. After that, she studied poetry at New York University with Louise Bogan, with whom she set up a writers' workshop in Greenwich Village circa 1959/60, a workshop also attended by LeRoi Jones, Don L. Lee and Larry Neal.

In the first half of the Sixties, Sanchez had an integrationist approach to Civil Rights, supporting the philosophy of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Hearing Malcolm X speak at CORE events led her towards the more segregationist outlook of the BAM. She was a committed educator: from 1965 to 67 she was a staff member at Downtown School in New York and also taught in San Francisco and at Pittsburgh, where she set up the first ever course dedicated to black women in 1969.<sup>141</sup> She continued to develop her poetry: over the course of the decade she published poetry in *The Liberator*, *Negro Digest* and *Black Dialogue*, and her first full collection, *Homecoming* was published by Broadside Press in 1969, with her second, *We a Baddddd People* following swiftly in 1970.<sup>142</sup> She married poet Etheridge Knight in

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<sup>139</sup> Andrew Salley, 'In Appreciation of Sonia Sanchez', *The Black Scholar*, 10.8/9 (May/June, 1979), 84–85 (p. 85).

<sup>140</sup> Sanchez, quoted in D. H. Melhem, 'Sonia Sanchez: Will and Spirit', *MELUS*, 12.3 (Autumn, 1985), 73–98 (pp. 73, 77).

<sup>141</sup> Susan Kelly, 'Discipline and Craft', *African American Review*, 34.4 (Winter, 2000), 679–687 (pp. 680, 682).

<sup>142</sup> Bryant, Jennifer Ryan, 'Sonia Sanchez' (June 2015)

<<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-0134.xml>> [Accessed 15 June 2017].

1967 (while keeping the name she acquired through her short-lived earlier marriage to Albert Sanchez), and the couple had twin sons, tellingly named Morani Meusi ('Black Warrior') and Mungu Meusi ('Black God') in January 1968.<sup>143</sup>

She had long been exposed to jazz – 'I was raised on Art Tatum' – through her drummer father, who regularly took the young Sanchez to the clubs on fifty-second street, and through whose contacts Sanchez was introduced to, among others, Billie Holiday, Art Tatum, Count Basie, Billy Eckstine, and drummer Sid Catlett. The jazz influence in her poetry is therefore unsurprising, and its direction in the early 1960s was particularly influenced by one record in particular: 'One of the records I was stricken by [...] years ago, was Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln's *Freedom Suite* [sic], I will never forget hearing that for the first time, which for the first time made me hear some people talk about freedom on a record in such a – I guess it was almost a belligerent manner [...] I sat down and wrote from that piece because of what was happening there.<sup>144</sup>

Written in 1969, eight years after Coltrane's recording of 'My Favorite Things' was released, Sanchez's 'a/coltrane/poem' immediately announces that Coltrane's record is another inspiration, in this case for the re-figuring of inherited forms:

my favorite things  
   is u blown  
   yo/favorite things.

stretchen the mind  
   till it bursts past the con/fines of  
 solo/en melodies.  
   to the many/solos

of the  
 mind/spirit.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Melhem, 73–98 (p. 73).

<sup>144</sup> Sanchez, quoted in Melhem, 73–98 (pp. 86, 87).

<sup>145</sup> Sonia Sanchez, 'A/Coltrane/Poem', in *We a Baddddd People*, (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1970), pp. 69–72. The poem is reproduced in full in the appendix.



These opening lines comprise a series of statements of poetic intent: the substitution of 'en' for 'ing' endings forming an ad-hoc internal rhyme scheme which will go on to subtly unify the poem's multiple sections and moods; the refusal of singular narrative viewpoint enacted in the shifts from 'my' to 'u' to 'yo' which also merges vernacular with standardized language; the persistent use of the solidus which disturbs isochronic readings and challenges the gubernatorial authority of the *mise-en-page* over poetic line-endings and enjambment, among others – all of which respond to Coltrane's approach to his given source material in 'My Favorite Things', and which indicate much of what will follow in 'a/coltrane/poem'

Particularly of note is the idea of bursting past the con/fines of | solo/en melodies. The use of the solidus in 'confines' symbolically liberates the word-as-vehicle from its associated content, separating dramatically the concepts of sign and signifier as Saussure did prosaically seventy years before.<sup>146</sup> It also enables another set of significations to be employed, the connotations of 'con', serving to illustrate that all poetic restrictions are fundamentally mutable. These six lines also multiply dramatize the pluralization of meaning. Even before the explicit celebration of 'many/solos', 'solo/en melodies' is latent with such plural ambiguities. 'En' as a stand-alone syllable admits a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities. Read as a substitute for 'and' it would form a description of the standard organising-schema of pre-1960 jazz music – solos and head-melodies – being broken by Coltrane in 'My Favorite Things'. 'Solo/en' is also visually and aurally reminiscent of 'stolen', and thus serves as a reminder that both Sanchez and Coltrane utilize the material of others; while also subtly calling back to the manner in which white culture appropriated the innovations of black jazz musicians and made money of which even the best-paid of them could only dream.<sup>147</sup> Finally, the whole section refutes singular identity

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris. New edn. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 73–87, 131–156.

<sup>147</sup> For instance, 'cool' jazz, of the kind that developed on the West Coast in the late 1940s and early 1950s, led by Dave Brubeck and Gerry Mulligan, was dismissed by Baraka as 'a whitened degenerative form of bebop'. (Amiri Baraka, 'The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)', in *Black Music: Essays* (New York: Akashic Books, 2010), pp. 205–43 (p. 233).) Miles Davis later concurred:

formation; instead the mind is always plural, with historically-constituted subjectivity engendered through ongoing negotiation of multiple simultaneous ideas.

Having established her methodology, Sanchez then practises it, taking advantage of a coincidence of nomenclature to translate the eighteenth-century French nursery-rhyme 'Frère Jacques' into a vernacular English that allows her to position Coltrane as both a fraternal spirit and spiritual guru, while also, through the vernacular spellings of 'sleeping' and 'brother', stamping a distinctly African-American cultural imprimatur atop the European original:

are u sleepen	(to be
are u sleepen	sung
brotha john	softly)
brotha john	

Authority over the borrowed material having thus been claimed, Sanchez gives herself room to move much further with it, using the lines which follow to subvert the original material in order to draw attention to the effects that the original material is designed to convey. In conventional English translation, the commanding instruction of '*sonnez les matines*' becomes the passive description of 'Morning bells are ringing' in order to preserve the rhythmic properties of the original French. The semantic content of the original is deemed of secondary importance to the need to fulfil the ritualized formal demands of the rhythms of English accentual-syllabic verse, which themselves exist to affect the responses of their audience, just as is true of the abrupt key-changes in the original 'My Favorite Things'. Decoupled from critical engagement – such that the comforting sound of the iambic tetrameter is sufficient to shield the change of meaning from scrutiny – Sanchez portrays the audience of all such poetry as no better than the infants for whom 'Frère Jacques' is designed, and no more conscious.

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'they were calling the kind of music they were playing 'cool jazz'. I guess it was supposed to be some kind of alternative to bebop or black music, or 'hot jazz' which in white people's minds meant black. But it was the same old story. Black shit was being ripped off all over again. [...] I was making a little money by then, but not as much as I thought I should be making. Dave Brubeck was making much more at the time.' (Davis and Troupe, pp. 131, 192–3.)

However, such somnambulant behaviour is given short shrift by Sanchez in *her* translation of the lines which follow. The narrative implication of the original – that no bells are ringing because Brother John is asleep – is deployed as a means through which Sanchez is able to illustrate her commitment to the dynamic *process* of poetic composition, in which given forms are continually available for re-ordering:

where u have gone to.  
no mornin bells  
are ringen here. only the quiet  
aftermath of assassinations.

Assassinations, the symbol of a means through which problematic, transgressive voices (such as Malcolm X (1965) and Martin Luther King's (1968)) are silenced, is transformed into a metaphor of celebration for the eruptive life-force energies that such transformations create when wrought in the poetic field, and transmutes it into the inevitable, necessary result of any re-ordering of given material. No formal constraint is apparent here; the limits of accentual-syllabic form being repeatedly breached, and its reflexive auditory comforts denied to the audience. The reading eye is disturbed by the indentations, being made to view each line on a left-to-right basis, and then being forced ever further to the right for each subsequent line. Further lexical disquiet is caused by the period at the end of the first of these lines, a piece of punctuation which also has the effect of confusing the syntactical order of things. Finally, the switch to an 'in' suffix for 'morning' before the 'en' returns a line later, further disturbs formal unity as it upsets the hitherto 'perfect' internal-rhyme scheme.

Taking saxophonist Lester Young's statement that 'the only worthwhile audience is an audience of active participants' as axiomatic, the absence of a wake-up call in the narrative of the original nursery-rhyme is therefore inverted to become an extra-narrative wake-up call to the audience of Sanchez's poem.<sup>148</sup> The softly-sung, spaciouly dreamy mood of the opening lines is rudely interrupted by 'assassinations', by far the grittiest image of the poem to this point. It is also the

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<sup>148</sup> Lester Young, quoted in Ross Russell, *Bird Lives!* (London; New York: Quartet Books, 1976), p. 204.

longest single word of the poem hitherto, and as such it breaks the rhythmic and symbolic spell of the nursery-rhyme idiom and brings the poem and the reader back into the dark, brutalized grown-up world of late 1960s race-relations – an effect then multiplied in force by the 'murder' and 'massacre' which follow in quick succession. The enjambment of *dolnik* and free-verse forms meanwhile establishes dynamic tension, indicating, to borrow from Hurley and O'Neill, an ambiguous treaty between form and '*apparent* formlessness'.<sup>149</sup>

Another critical purpose is served by Sanchez's use of 'Frère Jacques', for alongside her earlier and continuing reference to Coltrane's 'My Favorite Things', and the relationship between the borrowed poem and the new poetry into which it is being interpolated, the use of 'Frère Jacques' establishes 'a/coltrane/poem' as a space of continual intertextual negotiation and transmission between the received and new forms which denies any one of them the status of dominant authority. The title has the same effect: 'a/coltrane/poem' with its lower-case typography, the indefinite article, the transformation of 'coltrane' from noun to adjective – all invite the reader to view it as a self-reflexive commentary on its own contribution to the poetic form. Meanwhile, the *solidi*, which render the ordinarily hidden architectural substructure of the poem visible, affirm the poem's processual emphasis. In so doing, they make plain the inherent literariness of the work. The reader's gaze is turned back to the interior of the poem as a *literary* form with trace elements of musical influences that affect the movements taking place within it.

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Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), with its wide-ranging analysis of the effects of colonization upon people and concepts of nationhood, was translated into English in 1963. Although Fanon stated in the former that the 'essential problems'

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<sup>149</sup> Michael D. Hurley and Michael O'Neill, *Poetic Form: An Introduction* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 1.

facing 'American negroes', 'were not the same as those confronting African negroes', his ideas – particularly those in 1952's *Black Skin, White Masks*, which was not translated until 1967 – were rapidly disseminated among the black cultural avant-garde in the United States, initially via the journal *Soulbook*, 'the quarterly journal of revolutionary afro-america'.<sup>150</sup>

Fanon wrote that 'mastery of language affords remarkable power [...] a man who has language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language', an idea that readily translates into the history of black people in the USA and the black consciousness movements of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>151</sup> Black Americans remained historically 'over-determined from the outside', and the continuing subject of white American linguistic mastery.<sup>152</sup> The first slaves forcibly transported to the Americas by the Portuguese and Spanish in the seventeenth century were (collectively) othered by their various designation as 'Blackamoors', 'Moors', 'negers' and 'negros',<sup>153</sup> and (individually) in the form of official re-naming by their colonial masters from at least 1693.<sup>154</sup> Following the proclamation of American Independence in 1776, slaves – separated and dispersed from their West African tribes – were unable to maintain their home languages, and forced to yield to the English of their oppressors which was 'the contact language of survival'.<sup>155</sup> By the time the English translations of Fanon's work were published, the designation 'Negro' was itself being subjected to fierce scrutiny, with the increasing belief among African-Americans that it was a

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<sup>150</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 173; Carolyn Gerard, 'Symposium: The Measure and Meaning of the Sixties', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 46–50 (p. 48).

<sup>151</sup> Fanon, p. 9.

<sup>152</sup> Fanon, p. 87.

<sup>153</sup> Bennett Jr., p. 402.

<sup>154</sup> Hennig Cohen, 'Slave Names in Colonial South Carolina', *American Speech* 27. 2 (1952), 102–07 (p. 103).

<sup>155</sup> Mary B. Zeigler and Viktor Osinubi, 'Theorizing the Postcoloniality of African American English', *Journal of Black Studies* 32.5 (2002), 588–609 (p. 598).

term which perpetuated the master-slave mentality in the minds of both black and white.<sup>156</sup>

We have seen Amiri Baraka's emphatic, definitive call for a 'Black' nation. By contrast, never once in a/coltrane/poem does Sanchez use the whole word 'black'. The closest she gets is 'blk', a formulation which brings the 150-year old debate over onomastic authority into the centre of the poem, and enables Sanchez in the space of three letters to state a distinct position on 'a bitter national controversy over the proper designation for identifiable Americans of African descent' to which Sanchez herself had contributed with her poem 'Nigger' in 1969's *Homecoming*.<sup>157</sup> Geneva Smitherman identifies four stages of African-American onomastic self-marking, during the third of which (1830–1966) 'Negro' and 'colored' first vied for ascendancy before 'Negro' largely prevailed. However, with increased historical consciousness and political awareness – particularly following 1954's *Brown v Board of Education* decision – came increased resentment of 'Negro', a term whose derivation from the Spanish for 'black' and history of usage by slave owners since the 1600s led Malcolm X – among others – to view the word as a metonym for the stereotyping which enabled American racism to continue to flourish almost a century after the Proclamation of Emancipation.<sup>158</sup>

A change was therefore called for, and the names of the Black Arts and Black Power movements in the late 1960s evidently indicated their preference for 'Black' over 'Afro-American' as a designation. Sanchez's reduction of the word, however, places her both within and without the debate, indicating sympathy with 'black' but also drawing attention to the fact that any such sign is the product of demographic, not

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<sup>156</sup> 'Black Power advocates adopting the word "black" and reserving "Negro" contemptuously for those who they perceived still to be living on the terms of white America'. (Lerone Bennett Jr., 'What's in a Name? Negro Vs. Afro-American Vs. Black', *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 26.4 (1969), 399–412 (p.400).)

<sup>157</sup> Bennett Jr., p 399.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Geneva Smitherman, *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), p. 8 and *passim*; Sanchez, 'Nigger' in *Home Coming: Poems* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1969), p. 6.

biological discourse, and yet remains historically determined on a biological basis. In the latter respect, this partially aligns the poet with Du Bois's assertion in 1928 that 'a Negro by any other name would be just as black and just as white; just as ashamed of himself and just as ashamed by others, as today. It is not the name – it's the Thing [sic] that counts'.<sup>159</sup> With just three letters, therefore, Sanchez distils over a century of rhetorical argument into a formulation which admits the co-existence of all the perspectives of that history and of its present – a performance of new identity imbued with the historical energies of all those which preceded it.

'Blk' also plays on the assumptions that the reader (and the present author's spellchecker) brings to the text and forms the poem into a mirror for its readers' own prejudices. By choosing to read 'blk' as a contraction of 'black', rather than the theoretically equally plausible 'block' or 'balk' or 'bulk', it is the audience that is forced to confront its reflex tendency to frame African-American art in racial terms, which instinctively furthers the racial over-determination of the African-American. Similarly, we assume that 'wite' is a substitution for 'white', when it could add even more layers of historical coding into the surface of the text, since 'wite' is a middle-English word for 'punishment, penalty, pain inflicted in punishment or torture', and in this usage white and the connotations of 'wite' become semantically synonymous.

Fanon's idea of linguistic subjugation continued far beyond the formal end of slavery. Simply by speaking English all African-Americans participate in, reproduce and are created by the discourses of the people to whom they were originally enslaved. In an explicit rejection of the process and as an affirmative act of self-determination, members of the Nation of Islam adopted an 'X' instead of given surnames they believed had been imposed on their ancestors by slave-owners. Although never a member of the Nation of Islam himself, LeRoi Jones' change of name to Amiri Baraka was motivated by a similar rejection of the received codes of

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<sup>159</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Name "Negro"', *The Crisis* (March 1928), 96–97 (p. 96).

'standard' English, a rejection which was then remediated as a key part of the BAM aesthetic.

An awareness of and a rejection of the practice of linguistic colonialism, which brings the appropriative-synthetic musical techniques deployed by Coltrane in 'My Favorite Things' into literary form, is also writ large in Sanchez's poem:

MAKE THEM  
SCREEEEEEAM  
FORGIVE ME. IN SWAHILI.  
DON'T ACCEPT NO MEA CULPAS.  
DON'T WANT TO  
HEAR  
BOUT NO EUROPEAN FOR/GIVE/NESS.

This short section is packed with commentaries and inversions on older poetic forms that combine with the content of the lines to appropriate significant elements of the historic linguistic oppression of African-Americans, and invert them such that the oppressor language becomes subject to them. The division of 'Forgive me. In Swahili' with a full stop, rather than the solidus which the rest of the poem leads us to expect, gives the first words a weight which draws attention to the poet's conviction that there is something for which forgiveness needs to be sought. 'In Swahili' then appears as a demand for revenge on similar terms.

The internal half-rhymes of 'mea' and *European*', and end-rhymes of 'culpas' and 'ness', suggest that the final four lines are designed to be read as a discreet section within the wider poem. By doing so, we see that Sanchez is using content and form to simultaneously satirize, parody and re-work classical prosody on African-American terms. The spondaic stress on the final two syllables of 'European' and the subsequent division of 'forgiveness' into three separate and equally weighted stresses means that despite sharing eight syllables with 'Don't accept no mea culpasp' the later line feels less satisfying rhythmically – and becomes more difficult to read aloud – when compared with the former's gently bouncing iambic tetrameter, a rare example in 'a/coltrane/poem' of Sanchez using a recognizably standard accentual-syllabic line.



Playing the line-forms against one another turns out to be an economical method through which Sanchez can perform a radical appropriation of western form to her own ends. An English poetic line-form is combined with the Latin of 'mea culpas' to display the poet's mastery of the form alongside a full knowledge, but simultaneous rejection of, a historically hegemonic imperial language. 'European' is then utilized with dramatic irony to break the metrical restrictions of a European form. Sanchez demonstrates that she can use the older form, but by immediately breaking it also demonstrates that such usage is now solely a product of self-determining African-American agency.

Sanchez also slams words into one another to force her audience to question all that we see, her treatment of 'a love supreme' as a phrase being instructive in this regard:

a/love/supreme. lovesupreme a lovesupreme  
A LOVE SUPREME

[...]

a lovesupremealovesupremealovesupreme for our blk  
people.

The first instance – in which 'a love supreme' transforms from being diacritically separated, to fully conjoined, to partially separated, and then to the final, euphorically upper-cased title as we expect to see it – illustrates an idea in evolution, with an apparent final ending. However, the later thrice-joined iteration reaffirms the poet's commitment to the ongoing process, demonstrating that the apparently final moment only ever attains that status in retrospect. The 'screech' that separates this last instance from those before it makes clear that this is not an easy process. 'Process' is, however, as we have seen with Baraka, Roach, and Coltrane, the key, speaking as it does to an ever forward-moving momentum, with occasional reverses remaining a necessary part of the overall sense of progress, rather than a final block to it.

The same emphasis on process is carried over to the line following 'EUROPEAN FOR/GIVE/NESS':

DEADDYINDEADDYINDEADDYINWITWESTERN  
SHITTTTTT

While the reader can retrospectively insert gaps that allow us to read 'dead dyin wite western shitTTTTT', the immediate visual experience of the line requires the eye to scan it multiply before it can impose that order. Equally there is nothing to prevent it being read as one whole word, or as 'deaddy in wite western'; so, choosing to read it in the first manner (as this author does) is again the product of a transaction between the text and the reader's *a priori* conceptions. The production of such interpretive ambiguity enacts the content of the line – if for/give/ness shows the ease with which an inherited language can be slashed back to its constituent pieces then 'wite western' words can just as easily be rendered 'dead' and 'dyin' by the simple act of removing the expected physical markers of separation.

That words should not necessarily be taken at face value – whatever their source - is another concept embedded into the middle of the poem:

BRING IN THE WITE/LIBERALS ON THE SOLO  
SOUND OF YO/FIGHT IS MY FIGHT  
SAXOPHONE.  
TORTURE  
THEM FIRST AS THEY HAVE  
TORTURED US WITH  
PROMISES/  
PROMISES. IN WITE/AMURICA. WHEN  
ALL THEY WUZ DOEN  
WAZ HAVEN FUN WITH THEY  
ORGIASTIC DREAMS OF BLKNESS

The surface message of the betrayal of African-Americans by white 'liberal' Americans who, as the final image suggests, often fetishized a romantic version of blackness which had little practical effect on the status of actual black people.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> An attitude epitomized in Norman Mailer's 'The White Negro', *Dissent* IV (Spring, 1957).

'Promises' are doubled physically as the symbolic double-talk that Sanchez portrays them to be. 'Wite' promises are not to be trusted.

The use of the defamiliarized 'wuz' followed by the more familiar-sounding 'waz' suggests that the destabilization of form is one of Sanchez's strategies, too. The meanings of the neighbouring words are spread across contested fields, with their provisionality and plasticity brought to the fore. This places them in what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari later conceptualized as the 'plane of immanence', with words and form separated into an abstract network of becomings.<sup>161</sup> Sanchez is 'breaking down the melody' as Coltrane did with 'My Favorite Things', and therefore refusing to participate in or legitimize any single regime of discourse. The poem is full of energies which differentiate it from itself in each syllable, word, solidus and space. Instead of having to play the production of meaning within the socially determined linguistic system, now the reader must also participate in the interior sign-system of the poem, or find him/herself excluded from its discourses. That Sanchez had designs to that end is also suggested in that rapid switch from 'wuz' to 'was'. Following both with present tense verbs whose conventional 'ing' suffixes are substituted for 'en' suggests that the 'wuz' is the opening salvo in a strategy of ongoing linguistic subversion and re-appropriation.

'Wuz doen', meanwhile, obliquely suggests 'dozens', the name of a verbal game 'indigenous' to African-Americans, 'traditionally played by black boys', in which the participants insult each other's relatives, especially their mothers, in a test of emotional strength.<sup>162</sup> Henry Louis Gates analyses the game's continuing social impact beyond its childhood origins at some length in *The Signifying Monkey*, pointing to the sometimes goading intertextuality evident in black literature as an effective extension of the game's practice. Gates emphasizes the processual fluidity that the effects of dozens-like riffing had and has upon its participants' senses of self.

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<sup>161</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 35 and *passim*.

<sup>162</sup> Major, p. 138.

Ultimately, blackness is continually *being* defined through the *play* of signification – precisely what Sanchez's poem demonstrates.<sup>163</sup>

While the capitalized section creates visual drama, the tone that Sanchez's choice of words creates undercuts that drama when read aloud. Fricative, affricant and sibilant consonants, as in lines such as 'TORTURE | THEM FIRST AS THEY HAVE | TORTURED US WITH | PROMISES/' outweigh the more impactful plosives with which a sonic effect of urgency might more commonly be created, and the effect of the extended 'chhhhh' at the end of most iterations of 'screech' deny even that sound its usual staccato percussive effect, turning it instead into a long hiss. Similarly, the extended 'eeeeee' of 'screech' and 'scream' overwhelm the preliminary 'scr' sounds such that they are denuded of impact.

There is tension, then, between the visual and the remembered aural, and the poem seems to revel in the creation of such tensions. One part of Sanchez's strategy seems to be to use textual instruction in order to refute it. At four points, parenthetical instructions are written alongside the main text of the poem. The first is alongside the 'Frère Jacques' section:

are u sleepen (to be  
are u sleepen sung  
brotha john softly)  
brotha john.

In this instance, the instruction conforms to the expectations the reader would have of a nursery-rhyme. The typography, down to the entirely lower-case names, reifies that sense, as do the soft consonants and long vowels of the words. The positioning of the instruction to the right of the main text also physically locates the instruction within the text it accompanies, giving further affirmative weight to the sense of consonance between the two modes.

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<sup>163</sup> Gates, pp. 108–112.

In the three other instances of this technique, however, the instruction is moved to the left of the main text, literally marginalized, and that marginalization is continued in the texts' inter-relationship such that it becomes almost entirely dissonant. In the first of these –

(softly	da-dum da da da da da da da da / da-dum-da
till it	da da da da da da da da da
builds	da-dum-da da da
up)	da-dum. da. da. da. this is a part of my favorite things

– the poetic text remains entirely in one visual register, which could indeed be described as 'soft', but which then offers no assistance for a reader attempting to ascertain *where* 'it builds up'. Indeed, all that is made certain in this instruction is uncertainty. There is no definite indication in fact of what 'it' even refers to, and in the assumption that it references the poem there is nothing to go on, not even linguistically, since – save for the occasional hyphen and period – the speech-sounds of 'da' and 'dum' are rendered almost indistinguishable. Placing the instruction on the vertical axis also renders ambiguous what the parentheses even contain, such that the brackets themselves become unreliable markers of boundary. The instruction is therefore simultaneously marginal and integral. Accordingly, the white spaces become symbols of the opening of productive imaginative space between the now-troubled systems of typographical convention and language.

The same technique of cognitive dissonance between the visual and the semantic is later used in reverse:

(soft	rise up blk/people. Rise up blk/people
chant)	RISE. & BE. What u can.
	MUST BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.E-E-E-E-BE-E-E-E-E-

A 'chant' would ordinarily be consistently repetitive, yet only one line is allowed to operate to that convention. Meanwhile, the mixture of upper-case and lower-case typography refutes the simplicity of 'soft' as an instruction. Sanchez uses these occasions to set the eye and the mind against one another.



inject a tense challenge into the text. The reading habit desires to join the two together, and yet, if the text is the authority, then clearly it cannot. It is as though Sanchez has placed the notion of authority specifically in order to undermine it; to show the space of the poem as a scene licenced for disobedience, the main text openly ridiculing the marginal text as a symbol of authority, and, ironically, illustrating that no text of any kind, in any position, can be completely in control of its own modes of transmission.

Further problems are caused by Sanchez's ongoing repeated use of the solidus, whose presence between syllables, between words, and, just once, at the end of a line, disrupts attempts to see the text as a single unit, draws attention to the syllabic content of words, and make it impossible to settle on where the lines begin and end. Each solidus creates tension within the lines, and the constantly changing amounts of white space between them, allied with the equally pattern-free use of enjambment, creates just as much tension between them. There is no pattern to the usage, so the reader's natural urge to impose a pattern is constantly denied resolution.

Furthermore, the instances of hyper-extended vowels and consonants in 'screech' and then

weeeeeeeee (stomp)  
                   areeeeeeeee (stomp)  
                                   areeeeeeeee (stomp, stomp)  
 toooooooday           (stomp.,

all act as a brake on the momentum of the eye and the voice. The repetitions of 'da' and 'dum' occur so often that the eye begins to pass over them, but the speaking voice is forced to trip over the same words if it attempts to proceed too quickly, such that by the end of these sections the words become almost unsayable. What the eye perceives as rapid movement, the voice and mind must therefore treat with slow, deliberateness if it is to accurately reproduce the text.

For the performance poet, therefore, Sanchez's poem presents significant difficulties which might appear somewhat peculiar when set against her own recollection of the Black Arts Movement's determination to 'reach masses of people', something much more easily achieved among the African-American community in 1960s New York by social recitation than by individual, silent, private reading.<sup>164</sup> Despite writing the poem in response to what would prove to be Coltrane's final gig, Sanchez 'never performed it', until she read it late one night at Brown University in the early 1970s.<sup>165</sup> The lines of 'da' and 'dum' suggest the transliteration into the text of Sanchez's own stutter, which she suffered from in childhood.<sup>166</sup> As a child, Sanchez 'would go 'det-det-det-uhm', sounds she 'started to write on paper', and which became part of her poetry. She had, moreover been humiliated when her sister read out one of her earliest poems, written about George Washington, which heavily comprised the syllable 'da'.<sup>167</sup> Although she overcame the stammer when speaking, she continued to hear it in her head, for '*years and years and years*'.<sup>168</sup>

The stutter alienates the speaking voice from language just as 'da' and 'dum' alienate the written text from it. A stutter also contains its own plosive energies, in which language is consistently potentialized within the processes of play, replay and deferral, and yet is also consistently frustrated, trapped in a state of psychological becoming in which the gap between what the mind thinks and how the voice communicates is made audible and, in '*a/coltrane/poem*', is also rendered visual. In this regard, the clinical condition of stuttering is deployed textually in a manner which anticipates, by almost three decades, Deleuze's further notion that language itself can 'stutter', as the atmosphere created by a stopping and starting, a repetition

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<sup>164</sup> Bracey, Sanchez, and Smethurst, pp. 1–10 (p. 6).

<sup>165</sup> Sanchez, quoted in Sascha Feinstein, 'An Interview with Sonia Sanchez', Introduction to *Conversations with Sonia Sanchez*, ed. by Joyce Ann Joyce (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), pp. 155–76 (p. 159).

<sup>166</sup> Joyce Ann Joyce, 'Introduction', ed. by Joyce Ann Joyce (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), pp. ix–xx (p. x).

<sup>167</sup> Melhem, 73–98 (p. 73).

<sup>168</sup> Melhem, 73–98 (p. 74).



of sounds, a tension, and a disfluency.<sup>169</sup> Sanchez spoke of there being 'life between the poem and the lines, which means that if you really understand your life, our lives, there are lives in between that we don't always see, because we limit ourselves'.<sup>170</sup> The phenomenological obstacle of the stutter is thus transformed in the spaces of the poem into an ontological statement of defiance and positive possibility, where the delays 'in-between' the visual noises of the sounds of the stutter are transmuted to radical spaces of delay and rebirth.<sup>171</sup>

The instruction that this is 'to be sung slowly to the tune of my favorite things' can thus be read as an affirmation of the validity of the poetic field as a distinct site of renewal and self-destination *alongside* the music that inspires it, rather than a claim for one-to-one correlation between the forms. Aldon Lynn Nielsen proposes that 'African-American traditions of orality and textuality were not opposed to one another and did not exist in any simple opposition to modernity and postmodernity'.<sup>172</sup> Sanchez's poem goes even further than Nielsen, and collapses the distinctions between genre as well, demolishing the New Critical categorical insistence that, in their co-existent relationship, poetry represented 'high' culture in opposition to jazz music as 'popular'.

The revelation of the myriad 'da's' and 'dums' is that the statement made by Thomas Parkinson in 1961, that 'a poem is a score', is both an oversimplification and an overestimation of poetry's capabilities.<sup>173</sup> Coltrane's treatment of 'My Favorite Things' can no better be recapitulated in language units than can written text give *clear* performative instructions, since that would render the poem merely imitative,

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<sup>169</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'Re-Presentation of Masoch', in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 53–55 (p. 55).

<sup>170</sup> Sanchez, quoted in Annie Finch, 'Form and Spirit: A Conversation with Sonia Sanchez', in *Conversations with Sonia Sanchez*, ed. by Joyce Ann Joyce (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 2007), pp. 27–46 (p. 43).

<sup>171</sup> Joyce Ann Joyce, 'Introduction', in *Conversations with Sonia Sanchez*, ed. by Joyce, pp. ix–xx (p. x).

<sup>172</sup> Nielsen, p. 34.

<sup>173</sup> Thomas Francis Parkinson, 'Phenomenon or Generation', in *A Casebook on the Beat*, ed. Parkinson (New York: Crowell, 1961), p. 287.

serving to act simply as a static museum piece for the curious gaze of future generations. It is another easy but specious 'lateral sliding' to declare that the nonverbal sounds inscribed in Sanchez's poem, or indeed any poem, are the literal literary equivalent of Coltrane's playing his saxophone. Instead Coltrane's example is used to offer a method for a distinctly African-American updating of the processual poetic method that Jack Kerouac, similarly inspired by Charlie Parker and the bebop vanguard, pioneered.

Just as Coltrane uses the structure of the original 'My Favorite Things' and the metrical consistency of the material laid down by his own rhythm section as the base from which his own imaginative melodies can spring, and as the backdrop against which his transgressions against such structures can be clearly heard, so too does Sanchez in 'a/coltrane/poem'. The stress pattern of the opening four lines creates a rhythm that identically matches the standard ride-cymbal pattern for a jazz waltz that Elvin Jones uses as the basis for his right-hand playing on Coltrane's record:

my favorite things  
   is u blowen  
   yo favorite things  
 stretchen the mind.  
   till it bursts past the con/fines of  
 solo/en melodies.

As such, therefore, the opening of the poem is the one occasion where Sanchez *does* attempt to use poetry to emulate an aspect of the condition of music. However, having established the rhythmic basis, the poem breaks free from it, with the pivotal junction at the visual representation of 'con/fines'. Having been uncoupled, the initial rhythm and the poem's syntax never again converge. Nevertheless, the spectre of the opening pulse, once established, remains as a trace presence which the apparently free versifying that follows converts into a palimpsest, affording Sanchez the licence to experiment thereafter. This results in an accretion of references which in turn cause the proliferantly differentiated experiences of each individual reader and listener.

With this in mind, the later instruction 'to be sung softly to tune of my favorite things', can be seen not simply as the eschewal of the notion of a one-to-one correlation between poetic syllable and musical note, but also as a reminder that no art is autotelic, that everything new stems from an appreciation of, and move away from, that which preceded it. The manner in which Sanchez then frames the central message of the poem, which appears alongside the instruction, reifies this idea:

step over the wite/ness  
that is yessss terrrrr day  
weeeeeeee are toooooooday.

'We' – in this instance black people – can only be 'today' when 'yesterday' is first acknowledged as a presence, however grim much of that history happens to be.

History having thus been acknowledged, the poem is liberated to focus entirely on the present and the future. The six lines of 'das' and 'dums' that immediately follow are divided into much shorter units of two and three, which are far easier to read both visually and orally than are those that preceded the conclusion of 'yesterday', (which never appear in groupings shorter than four, and at one point are as long as fourteen). In these shorter groupings, they create a much lighter, more dancelike and more positive sense of momentum. The recapitulation of 'weeeeeeeee | areeeeeeeee | areeeeeeeee | toooooooday' which then follows acquires an assonantal glibness which stands in stark contrast to the harsh evocations called to mind by the same effect in 'screeeeeeech'.

The principal aesthetic example of John Coltrane's 'My Favorite Things' is his demonstration that an acknowledgment – not destruction – of given forms, can liberate the artist to simultaneously transform and create anew. It is a synthesis of historic and present codes and ideas. In the final lines of 'a/coltrane/poem', Sanchez clearly does the same, using the title of Coltrane's masterwork to echo the preceding

assonance and combine the whole of the history and present into an optimistic instruction:

chant     RISE. & BE. what u can.  
                   MUST BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.E-E-E-E  
                           BE-E-E-E-E-E-  
                           yeh. john coltrane.  
 my favorite things is u.  
                           showen us life/  
                                   liven.  
 a love supreme  
                           for each  
                           other  
                           if we just  
                           lissssssSSTEN.

The opening and closing of the poem are brought together in the repetition of 'my favorite things is u', but the switch in outlook that the poem is designed to engender is illustrated by the change from 'blowen' to 'showen'. Earlier, the poem addresses the absent Coltrane and says '...u blew away our passsst | and showed us our futureeeee'. But this is not the total destruction that Baraka heard in Coltrane's music. The switch from 'blowen' to 'showen' at either end of the poem tells us that the poem has finally caught up with what Coltrane achieved in 'My Favorite Things'. The past has been acknowledged and then transformed to illustrate the 'futureeeeeee', the long vowels of which foreshadow the many that will subsequently follow, echoing back to Abbey Lincoln's final vocals on 'Freedom Day'. The giddy 'weeeeeee' sounds can be traced back to this moment; they echo those contained subtly in 'a love supreme', an assonance which simultaneously unifies the community as 'we'. The processional exertion of mental 'stretchen' at the opening has become the stand-alone and resolved 'liven' through this process.

And the very final word makes sense of all the tensions that Sanchez has located within the preceding text. The reception of the text is problematized only when one tries to receive it by externalizing it, be that in vocal performance or in the silent, internal performance of the mind. Sebastian Clarke said of Sanchez's writing that 'an alternative has been posed, a vision of a new society in its embryonic stages reering

[sic] towards restoration, to its traditional greatness'.<sup>174</sup> To that end, the final syllable also makes further sense of the long list of switches from 'ing' to 'en' that precede it: 'blowen', 'solo/en', 'sleepen', 'ringen', 'DOEN', 'HAVEN', 'FUCKEN', 'showen' – all are designed to be a part of what it is to 'Listen' in this poem, a method through which once again the historical content and the projective political futurity are unified in the pursuit of just such an 'alternative', and through which, in the process, English is rendered servant to the African-American poet, rather than vice-versa.

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<sup>174</sup> Sebastian Clarke, 'Black Magic Woman: Sonia Sanchez and her Work', *Présence Africaine*, 78 (1971), 253–261 (p. 261).

## Chapter Three: New and Old Gospel

### Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz*, Steve Jonas' 'One in Three Musicians', and Jayne Cortez's 'Ornette'

*He's brought a thing in— it's not new. I won't say who started it, but whoever started it, people overlooked it.*

— Charles Mingus on Ornette Coleman, 1960.<sup>175</sup>

*Ornette, perhaps more than any other modern jazz musician, is firmly rooted in the tradition of his people. [...] Once you get past the complexity of it, this is relatively simple music.*

— A. B. Spellman, 1966.<sup>176</sup>

In 1969, Black Arts writer James Stewart declared Ornette Coleman's music to be 'the most meaningful music being created today'.<sup>177</sup> Forty years later, Garry Giddens and Scott DeVeaux would assert that Coleman is 'universally revered as one of American music's most original figures,' whose influence is 'beyond calculation'.<sup>178</sup> Born in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1930, Coleman started playing the saxophone at the age of fourteen. Exposed to the music of Charlie Parker, he began to develop his own style based on Parker's around 1948, doing so in the context of southwestern rhythm-and-blues and carnival bands, whose players did not appreciate Coleman's experiments.<sup>179</sup> Such was the hostility that his saxophone was destroyed in an assault by audience members after a gig at Baton Rouge in 1948. It was this that prompted him to return to the alto saxophone, exploring 'micro-tonalities and speech-like cries'. However, for most of the 1950s he was employed in Los Angeles as an elevator attendant,

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<sup>175</sup> Charles Mingus, 'Another View of Coleman', in *Down Beat: The Great Jazz Interviews*, ed. by Frank Alkyer (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Books, 2009), pp. 77–78 (p. 78).

<sup>176</sup> A. B. Spellman, *Four Lives*, p. xiii.

<sup>177</sup> Stewart, pp. 3–10 (p. 4).

<sup>178</sup> Giddins and DeVeaux, p. 506.

<sup>179</sup> Gunther Schuller and Barry Kernfeld, 'Ornette Coleman' (2002), *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press

<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-2000095200?rskey=TAWAMx&result=1>> [Accessed 1 December 2017].

experiencing first-hand what he referred to simply as the 'insanity' of racism, and the limited opportunities that American society held for its black populace at that time.<sup>180</sup>

It was here, however, that he developed his own 'harmolodic' musical theory from a combination of musical intuition born of southwestern country blues and folk forms and his 'misreadings – or highly personal interpretations – of the theoretical texts'. This represented an extension of the autodidactic habit that had seen him originally learn the scales of the saxophone out of a piano book. From this – with no-one to correct him – he believed that the note A in the book corresponded to what was in fact C on the horn, a mistake which gave him 'the unusual sense of pitch that is so apparent in his playing'.<sup>181</sup> That independence of outlook would continue to be apparent throughout his life and career. As Amiri Baraka noted of Coleman's debt to Parker: 'Ornette Coleman uses Parker only as a hypothesis; his conclusions are quite separate and unique'.<sup>182</sup> Those unique conclusions drew Coleman into the orbit of John Lewis, and he was invited to play with the The Modern Jazz Quartet in 1958. A year later, 'on a chilly autumn evening' in November 1959, as A. B. Spellman melodramatically puts it, 'the New York jazz establishment faced its most serious challenger since Charlie Parker came out of Kansas City in 1939,' Coleman beginning the residency in which his new sound delighted and appalled the audience in equal measure.<sup>183</sup>

Coleman's technical experiments in what would come to be known as 'free jazz' preceded John Coltrane's own 'free' period by four years, and Coltrane himself acknowledged his debt to Coleman as early as 1961: 'I didn't know where I was going to go next, I don't know whether I would've just thought of abandoning the chord system or not. I probably wouldn't have thought of that at all. And he came along

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<sup>180</sup> Spellman, p. 94.

<sup>181</sup> Spellman, p. 86.

<sup>182</sup> Baraka, pp. 81–93 (p. 84).

<sup>183</sup> Spellman, p. 81.

doing it, and I heard it and I said, "well, that must be the answer".<sup>184</sup> Curiously, however, and at variance with the hyperbolic nature of James Stewart and Gary Giddens' assessments, Coleman inspired very few direct poetic responses from the BAM, certainly not in comparison to Coltrane. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, through close reading of Coleman's 1961 record *Free Jazz*, Steve Jonas' 1961 poem 'One of Three Musicians', and Jayne Cortez's 1969 poem 'Ornette', is to illustrate that many of the aesthetic innovations and inspirations frequently credited to Coltrane alone by the Black Arts Movement, both musically and poetically, should in fact equally be attributed to Coleman. The involvement of the body in the construction of meaning, and the synthesis of the new and the historic – an aspect often overlooked critically in responses to *Free Jazz* which fetishize its novelty – would go on to be two crucial elements of the Black Arts Movement's aesthetic, and will, as a result, go on to be the focus of this chapter's examinations.<sup>185</sup>

At the time of its release, *Free Jazz* would have seemed truly radical in almost every respect. An initial comparison with Roach's *We Insist!*, released just one year earlier, or indeed Coltrane's 'My Favorite Things', would suggest that *Free Jazz* emanated from another world. Coleman's record not only names a new jazz subgenre, it does so in a way that also acts as a Roach-like demand for emancipation, but from the now formulaic approach of the once equally iconoclastic bebop style, of which Roach himself was a symbol, rather than from African-American history. The performance, as with Roach's album, begins prior to listening, on the cover and in the gatefold of the sleeve. A cut-out square on the cover reveals a section of a reproduction of Jackson Pollock's 1954 painting 'White Light' (see figure 1).

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<sup>184</sup> Benoît Quersin, 'Interview with John Coltrane', in *Coltrane on Coltrane*, ed. by DeVito, pp. 97–104 (p. 102).

<sup>185</sup> Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz* (1961), The Ornette Coleman Double Quartet (Atlantic Jazz, 7567-81347-2, 2004) [on CD].





Figure 1: The front cover of Coleman's *Free Jazz* (left), and Jackson Pollock's 'White Light' (right).<sup>186</sup>

While the print is, relative to Pollock's canvas, miniscule, this is nevertheless an immediate statement of aesthetic intent from Coleman, who wrote in the liner notes to his 1959 record *Change of the Century* that 'there is a continuity of expression, certain continually evolving strands of thought that link all my compositions together. Maybe it's something like the paintings of Jackson Pollock'.<sup>187</sup> The cover of *Free Jazz* echoes Pollock's 'all over' methodology, announcing the record as an intertextual document, whose 'collective improvisation' extends beyond the recorded sounds of the performers.

Meanwhile, the first indication of what a structural departure *Free Jazz* would be from previous jazz, and even from Coleman's own previous records, is revealed in the title of just one tune on the back cover: 'Free Jazz—parts 1 & 2'. Listening then reveals the absence of a defined end to 'part 1' or starting point for 'part 2' – the divide at 19:55 being forced upon what is in fact a single piece of music solely by the technological limitations of the long-playing record. Refusing to designate the two sides as separate suggests that Coleman was both refusing to adhere to commercially-governed record industry norms and refusing to be constrained in the

<sup>186</sup> From 'The Ornette Coleman Double Quartet - *Free Jazz*', *Discogs* <<https://www.discogs.com/The-Ornette-Coleman-Double-Quartet-Free-Jazz/master/28578#images/7580861>> [Accessed 21 October 2015]; Jackson Pollock, 'White Light' (1954), *MOMA.org* <<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79481>> [Accessed 21 October 2015].

<sup>187</sup> Ornette Coleman, 'Liner Notes', *Change of the Century*, Ornette Coleman, et al. (Atlantic; Warner Jazz, 8122-73608-2, 2002) [on CD].

manner that jazz musicians had been previously by the need for short tracks – first to fit onto the very limited recording space of the 78-rpm record and then to fit into broadcast-able pockets of airtime on commercial radio. As recorded, and as it can now be heard digitally and on CD, 'Free Jazz parts 1 & 2' lasts for thirty-seven minutes and four seconds – an unprecedented length for a single studio-recorded jazz track in 1961, much more in keeping with the length of 'live' improvisations, and therefore a more accurate representation of conventional jazz praxis.

*Free Jazz's* radicalism also extends to the composition of the ensemble(s) that perform it, the cover announcing the 'Ornette Coleman Double Quartet'. Coleman assembled two quartets for the session: one with himself, Don Cherry (pocket trumpet), Scott LaFaro (bass) and Billy Higgins (drums), the other featuring Eric Dolphy on saxophone, alongside Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), Charlie Haden (bass) and Ed Blackwell (drums). Calling them a 'double quartet' rather than an 'octet' was a key distinction, since, although the two quartets perform simultaneously, they do so as discrete units. Each is recorded in separate channels on the stereo mix – a method not previously deployed on any jazz recording (and indeed rarely used since).

Also of note is the absence from *Free Jazz* of the piano. This was not new; Gerry Mulligan's 1953 quartet went without a keyboard instrument, as did Sonny Rollins' trio of the late 1950s, and Roach on *We Insist!*. Dropping the piano was, however, still a relative rarity for jazz in 1960. Reflecting on the role of the instrument in jazz with Jacques Derrida in 1997, Coleman said that 'it's primarily the piano that has served at all times as the framework in music, but it's no longer indispensable'.<sup>188</sup> The effect of the instrument's absence in all these cases was to liberate the ensemble from the

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<sup>188</sup> Coleman, quoted in Jacques Derrida, 'The Other's Language: Jacques Derrida Interviews Ornette Coleman, 23 June 1997', *Genre* 36. (Summer, 2004), 319–29 (p. 322). It is also notable that John Coltrane – even on his most sonically radical albums *Ascension*, *Meditations* and *Expressions*, recorded between 1965 and 1967 – never abandoned the piano. Only in February 1967, on what would be the final recording sessions of his life, released, *post-mortem*, as *Interstellar Space* (1974) did he reduce the ensemble to just his saxophone and Rashied Ali's drums.

even-tempered scale. 'The idea', as Coleman put it, 'is that two or three people can have a conversation with sounds, without trying to dominate it or lead it'.<sup>189</sup> With harmonic underpinning now provided by an instrument (the bass) capable of glissandi, allied with the pitch-bending techniques which Coleman, Cherry, Hubbard and Dolphy all employ on *Free Jazz*, the audible influence of even-tempered tonality, which the sound of the piano unavoidably employed and which had dominated music for three centuries, could be abandoned entirely whenever the players so chose. The non-dominant collective improvisation was thus given the space it required to flourish.

The separation of the two quartets has immediate consequences for the listener. The movements of the sonic centre of *Free Jazz* back and forth from left speaker to right speaker involve the listener bodily in the act of listening. This in turn challenges the notion of bodily unity: from his or her central position the *Free Jazz* listener becomes an essential component of the auditory circuit between the left and right channels, and so becomes an indispensable part of the construction of the music in both time and space. Only within the body of the listener does the whole 'collective improvisation' come truly into being, and as the skulls of the listeners vibrate to that newly united sound so that sound emerges complete from that body. With listener and listening always context-dependent, the decision to split the channels in this manner makes every new listener a duty-bound participant in the construction of a new form of bodily identity, subject to constant reinterpretation as the music continues.

This instrumental formation also offers a first indication that this is a 'revolution' with a firm awareness of its own history. The use of two quartets in a formation which Gioia likens to the 'battle royales' of televised wrestling also refers to the long history of combative 'cutting contests' through which jazz bands and individual

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<sup>189</sup> Derrida, p. 322.

musicians proved their mettle. These date back as far as the late-nineteenth century, when brass bands in New Orleans competed against one another, to the famous 1930s battles of the swing bands at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, and those at Minton's and Monroe's in Harlem in the early 1940s, where the bebop vocabulary was developed and refined.<sup>190</sup> As Gioia puts it, 'in a setting where conservatory degrees were still unknown, one's curriculum vitae was earned every night on the bandstand.'<sup>191</sup> Although Coleman's quartets are working with one another, the trace of antithesis contained in their physical separation and mirrored instrumentation encode this historical set-up in a manner which once more foreshadows the emphasis Amiri Baraka placed on the contemporary valence of jazz history in *Blues People*.

Sonically, *Free Jazz* is indeed extraordinary. 'Churning and seething, sounds ricocheting between the two quartets, a restless energy permeating the music, *Free Jazz* fulfilled all the prophecies about Coleman, both positive and negative'.<sup>192</sup>

Listening to the whole record today we find another instance – as with Baraka's 'Black Art' – where the risk of Douglas Kahn's 'real havoc' in noise is made real. This is apparent from the outset, where 'Free Jazz – Parts 1 & 2' begins with layers of rapid bop licks performed in polyphony by all the horns, before a series of angular ensemble chords which begin at 00:8 and continue through to 0:20. Harmonically the soundscape is overwhelmingly dissonant, and established here is the most striking rhythmic aspect of the opening twenty-eight minutes: its sheer speed. With a metronome marking close to 200 bpm, the effect is of irresistible propulsive urgency and animation; a bristling, electrifying soundscape which achieves in music something akin to Charles Olson's exhortation for poetic ideas to 'move on instanter' at all times.

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<sup>190</sup> Gioia, pp. 98–99.

<sup>191</sup> Gioia, p. 210.

<sup>192</sup> Gioia, p. 344.

Alfred Willener claimed in 1969 that Coleman's music was 'as far removed as possible from pre-established structures',<sup>193</sup> an example of the critical desire to frame *Free Jazz* as epistemically radical which also fits the rhetoric Coleman himself employed in the liner notes to *Change of the Century*, when he wrote that 'the members of my group and I are now attempting a break-through to a new, freer conception of jazz, one that departs from all that is "standard" and cliché in "modern" jazz'. Despite the unusual soundscape, however, the opening of 'Free Jazz' quickly establishes that it is not entirely removed from pre-established 'standard' structures, or even entirely radical in its use of them. The opening polyphonic section gives way to a solo section by Eric Dolphy, just as a head would give way to a chorus in an arranged jazz tune. Similar *tutti* ensemble breaks then return to form the junctions between one solo section and another over the course of the opening twenty-five minutes, with each player taking a solo chorus in turn. As an organizing principle, this is no different to the methodology that Louis Armstrong employed in his time with the Hot Five and Hot Seven in the 1920s, and would be recognizable as standard practice in all of jazz's various incarnations to that point.

Closer listening to *Free Jazz* reveals multiple latent traces of past jazz performance practices which contradict Coleman and Willener's own claims, and support Michael Cogswell's more-refined observation that 'Coleman's music displays a fascinating fusion of the innovative and the traditional'.<sup>194</sup> When heard, those historical traces place *Free Jazz* as the next point in the lineage of the music's history, rather than as an entirely new, ahistorical departure. This is most apparent when one listens in isolation to the right-channel quartet of Dolphy, Hubbard, Haden, and Ed Blackwell. Haden, whose career indicated a lifelong concern with 'simplicity and traditional conceptions of accompaniment' to his bass playing, plays a walking bass-line whose rhythmic properties establish pulse and therefore structure, in a manner consistent

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<sup>193</sup> Willener, p. 239.

<sup>194</sup> Michael Cogswell, 'Melodic Organization in Two Solos by Ornette Coleman', in *Annual Review of Jazz Studies 7*, ed. by Edward Berger, et al. (Maryland, Folkestone: Scarecrow Press, 1994–1995), pp. 101–44 (p. 104).

with the music of the swing-era (c.1925–1945).<sup>195</sup> Blackwell's drumming, meanwhile, enhances that connection with a 4/4 ride-cymbal pattern straight out of that era. He also layers the performance codes of bebop into the music through his use of the snare drum and (less frequently) bass drum and hi-hat to accent and subdivide the pulse. Together, the two players forge a sonic base for their quartet for which the word 'standard' is perfectly appropriate.

This conventional approach allows the rhythm duo in the other quartet – Billy Higgins (drums) and Scott LaFaro (Charlie Haden's one-time flat mate and fellow bassist) – to engage in dialogue with the anchoring structure of Blackwell and Haden's playing, and thereby create the polyrhythmic propulsion that marks *Free Jazz* as a paradigm-shifting record. Playing at double the speed of Blackwell for almost half-an-hour without halt, Higgins' right hand maintains a furious pace, with cymbal 'notes' being played as quickly as any of the runs that enabled Ira Gitler to label John Coltrane's late-fifties sax playing 'sheets of sound'.<sup>196</sup> Given the natural absence of definable tonality from the drum set, the emphasis on sound in Gitler's epithet is perhaps even more relevant here. The staccato punctuations of each individual strike of the cymbal both interrupt and add to the continuous crescendo-ing 'roar' of sound that the same cymbal's ever-continuing vibrations generate. At no point is that roar cut off or choked with a mistimed strike, a testament to Higgins' technique and intonation. The result is an ever-accruing collage of repetitive sounds. The texture thickens continuously over the opening twenty-five minutes, and yet the decaying sound of every single strike remains in a quick-fire aggregation of the traces of the recording's own short history. 'Free Jazz' serves as an intermediary site of productive ambivalence between the traces of the past and the continual newness layered within and beneath the surfaces of the music

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<sup>195</sup> Barry Kernfeld, 'Haden, Charlie (Jazz)' (2002), *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-2000182600>> [Accessed April 29 2016].

<sup>196</sup> Gitler, pp. 41–44 (p. 43).

With the more traditional pace and tone of Haden and Blackwell's playing, the two rhythm sections together create a polyrhythmic spree. The four individuals – augmented by each drummer's limbs operating in coordinated independence – effectively create ten different rhythmic lines which run in parallel throughout the piece.<sup>197</sup> In addition, while each individual rhythm section clearly follows a pulse, the two together are not always in complete lockstep. Fractional lay-backs or anticipations of the beat in one quartet form a microscopic, but nevertheless audible, metrical displacement which prevents the establishment of a singular metrical unity between the two rhythm sections. In so doing it also creates a third, supplemental, meter which could *only* occur through the collective performative process. In turn, this results in a sense of dislocation for the listener which goes far beyond the unfamiliar 5/4 of Roach's 'Driva Man'.

Within that polyrhythmic sound, however, the more conventional approach from the right-channel rhythm section seeps through the dense texture of the whole work, confirming *Free Jazz's* productive synthesis of the radically new with elements of the traditions of the old. Haden's crystal clear intonation and its place at the bottom end of the frequency spectrum enables it to cut through the texture in a way that means that – even within the problematized overall pulse – a trace of a familiar pulse intermittently continues to draw the listener's attention, serving as both a presence and an absent echo of the shape of jazz just gone. In turn, this emphasizes the fact that such traditional notions are being challenged within the full context of the work.

The familiar rhythm of Haden's playing also liberates the bass to fulfil a new, unfamiliar harmonic role. Haden does not follow a pre-set chord progression in the manner of the twelve-bar blues, or of the 'changes' taken from tin-pan-alley tunes that form the basis of so many bebop tunes, but instead takes his harmonic lead from

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<sup>197</sup> Coordinated independence is the acquisition of the ability to perform four disconnected actions simultaneously, theorised by Jim Chapin in *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer: Coordinated Independence as Applied to Jazz and Bebop* (Miami, FL: Warner Bros. Publications, 1948), pp. 1–3.

the horn-players Coleman, Dolphy, Hubbard and Cherry. The result is an inversion of standard practice to that point.<sup>198</sup> For Coleman,

all that matters in the function of the bass is either the top or the bottom or the middle, that's all the bass player has to play for me. It doesn't mean because you put an F7 down for the bass player he's going to choose the best notes in the F7 to express what you're doing. But if he's allowed to use any note that he hears to express that F7, then that note's going to be right because he hears it, not because he read it off the page.<sup>199</sup>

Haden's playing, accordingly, goes where the melody instruments suggest, rather than adhering to any pre-conceived plan.

Above this, the first minute of Scott LaFaro's bass contribution offers confirmation that *Free Jazz* is fully engaged with the same processual impulse theorized and enacted in the post-war poetry of Olson and Williams. LaFaro's playing briefly places him in the role of commentating observer to the performance. Until 1:17 he confines his playing to occasional interjections which, as with Haden, are audible responses to the sounds around him. With these contributions gradually increasing in length, the effect is of experimental exploration. From 1:17 to 25:30, however, LaFaro locks into Higgins' pulse and remains with it from then on, playing mostly crotchet notes, and tonally remaining in the high register of the bass's range, leaving the lower-end of the range free for Haden to explore.

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<sup>198</sup> Upon whose novelty Haden himself later reflected: 'I started just following him [Coleman] and playing the chord changes that he was playing: on-the-spot new chord structures made up according to how he felt at any given moment'. (Haden, quoted in Don Heckman, 'Charlie Haden: Everything Man' (2011), *JazzTimes* <<https://jazztimes.com/features/charlie-haden-everything-man/>> [Accessed 5 May 2016].)

<sup>199</sup> Quoted in Spellman, p. 124.



Stephen Jonas' early life is so poorly documented that the early part of his history can 'only be conjectured', according to the editor of his *Collected Poems*, Joseph Torra.<sup>200</sup> It is believed he was born 'somewhere in Georgia between 1920 and 1927', and was raised by his adoptive parents as Rufus S. Jones. When exactly he adopted his allonym is unknown. However, it is known that he lived almost all his life in Boston, and that his physiognomy— light complexion, high cheekbones and wavy black hair — raised the possibility that he was of mixed-racial heritage.<sup>201</sup> As Aldon Nielsen says, he is 'this poet who may have been born black Rufus Jones and died as white Stephen Jonas'.<sup>202</sup> Torra claims that 'Jonas often passed as Hispanic or Portuguese and didn't feel comfortable when someone referred to him as black'.<sup>203</sup> The result of this fluidity, however, is one that has considerable relevance to the present discussion, forcing Jonas to confront his own identity as 'a system of upheaval, the continuous turning over of matter and the transmutation of process into poetry'.<sup>204</sup>

Jonas' 'One of Three Musicians' (1961) is a response to Coleman's music, and shares the reinventing-impetus that *Free Jazz* employs. The poem commentates on the saxophonist's music in a way that places it within a continuum of revolutionary (in the sense of a cyclical return to a point of origin) practice in jazz, rather than claiming it to be a unique disruptive break. Jonas is unusual within the boundaries of this thesis in that he was not from New York, and in that his poetic response to the so-called 'new thing' came four years before the Black Arts Movement was formalized. He and Baraka did know one another, however, and 'One of Three Musicians', with its interdisciplinary emphasis, its near-contemporaneity with *Free Jazz* and its synthesis of historical performance strategies within the present, anticipates a

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<sup>200</sup> Joseph Torra and Stephen Jonas, 'Introduction', in *Selected Poems*, ed. by Joseph Torra (Hoboken, NJ: Talisman House, 1994), pp. 1–12 (p. 2).

<sup>201</sup> T. J. Anderson, *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right: Four Innovators of Jazz Poetry* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2004), p. 99.

<sup>202</sup> Nielsen, p. 4.

<sup>203</sup> Torra and Jonas, pp. 1–12 (p. 2).

<sup>204</sup> Torra and Jonas, pp. 1–12 (p. 12).



participated in it. These memories shaped, in turn, the jazz performer's self-image, their sense of what it meant to be an African-American musician.<sup>208</sup>

A sense of that remembered vision is given in the lyrics to Duke Ellington's 'Congo Square' from his suite *A Drum is a Woman* (1956): 'here the crowd is congregated. They all have such strange faraway looks in their eyes. You can almost smell violence and fear, maybe afraid to be there or maybe afraid *not* to be there'.<sup>209</sup> By referring to it in his poem, Jonas brings the history of the African-American and of jazz and their present, represented in this case by Coleman, together as one, and forces the reader into a reflection on the similarities between Coleman's radical approach and those of the original jazz musicians.

As the subtitle of *Free Jazz* makes explicit,<sup>210</sup> Coleman's conception was based on an emphasis of the collective above the individual, an approach which Coleman himself acknowledged was not new: 'The idea of group improvisation, in itself, is not at all new; it played a big role in New Orleans' early bands',<sup>211</sup> and Ted Gioia's detailed description of the jazz of New Orleans confirms that the idea was in fact a return to the approach of that time:

New Orleans pioneers created a music in which the group was primary, in which each instrument was expected to play a specific role, not assert its independence. The most characteristic moment in these recordings of early jazz takes place when the lead instruments, usually cornet, clarinet, and trombone, engage in spontaneous counterpoint. The trombone takes over the low register, providing a deep, deliberate bass melody; the clarinet plays more complex figures, often consisting of arpeggios or other rapidly fingered patterns; the cornet moves mostly within the middle register, playing less elaborate melodies than the clarinet, but pushing the ensemble forward with propulsive, swinging lead lines.<sup>212</sup>

The *mise-en-page* of Jonas' poem gives a visual sense of contrapuntal registers interlacing and working with one another; the fragmentation and varying pagination

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<sup>208</sup> Gioia, pp. 4–5.

<sup>209</sup> Duke Ellington, 'Congo Square' on *A Drum is a Woman* (1956) <<https://open.spotify.com/track/6KhYFCfCY5eWUSQNmx1cqr?si=6b8ozxz6SE28XlcDyQAXYQ>> [Accessed 5 March 2015].

<sup>210</sup> 'A Collective Improvisation by the Ornette Coleman Double Quartet'

<sup>211</sup> Coleman, 'Liner Notes', *Change of the Century*.

<sup>212</sup> Gioia, p. 50.

giving each line a distinct metrical and visual character within the overall poem. In this, Jonas once more anticipates much of what would follow in the Black Arts Movement.

Just like 'Congo Square', the 'bare black feet pounding Delta clay' is another heavily historicized image, containing as it does the traces of the activities of the slave field. 'Bare black feet' also signifies – in Gates' parodic sense – upon 'feet' as the academic label for the constituent parts of poetic meter. A sense of dynamism is rendered in the image of clay being 'pounded', and, we must therefore assume, shaped, and re-shaped in the image of the feet and by the vibrations those feet cause. The imprints left physically in clay symbolize the traces of memory in Jonas' poem, and involve the poet and reader in the history of the image and the percussive physicality of the performance itself.

'Pounding' also draws connections both between Coleman's music and the literal sound of the street and between the quasi-primal imagery of the poem and the industrial-mechanical world of mass machine-production. The latter was revolutionizing work and the American economy at the same time as jazz was evolving. In New York, particularly this led to a focus on fragmentation that found its artistic expression in John Dos Passos' 1925 modernist masterpiece *Manhattan Transfer*, released, as it happens, just a year after Louis Armstrong first moved to the city to join Fletcher Henderson's orchestra.<sup>213</sup> The image transforms the act of writing the poem itself into a ritual act of creation based on repetitive but not cloned activity. This, in turn, leads to results which in the instant are, to quote Homi Bhabha, 'almost the same but not quite', and in their proliferation of meanings give rise to the 'excess and slippage' that leads, as Bhabha suggested, to the necessary problematizing of colonial identity.

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<sup>213</sup> John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925; London: Penguin, Classics, 1987)

Jonas 'thought about Picasso's three musicians' when hearing Coleman, and what follows indicates that 'about' should be read in the sense of 'around', rather than in its direct referential sense, for the poem swiftly moves away from Picasso to the world of 1890s and 1910s New Orleans, before switching to the sixteenth-century imagery of Dutch painter Pieter Brueghel's *Kermess*. Brueghel's painting is a representation of an inherently carnivalesque scene.<sup>214</sup> The Dutch 'Kermess', originally a specialized celebration of a town or village's patron saint, became a more transactional 'combination of carnival, festival, fair, and religious observance'.<sup>215</sup> Among several such scenes, the one referred to by Jonas is likely to be 'The Peasant Dance', which would also become the subject of a William Carlos Williams poem, 'The Dance', in 1962. In the painting, the country peasants celebrating the Kermess are engaged in licentious behaviour: dancing, drinking, and enjoying the pleasures of the flesh; and turning their back on the church and the symbolic presence of the Virgin Mary, and instead facing the tavern. If a theatre is indeed 'any place / free associates come in / to play' as Jonas posits at the conclusion of 'One in Three', then this poem itself is just the same. The initial 'thought' inspired by hearing Ornette Coleman turns out to be the performance that then ensues in the text, with the aggregation of associations forming a collage-effect, itself inspired by Picasso's synthetic-cubist painting.

Jonas is clear, however, that the people represented in his poem are 'not' the 'shoed' peasants of 'Brueghel's / painting The Kermess'. Instead, these are 'bare black feet pounding / delta clay'. For all their lower-order status in sixteenth-century society, Brueghel's peasants are well-dressed, well-fed to the point of corpulence, and engaged in a temporary abandonment of self through a series of performances of bacchanalian excess. By making the point that the 'black' feet are 'bare', Jonas places the subjects of his poem in a symbolic social position beneath the lowest of the low in

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<sup>214</sup> As described by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White: 'Carnival was the repeated, periodic celebration of the grotesque body - fattening food, intoxicating drink, sexual promiscuity, altered ego-identity, the inverse and the heteroglot. All these are the opposite poles to the terms governing everyday work and are usually repressed'. (*The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 183.)

<sup>215</sup> H. Arthur Klein, *Graphic Worlds of Pieter Brueghel the Elder* (Chelmsford, MA: Courier Corporation, 2014), p. 58.

white European culture, implicitly chastising the relative decadence of Brueghel's subjects, and reminding the readers of the fact that in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, 'the Negro was thought to exist outside of civilization'.<sup>216</sup> Rather than escaping the quotidian self, the 'bare black feet' are instead using the carnivalesque locale as a space in which the black self, denied in everyday life by the legal and social racism of 1890s and 1910s 'Jim Crow' era America, is allowed simply to exist.

Emphasizing the turn away from the licensed individual excesses of Brueghel's conception of carnival and towards the collective improvised progress of Coleman's *Free Jazz* is Jonas' rhythmic approach in this section:

They reproduce the spasms, the screams  
the outbursts of dark religious ex-  
orcisms. these are not the

shoed peasant feet out of Brueghel's  
painting The Kermess, these are  
bare black feet pounding

delta clay

the wire & steel singing over  
broken barrel staves,  
saying a theatre is any place  
free associates come in

to play

With irregular stresses and line-lengths, Jonas' use of the *mise-en-page* echoes the metrical displacements of *Free Jazz* while anticipating the Black Arts Movement's preoccupation with disruptive visual methods such as odd enjambments and split words. The visual rhythmic regularity of Brueghel's circles is shunned in favour of a much more jagged, unpredictable meter. The refutation of Brueghel serves also as a reification of Pablo Picasso's 'One of Three Musicians', celebrated in the title of the poem and, by name, within it. Indeed, Jonas' use of the *mise-en-page* serves mimetically for Picasso's own fragmented depictions of his subjects in Three

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<sup>216</sup> Davarian L. Baldwin, 'Our Newcomers to the City: The Great Migration and the Making of Modern Mass Culture', in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890–1930*, ed. by William Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp. 159–89 (p. 169).

Musicians. This is also apparent in Jonas' reduction of the word 'with' to 'w/', the whole deconstructed into fragments – but not so completely as to be unrecognizable.

That 'they reproduce the spasms, the screams / the outbursts of dark religious exorcisms' is significant because, just as the playing of Coleman's music serves – in Jonas's response to it – to re-paint Picasso's paintings and to re-sound the jazz of New Orleans, so then in an act of supplemental performative excess does the writing of the poem serve not merely to describe but to re-perform and re-mediate Coleman's music. That in turn then stimulates the responses to which the reader is now exposed: in the act of kicking cans and hitting bones together the "'fakers'" of Congo Square did, and do re-perform, or 'reproduce' as Jonas has it, the acts of ritual cleansing of the occult to which the image of 'dark exorcisms' refers, a sacrilegious performance which, in this carnivalesque space, occurs without fear of punishment.

The manner of Jonas's description of New Orleans music-making also forms a celebration of artistic defiance. If denied shoes then 'black feet' will 'pound' even harder; if deprived of 'actual' instruments they will make them out of anything that comes to hand: 'cigar boxes', 'barrel-staves', 'tin cans', and ultimately the body itself. These images further historicize the poem, calling back to Africa in their evocation of bodily percussion,<sup>217</sup> and invest the poem with a rebellious subtext – calling into question the very distinctions between art and non-art that forms much of the backdrop to the Euro-American cultural discussion of the interwar years – whilst drawing attention to the manner in which such distinctions are created.

We can, therefore, see that the poem not only takes inspiration from Picasso but also from the interrogations begun by Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917). Just as Duchamp's

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<sup>217</sup> J. C. Thomas says: 'Africans have some subtleties that we Westerners do not often attempt. For example: using the body itself as a percussion instrument by slapping the chest, knocking on the headbone and clicking the voice, the latter made famous by Miriam Makeba of the Xosa tribe in South Africa'. (*Chasin' the Trane: The Music and Mystique of John Coltrane* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1976), pp. 21–22.)

urinal interrogated the concept of 'art', challenging assumptions through strategies of displacement, assemblage and naming. Jonas's cigar boxes and barrel staves ask 'what is a neo-classical instrument?', with the answer in this instance being that it is anything made subject to 'neo-classical' as a speech-act. The 'cigar boxes' are transformed into 'neo-classical instruments' because the poem has labelled them as such. Calling these 'instruments' 'neo-classical' creates a means through which the performers could be pejoratively suppressed, and then inverts it as a celebration of the levelling principles of the free and familiar interaction of the carnival.

In another example of its alignment with the immersive performative strategies of *Free Jazz*, an emphasis on the ear and hearing as sensory methods is clear in Jonas' poem. Crucially, the ear and hearing as presented in 'One of Three Musicians' are in a position of primacy over the eyes and seeing. This – as will be discussed in further detail when looking at the work of Jayne Cortez later in the chapter – would also be a considerable concern of Black Arts Movement poetry and aesthetics. In Jonas' poem the visual senses become engaged in a reactive response to the first time Jonas 'heard Ornette', from which his 'thought / about Picasso's / Three Musicians' stems. From there, the imagery of the poem returns swiftly again to the sonic: 'jaw bone percussions', feet 'pounding', 'stomping', 'the wire & steel singing', 'saying'.

Kinaesthesia at the level of narratology therefore begins in the ear and returns to it in a cyclical interplay of free associations which also stem from and echo the sounds heard and felt by the ear and in the body. Visual perception is here conceived as a result of heard and felt vibrations rather than as a correspondence with the associational perceptions of the world that appears in front of the eyes. Those 'instruments' 'reproduce the spasms, the screams / the outbursts' of African-American history in a manner akin to the *Jongleur* of Jacques Attali's conception – the poet as bard – Jonas commentating on performance in and as history, emphasizing the much greater role that speech and sound had in conveying a distinct sense of history for a race deliberately denied access to academic education



and literacy.<sup>218</sup> That this is in response to Coleman indicates that Jonas hears in Coleman's music the trace-sounds of African-American history that Roach more deliberately inserted into *We Insist!*.

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*After you initiate the solo, one phrase determines what the next is going to be. From the first note that you hear, you are responding to what you've just played: you just said this on your instrument, and now that's a constant. What follows from that? And then the next phrase is a constant. What follows from that? And so on and so forth.*

— Max Roach.<sup>219</sup>

Where *Free Jazz* sheds its historical inheritance from the stylistic approaches of bebop, or hard bop, or cool (in the Miles Davis sense rather than the West-Coast sense) is in the manner that its solo improvisations develop through the non-linear accrual of fragmentary moments in a process akin to sonic collage, analogically reminiscent of Pollock's 'all-over' painting style. Ekkehard Jost identified 'motivic chain association' as a key part of Coleman's improvisatory approach,<sup>220</sup> and the motivic chain in *Free Jazz* departs from the riff-conventions of the swing bands in that each motif is used and is then either discarded altogether, or transferred to another player who rapidly transforms it into another motif of his/her own conception. Where a classic swing-era tune such as 'One O'clock Jump' has a clear thematic beginning, middle and end – with riffs placed on top of riffs *en-route* to a climactic final moment – the motifs on *Free Jazz* represent a series of perpetual beginnings which are never brought to an

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<sup>218</sup> Attali, pp. 14–17 and *passim*.

<sup>219</sup> Quoted in Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 193.

<sup>220</sup> Summarized from Jost's original German by Cogswell, pp. 101–44 (p. 106).

end.<sup>221</sup> Instead, they are abandoned in the processual chain as each new motivic idea comes and is performed until the process begins again.

Additionally, the bebop combo's dissolution of the quasi-military uniformity of sectional playing that the big-bands demanded is taken even further. Connections between the performers are instinctive, and externally governed concepts such as harmony and melody are removed as factors influencing those interactions. Forming an aural template for the distinction between 'personality' and 'individual' proposed by Maulana (Ron) Karenga, where individuality represents 'a useless isolation' but personality an 'important involvement', it is the personalities of each of the players, rather than their individual selves, that are left 'free' to be asserted within the boundaries of the 'collective'.<sup>222</sup>

All the front-line players engage in this motivic play throughout the first twenty-five minutes of *Free Jazz*, Dolphy and Hubbard most prominently. Particularly clear examples (among myriad others) can be heard at 12:31 and 13:48, but we will look in depth at the section which begins at 20:40. Here, Don Cherry plays two C#<sub>4</sub>'s on his pocket-trumpet, which Dolphy then instantly responds to in 'almost-the-same-but-not-quite' kind, before both move on to their next, thematically unconnected melodic ideas. Dolphy then plummets from the high-register to the very bottom of his instrument's range, where he plays tone-free sounds resembling a rumble, out of which, eventually, a new four-note motif emerges at 20:54 (figure 2).<sup>223</sup> Dolphy

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<sup>221</sup> Basie, 'One O'clock Jump',

<<https://open.spotify.com/track/5gJZQQg6xNGs32Nd5w9pMV?si=8hbwrq-RemWmVQFzeAmfA>> [Accessed 1 April 2014]. See also the signature Basie piano/ensemble 'plink, plank, plonk, BOOM' ending which signifies on grandiloquent ideas while still bringing each piece to a satisfying cadence.

<sup>222</sup> Maulana (Ron) Karenga, 'Black Cultural Nationalism', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 51–55 (p. 53).

<sup>223</sup> It so happens that these note intervals also form the opening phrase of Hubert Parry's setting of William Blake's 'And did those feet' from the preface to 'Milton: A Poem'; its contribution to *Free Jazz* here perhaps serving as a rather better sonic representation of the deep ambiguities of Blake's text and the ambiguities that are designed into the text of Coleman's music than the unyielding imperial bombast of Parry's score.

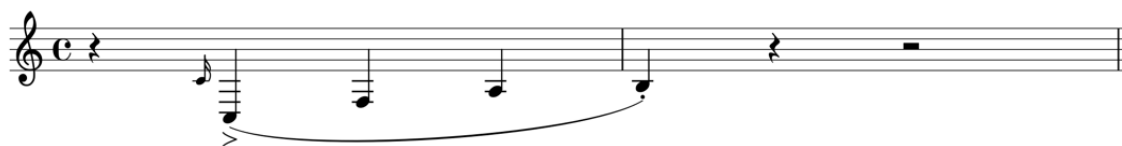


Figure 2 - Eric Dolphy bass clarinet motif from 20:54 in 'Free Jazz'

repeats that figure eight times, with very minor variations on the fourth and sixth iterations. In those repetitions a dissonant echo of the opening to the old spiritual 'Oh When the Saints' further intensifies the relationship between the African-American musical past and the performance's present. After the eighth iteration, the motif's usefulness having been exhausted, Dolphy signposts its obsolescence and the start of another new idea with a thumping, unrelated, C#<sub>2</sub>. Hubbard joins in with his own motif at 21:50, which emerges in similar fashion from a tonally uncertain set of sounds, just as LaFaro's bass took its time to find its tonal purpose in the opening minute. In these moments, the totality of involvement that *Free Jazz's* improvisatory aesthetic demands is made clear. The process of definition, which thought undergoes as it is externalized in the language of tonality, is dramatized in the tone-free sounds which precede the definable tones that comprise the motifs.

From 10:55 to 11:20 we can also hear Dolphy and Hubbard feeding upon each other's motivic ideas. Hubbard plays a rapid, seven-note phrase and then repeats it almost immediately, but hearing it just once seems to have been enough for Dolphy, who joins Hubbard's second iteration of the motif, playing it a third above. Both then play the same rhythmic motif seventeen further times. Tonally, they gradually move the final note stepwise up the scale, but alternate their relative positions within the texture, such that the vertical organization of the resulting chords is continually switched between the two distinct 'voices' of the respective instruments – a disorienting effect.

Meanwhile – in another nod to history which appropriates and transforms European musical form – the first two stages of the thematic development native to the

eighteenth-century sonata form can be heard in microcosm in this solo section. The 'exposition' of the theme by Hubbard is followed by the 'development' that both players take the motif through. The departure from the form comes in the abandonment of recapitulation. This is music whose concern is always with anticipation, as is indicated by the final two repetitions of this particular cell, where the two players drop out of rhythmic synchronization, in a momentary display of the fragmentation and dissolution which is exemplary of the approach adopted in the piece as a collective whole.

Further motivic chains are in evidence in what, for ease of comprehension, we will call the second section of 'Free Jazz', which begins at 25:27. After another polyphonic statement from the horn players, the hitherto uninterrupted thick, bristling, propulsive texture gives way to a complete contrast in mood and style as the two bass players take centre-stage. Bass solos were of course long established as part of jazz since the instrument supplanted the sousaphone as the primary low-register instrument circa 1925–28, and Charles Mingus' work and force-of-nature presence on the bandstand in the 1950s elevated the instrument to a frontline position in its own right.<sup>224</sup> Never before had an eight-minute long bass soli been recorded for a jazz release, however, so this alone is another of *Free Jazz's* myriad innovations.

Once again, it is revealing to listen to the two players separately. In common with the techniques employed by the horn players in the first section, Charlie Haden's approach is highly motivic. From 25:27 to 26:56 he improvises around a rhythmic cell comprising four notes. First heard at 25:27, this recurs at 26:02, 26:27, and finally at 26:48. Each chord is first outlined by a movement up and down in pitch, with the same pattern then echoed in each of the lowest notes in the sequence. Haden moves this motif downward in a sequential semi-tonal progression. Movements up in pitch are usually deployed to generate tension and to anticipate the prospect of release.

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<sup>224</sup> Giddins and DeVeaux, pp. 9, 390–391.

Moving the bass note down while leaving the two top notes of the chord in-situ inverts that expectation, causing a sense of unease.

Rhythmically, Haden fractionally shifts the position of the first note of each cell within the temporal structure, such that said structure is productively unsettled. Behind him in the texture is Blackwell, who, having now switched from sticks to brushes, also dramatically thins out the texture of his playing. In the main, he outlines another 4/4 swing pattern on his ride cymbal, but his work on the rest of the kit is reduced to sotto voce flutters on the snare – an effect achieved by pressing down on the very front-end of the shaft of the brush with the index finger while the third and fourth fingers hold the barrel. It is a sound created by actual, dynamic physical tension and, even at a very low volume, that tension is palpable in the resulting sound.

This in turn creates a huge tension between the sounds of this second section and its predecessor. Such is the contrast with the opening twenty-five minutes that the effect in the first instance is completely disorienting. By departing from the 'walking' bass of that opening section, Haden moves out of sympathy with Blackwell. At this point, the conventional structure against which the improvisations of the horn players were able to thrive in the first section of the piece is finally abandoned. Instead, a sonic world which now truly bears little relation to preceding styles of jazz is created. This is – rhythmically – the point at which *Free Jazz* reaches its iconoclastic zenith.

Confirming as much, Haden plays the motif at double speed the final time it appears. This once more transforms the mood, reinserting the momentum of the first twenty-five minutes while also – in the movement back-and-forth in pitch – halting it. At no point with this motif is the listener's *a priori* expectation or desire met. The model instead is continual subversion and improvised performative control.

Haden's second principal motif outlines a waltz. Beginning at 30:44 and going through to 33:49, he does this by playing a crotchet bass note followed by a minim-

long hemitonic minor-second chord. This represents another appropriation of European form and a re-performance of it on Haden's terms, outlined as it is against LaFaro's continuing simultaneous non-waltz time playing. Meanwhile, the minor-second chord – its two notes a semitone apart – is naturally dissonant. The two chords – which Haden alternates up and down once again – thus add yet more harmonic tension into the piece, further disturbing the listening experience.

LaFaro's solo is more as a regular jazz listener might expect a bass solo to be. He too utilizes motifs but these are less rhythmic and more melodic than Haden's. Indeed, LaFaro's playing throughout this section is much more concerned with exploration of the melodic range afforded by Coleman's 'harmolodic' theory. This is at its clearest when at 30:25, and then again at 32:58, he improvises through a series of scales, moving up the instrument with immense speed each time. Melodically, the effect is very reminiscent of John Coltrane's sheets-of-sound method and so brings yet another element of previous jazz into *Free Jazz's* sound. That sense is further enhanced at this point by Haden's return to a conventional walking-bass figure, which means that LaFaro's bass occupies the position in the textural hierarchy that would conventionally be taken by a horn player. However, with both instruments the same, the division between soloist and accompaniment is disrupted almost to the point of dissolution. Coleman said in the notes to *Change of the Century* that 'ours is at all times a group effort and it is only because we have the rapport we do that our music takes on the shape that it does. A strong personality with a star-complex would take away from the effectiveness of our group, no matter how brilliantly he played'.<sup>225</sup> Listening to the full stereo effect of the bass section on *Free Jazz*, it is duly difficult to distinguish the sounds of the two bass players, and so the submission of the individual to the collective is audibly enacted.

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<sup>225</sup> Coleman, 'Liner Notes'.

It is also in this section that further influences from non-jazz musical forms begin to make themselves felt. From 30:40 to 31:55, LaFaro tremolos vigorously on notes at the high end of the bass register while Haden outlines a waltz rhythm. The effect of the tremolo is metonymic of the vibrations made by any sound-source, creating an effect of ever-heightening anticipation. Haden however places an audible anchor into the sound from which LaFaro's playing strains to escape. Together, the sound transcends the instruments it is played on, giving an effect much more akin to a balalaika. In the other distinct repetitive motif that LaFaro plays – descending arpeggios at the upper limit of the bass's range (from 29:01) – can also be heard the sounds of the harp. Thus, 'freedom' in this conception of jazz extends to the borrowing of sounds and techniques from other art forms. Higgins, meanwhile, almost exclusively plays an agitated shuffle-pattern with brush on ride cymbal at the beginning of this second section. However, once the bass players reach the tremolo section discussed in the previous paragraph, Higgins switches to a Latin rhythm played on the bell of the ride cymbal, with pushed accents audible on bass drum and hi hat. It is another motif that pulls the sounds of yet another continent into the music.

The drummers take over entirely from 33:58, Blackwell playing a solo based on straight-semiquavers, and thus moving out of the generic limitations of traditional jazz playing and its emphasis on swing. With snares taken off and the playing predominantly taking place on low-tuned toms, Blackwell brings the sounds of 'jungle drumming' into the music, a sound which has particular resonance in the African-American context.<sup>226</sup> The drum has occupied an important place within the

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<sup>226</sup>'Jungle', not to be confused with the present-day rave music, was a negative epithet applied by white critics, intended to denote jazz as a primitive music, applied primarily to the music of Duke Ellington's Orchestra c.1926–1935. Doran K Antrum, in *Metronome* in 1933, wrote that 'I do feel [that jazz's] accepted forms are due for radical changes but there will remain in the background the jazz element, based on the primitive jungle drum.' (quoted in Carl Woideck, 'Authentic Synthetic Hybrid: Ellington's Concepts of Africa and Its Music', in *Duke Ellington Studies*, ed. by John Howland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 224–98 (p. 230).)

The drumming which came to be associated with the name is a syncopated style played primarily on the low floor toms, developed by Ellington's drummer Sonny Greer, but today most readily associated with Benny Goodman's drummer, Gene Krupa. Carl Woideck suggests that 'for most of the twentieth

history of American race-relations since the antebellum era, when white slave owners feared drums were being used to communicate strategies of rebellion, to the extent that laws were passed in the deep-South prohibiting the slaves 'using and keeping drums, horns or other loud instruments which may call together or give sign or notice to one another.'<sup>227</sup> The fear was that slaves would use drums 'to communicate strategies of rebellion'.<sup>228</sup>

Slaves *were* however permitted to play in military bands.<sup>229</sup> The drum kit as we know it today was indeed born as a solution to the problem of enabling a single individual to play the parts of a military band's percussion section, and the ethos of instrumental control via marching-rhythms predominated in the New Orleans-dominated sounds of the 1910s and 1920s. The drummer remained a rigid (though often flamboyant) timekeeper in the swing bands of the 1930s and '40s, a style epitomized by Chick Webb, Gene Krupa and Sonny Greer, before gradually becoming a significantly less-controlling and more-participatory presence in the 1950s and 1960s, often devolving the time-keeping role to the bass-player in the pursuit of an a-rhythmic wash of percussive colour. Blackwell's interpolation of the sounds of another era on *Free Jazz* is thus another instance in the record of jazz 'revolution', a sound which consciously disconnects from its immediate past, but refers to developments from some thirty-five years earlier. The fear that the instrument might be used to communicate 'strategies of rebellion' was, it turns out, well founded, even if the ongoing cultural oppression of African-Americans prevented it reaching true fruition until the 1960s.

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century, Westerners, including Ellington, often generically associated tom-toms with the music of African jungles'. (Woideck, pp. 224–98 (p. 230).)

<sup>227</sup> Quoted in Southern, p. 182.

<sup>228</sup> John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006), p. 123.

<sup>229</sup> As Eileen Southern says: 'a typical assignment for a black was that of a drummer. indeed, a Virginia Act of 1776 specifically stated that blacks "shall be employed as drummers, fifers or pioneers"'. (p. 63.)



While Blackwell sets about his solo, Higgins adopts a minimalist approach, playing a relatively simple one-bar Latinate pattern on the bell of his ride cymbal. That technical simplicity however, in alliance with Blackwell's playing, continues the polyrhythmic complexity established in the first section of the piece. The Latin rhythms contrast with the more military sounds of the semiquavers upon which Blackwell's solo is based and pluralize the aesthetic into an unfamiliar space once more. Through these incorporations of sounds influenced by – and reminiscent of – the music of completely different traditions and geographical locales, *Free Jazz* does become a parallel of Steve Jonas' 'theatre' – a place where 'Free associates come to play'. Nowhere is that sense of playfulness more clearly in evidence than in the second half of Blackwell's contribution to the section. From 35:34 to 36:34, in what – given the preceding context – is difficult to hear as anything other than a musical joke, Blackwell plays a 4/4 swing rhythm which could come straight out of an exercise book for the learning drummer. For two bars he even plays a 'four-to-the-floor' bass drum pattern, a technique straight out of the swing-era playbook of Gene Krupa. Set against everything which precedes it (the drums now being the only instrument playing), the limitations of such a formal pattern are rendered stark, highlighting just how big a departure *Free Jazz* as a whole has made from the last vestiges of the limitations of the music from three decades earlier.

While Blackwell plays this, Higgins uses mallets to do nothing more than play a constant roll on his cymbals. Mallets, with their soft beater heads, afford negligible immediately audible attack (in contrast with the sounds of sticks or wire brushes) when striking a cymbal. Instead, the sound emerges gradually. When successive impacts occur in rapid succession, as they do here, the effect is created of a single continuous sound, as though no individual strikes were occurring. As such, it is the one method through which the drum set can easily steer away from a time-keeping role.

With the majority of jazz performance to that point demanding metrical regularity, the cymbal roll is much more frequently heard in the context of orchestral percussion, often played as the lead-in to a moment of climax or a change of section. As with so much else on *Free Jazz*, the technique had little previous application in jazz, and Higgins' use of it against Blackwell's swing makes a deliberately excessive reference to the heightened emotional state of romantic symphonic music – the sound of exclusionary 'high art' introduced in order to be sent-up, and thus brought down to earth. As if to emphasize the point, the re-arrival of the horns at 36:34 leads to the tutti conclusion of the piece, and the first time in the piece where Blackwell's playing departs from any discernible rhythm. This lasts just thirty seconds however, as if, having worked through, transformed and signified upon the musical styles which preceded them, the players of the Double Quartet, having reached a moment of near complete 'freedom' from those forms, use it simply as a taster. However radical the preceding thirty-seven minutes were, *Free Jazz* represents simply an opening salvo for the genre to which it would lend its name.

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Jayne Cortez was born Sallie Jayne Richardson (Cortez was her grandmother's maiden name) in Arizona in 1934, at an army base where her father, who served in both World Wars, was stationed. Her first experience of the social realities of black life in America came at school, which, as Cortez said to D. H. Melham, 'was my introduction to segregation'.<sup>230</sup> At age seven, Cortez moved with her family, including an older sister and younger brother, to San Diego, and then later to Watts, Los Angeles, where she established The Watts Repertory Theater Company (WRTC), a community theater group, in 1964, and where she also bore first-hand witness to the riots of 1965. Cortez also spent time as a civil rights campaigner in Mississippi in the early 1960s. She worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

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<sup>230</sup> D. H. Melhem and Jayne Cortez, 'A Melus Profile and Interview: Jayne Cortez', *MELUS* 21. 1, Poetry and Poetics (Spring, 1996), 71–79 (p. 71).

(SNCC), and was a strong advocate in favour of the arts as a vehicle for the promotion of political action.<sup>231</sup> Her work while she was volunteering in Mississippi – where she bore witness to 'fierce oppression, segregation and lynchings' of black people – was directed towards encouraging black voters to register. From this experience came the realization that 'the problem is the system', but also that 'you can organize, unify and do something about' that system.<sup>232</sup>

While attending the Manual High School in LA, she studied piano and bass, played cello, and learned music theory. At home, meanwhile, thanks to her parents' extensive collection of recordings she was exposed to the music of (black) swing-era greats such as Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday, and to earlier blues records, with Bessie Smith's voice a strong presence and influence on her later poetics. It was, however, with the more contemporary sounds of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk, and the centrifugal force of 'the world-famous jazz of New York', that she "fell in love" – moving to the city in 1967. Having already been writing poetry for three years, she swiftly became a part of the Black Arts Movement scene.<sup>233</sup> She believed that in poetry 'everything can be transformed', and given the formative influence jazz had upon her, it is no surprise that it is central to her poetic aesthetics, nor that much of her work responds to the music and its protagonists.<sup>234</sup> Her first, self-published collection of poetry, *Pissstained Stairs and the Monkey Man's Wares* (1969) features numerous responses to those musical influences, two of which: 'Lonely Woman' and 'ORNETTE', respond directly to the music of Ornette Coleman, to whom she was married from 1954 to 1964, and with whom she had a son – Denardo – who would go on to be a longstanding member of the tellingly-named Firespitters, the group which would accompany Cortez's recitations of her poetry on record and on stage from 1974 until her death in 2013.

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<sup>231</sup> Melhem and Cortez, pp. 71–79 (p. 76).

<sup>232</sup> Melhem, *Heroism in the New Black Poetry*, p. 200.

<sup>233</sup> Melhem, p. 198.

<sup>234</sup> Anderson, p. 127.

We have seen that each motivic development in *Free Jazz* contributes to the development of the whole. So too does Cortez's 'ORNETTE' engage with the jazz improviser's use of Jost's motivic chain associations.<sup>235</sup> This is most obviously the case in the rhetorical methods and the imagery that Cortez employs. In the opening lines, proper nouns and initials form the motivic base. That then leads to the emphasis on the vocal quality of Coleman's saxophone sounds in the 'shrill voice', which in turn gives way to the aquatic variations begun in 'drops of water', and so on.

Where Cortez's use of motivic chains becomes more akin to the 'Free Jazz' concept of improvisation and process as the governors of form is in the gradual but continual extension of these themes as the poem goes on. Having tested alliterative and assonantal repetitions simultaneously in 'Fierce Freedom Screams' (whose vowel sounds also play with the difference between sound and sight), Cortez then switches her imagery via further linked visual and auditory assonance in 'heard in the beating heart', which, through 'beating' opens the way to the motif that dominates the final third of the poem: 'blood'. Repeating the word itself five times but introducing variety through switching between capitalized and non-capitalized versions, the 'bl' sounds are also found in 'black', 'bleached', and 'Blackness' in a section lasting seventeen lines. 'Water' is the initial motivic constant which enables the aurally associational move to the thicker, more visceral blood. In turn, blood then becomes the constant which is transformed and re-transformed – via adjectival intensification – as 'Liquid', 'foaming' and 'passionate' blood which ultimately 'gushes' from the life of Ornette Coleman. The variations imply the improvisational, instant playfulness of the aggregation of thought following thought.

In juxtaposition with the anaphoric motif of 'listen' and 'hear', another anaphoric progression can be found in the adjectives – 'rambling', 'vibrating', and 'quivering' – which Cortez uses to describe Coleman's playing in the following lines. This internal

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<sup>235</sup> Jayne Cortez, 'ORNETTE', in *Pissstained Stairs and the Monkey Man's Wares* (New York: Phrase Text, 1969), p. 11. The poem is reproduced in full in the appendix.

trptych forms its own evolutionary pattern which charts the idea that Coleman's music takes time to truly hear, but ultimately rewards the effort. The loose, open-ended, and somewhat pejorative associations of the initial 'rambling' give way to a more focused, intense description in 'vibrating'; the waves of movement to which both adjectives refer become more tightly packed and regular, the focus switching from large exteriorized bodily movements across a geographical space to smaller, internally generated movements at the molecular level, before 'quivering' completes the transformation into extremely small, rapid movements which simultaneously bespeak both momentum and tension, and pack the image with a sense both of imminence, the feeling that something is about to happen, and 'immanence', whereby the life and death of Coleman's sound was/is always-already contained within itself, as it is here within Cortez's re-performance of that sound into metaphor.

It is also apparent from the outset that the processual, visual performance of the text is following the motivic principles of jazz performance practice based upon pre-ordained structure:

ORNETTE ORNETTE  
 Go listen to Ornette  
 Rambling Blesings  
 with Cherry Higgins Haden  
 O. D. C. B. holding church  
 at the five spot in  
 N. Y. C.

Listen to the shrill voice  
 Vibrating with  
 Love & Agony

The great drops of water  
 spilling from  
 tears inside

Justified to the left, the first five lines of 'Ornette' act in effect as the poem's own head arrangement, establishing the structure from which the poem can then begin to depart and can be seen to depart physically in the three lines which follow. However, the three lines from 'The great drops of water' revert to the left, and as the poem continues so does this visual back-and-forth. Cortez uses motivic themes in the



The combination of the visual and the rhythmic also indicates indebtedness to the music of the poem's eponymous figure. The lines of wholly variable meter and length play out atop one another in the manner of the soloists in the two *Free Jazz* quartets. The gradual shift of indentations to the right leads the last four lines to appear as an almost entirely separate poetic entity. With images and adjectives also compounding one another, there is a feeling of simultaneous discovery, the poem being composed across both horizontal and vertical axes rather than proceeding in a linear, solely horizontal manner, forming a composite surface text that aspires to an all-encompassing quality. Moving this way, the sounds of the poem are once more placed in a position of primacy over the visual via the visual method.

That immersive sense is compounded by the focus on the body that is apparent in 'ORNETTE'. Greg Thomas calls Cortez 'the most biological of poets the Black tradition has ever had', and 'ORNETTE' pulses with direct and indirect bodily imagery: 'womb', 'fever', 'stomping', 'beating heart', 'liquid blood', 'foaming passionate / Violent blood'.<sup>236</sup> Yet the real biological significance of the poem lies in the manner in which Cortez uses her assertion of the primacy of the ear and the auditory system to constitute a new textually-represented form of 'Blackness', with which the poem ends. The poem begins, however, with the command to 'go listen', which becomes another anaphoric refrain binding the poem together. In the poem's second instruction the aural sense is further compounded by the adjectival image of sound as it is manifested physically: 'listen to the shrill voice vibrating'. Already it is apparent that the poem, like the sound of the 'shrill voice' of Coleman's plastic saxophone, is designed to enable performative interpretations.

From there, the instruction becomes the subtly but significantly different 'hear', a change – foregrounded by the half-rhyme of 'tears inside' – which further

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<sup>236</sup> He goes on to describe this as 'a significant fact in the world of the West which fears the biological and what it perceives to be Black and female biologies especially'. (Thomas, *Hip-Hop Revolution in the Flesh: Power, Knowledge, and Pleasure in Lil' Kim's Lyricism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 42.)

emphasizes the implicit turn to bodily interiority in the poem's performance strategy. This is then made explicit when Cortez asks us to 'hear the womb of spontaneity'. The source of creativity and the source of human life are symbolically aligned, and in this environment the role of sound is to indicate that what the mind 'sees' does not need to correspond to what the eyes perceive. Instead, vision becomes the product of the whole environment and comes from the interior – be that the textual interior of the poem or the physical interior of the reader. Subjectivity can only be constituted by the full engagement of all the senses, with vision – which develops first – being moved to a lower position in the sensory hierarchy, itself the subject of the other senses in their primary form.

The 'womb' of Coleman's music is therefore posited as another carnivalesque space in which 'spontaneity' is free to be nurtured until it can no longer ('gushing') be contained. An earlier image makes the same point: 'O.D.B.C. Holding church / at the five spot / in N.Y.C.'. Here the Christian church – originally attractive to slaves 'simply because it was something the white man did that the black man could do also', 'almost all parts' of whose services in the early days of African-American Christianity in the 1810s and 1820s, 'had in some way to do with music'; and which was therefore the original site through which African-Americans were able to assert some level of cultural difference in the days of slavery – is 'held' within the similarly ritualistic locale of the jazz club.<sup>237</sup> Both are institutions which provide a historical and physical structuring, and whose names, in the speech-act, become defined as spaces within which transgressive energies are permitted to come into being. Just as Coleman's 'free' jazz does not actually abandon the structures of previous jazz styles, poetic 'spontaneity' cannot come into being in 'ORNETTE' without the confines of structure against which it can push. That push and pull between the new and old forms is what creates the dynamic surpluses of energy that ultimately allow the new

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<sup>237</sup> Jones, *Blues People* pp. 32–49 (pp. 33, 45); As Jones expanded, 'not only were African songs transformed into a kind of completely personal Christian liturgical music but African prayers and chants as well'. (Jones, *Blues People*, p. 45.)



to transcend its parent. In the case of this poem, it is the process that enables the symbolic phallic image of 'Naked Unashamed Blackness' to walk 'proud' out of the poem's conclusion.

Only after being 'heard in the beating heart' can the audible acts of 'stomping / crying out / Fierce Freedom Screams' be brought into being, and in this we can see that those same screams serve as metaphors for vocalized oral transmission which functions metaphorically as a 'supplement' in both the senses of 'accretion' and 'substitution' that Jacques Derrida enunciated in *Of Grammatology* – serving as an external replacement for the 'natural' felt vibrations 'heard in the beating heart' while also enhancing the performance and impact of those vibrations in the new form of exteriorized transmission which can in turn be heard by others.<sup>238</sup> In this performative way do the shared aesthetics of Cortez' poem and Coleman's approach to jazz performance function to create an identifiably distinct 'voice' in Charles Hartman's sense: 'not self but the going outward of the self, a going that can be indirect or redirected'.<sup>239</sup>

However, as with *Free Jazz* once again, the 'womb of spontaneity' does not give birth to an ahistorical subject. Instead it incubates another synthesis, 'rising / rising rapidly from' a grim history alluded to in 'bitter broken rhythms', leading to a great cry of 'Fierce Freedom Screams'; screams forged by the indignities of the Black past and containing the first sounds of a new black future. 'R&B' becomes 'Revolution and Blood', and the final section of 'ORNETTE' takes us into a hyper-dramatic scene of revolutionary fervour:

Liquid blood  
foaming passionate  
Violent blood  
gushing from the life of  
Ornette Coleman O.C.

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<sup>238</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 200.

<sup>239</sup> Charles O. Hartman, *Jazz Text: Voice and Improvisation in Poetry, Jazz, and Song* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 3.



the sense that Frantz Fanon observed: the black man naturally feels that he is in closer touch with the 'lower animals than with the white man, who is so far superior to him in every respect.'<sup>240</sup> 'Fierce Freedom Screams', by contrast, is an internally driven affirmative statement, imbued with an intensity and a proactivity that the original description lacks. The valence of the first description is not gainsaid, but its alignment with 'Fierce Freedom Screams' draws attention to its function as a rhetorical strategy which must be interrogated and transformed into a new 'scream' of self-validation.

Cortez's response to Coleman charts a process of African-American maturation. From 'stomping' to 'Walking proud', the adjectives read as a temporally linear narrative description of the behaviour of a growing child. Gradually it becomes clear that the carnivalesque 'womb' of spontaneity is, like Jonas's 'Congo Square', and all of *Free Jazz* – a metaphor for the poem itself, here serving as an incubator for the construction of a form of 'Blackness' which must first be heard in order to be properly understood. As the poem unfolds in this manner, it becomes clear that the 'shrill voice' of Coleman's saxophone is intended to function as part of another metaphor whereby Coleman becomes new black life: a new, emergent, embryonic consciousness which no longer pays exclusive attention to what its eyes tell it, but instead builds its experience of the world as it is first heard and felt, and as it improvises its way through it. The sounds of Coleman's saxophone are the final, audible expression of a deep interiority; the birth-screams of a constantly re-creating and re-created self-identity and the expression of a forever modulating, improvising, re-sounding and resoundingly unique African-American voice. They take the experiences in which the subject has been forged, combining them with improvisatory practice; inventing something entirely new and constantly evolving; negotiating, renegotiating and synthesizing with its past.

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<sup>240</sup> Fanon, p.134.

## Chapter Four: 'Trane's Horn Had Words in It'

### Music and Text in John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* and A. B. Spellman's 'John Coltrane' and 'Did John's Music Kill Him?'

*Words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts, / fears and emotions —  
time — all related . . . / all made from one . . . all made in one.*

— John Coltrane.<sup>241</sup>

*The development of African American music must be viewed from the  
perspective that sees it as the progressive refinement of a sublimated  
vocabulary wherein that which is most heartfelt is stated most loudly and  
clearly but never directly, never in so many dangerous words.*

— A. B. Spellman.<sup>242</sup>

Much has been written about the moment in 'Acknowledgement', the opening track of John Coltrane's album *A Love Supreme*, where Coltrane's voice enters, chanting 'a love supreme' repeatedly (at 6:05).<sup>243</sup> Lewis Porter claims it is the moment the listener realizes 'that this was the goal toward which Coltrane directed his solo. He brilliantly executed a reverse development, saving the exposition – or perhaps *revelation* would be a better word in this case, for the end'.<sup>244</sup> Iain Anderson, in a long section of *This is Our Music*, sees the moment in similar terms, evoking wider parallels to both jazz history and the African diaspora:

another distinctly non-European technique formed an integral component of "the new thing", drawing the attention of friendly and hostile critics alike. Free improvisers, especially saxophonists, tended to simulate human speech patterns on their instruments. Nat Hentoff, Amiri Baraka, and others again drew parallels to the "singing horns" of New Orleans jazz. Indeed Baraka, drawing once more upon his discussions with Marion Brown, identified this vocal quality as a key African trait that slaves transferred to the New World. As the pitch of each syllable altered the meaning of words in Africa's tonal languages, careful attention to melodic inflection

<sup>241</sup> John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme* (1965), John Coltrane, et al. (Impulse!, 589 945-2, 2002) [on Double CD].

<sup>242</sup> Spellman, *Four Lives*, pp. 159–68 (p. 159). My emphasis.

<sup>243</sup> John Coltrane, 'Acknowledgement', *A Love Supreme* (1965), John Coltrane, et al. (Impulse!, 589 945-2, 2002) [on Double CD].

<sup>244</sup> Lewis Porter, 'John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*: Jazz Improvisation as Composition', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38. 4 (1985), 593–621 (p. 612).

proved essential to preserving the intent of vocalized references in instrumental lines. This quality re-emerged during the 1960s in works such as Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* (1964), in which each instrument improvised around a four-note phrase that reproduced the cadence of the title. Coltrane chanted "a love supreme" over the figure, erasing any doubts as to the correlation.<sup>245</sup>

Both Anderson and Porter, however, fail to acknowledge the fundamental difference between the pitched musical notes to which the refrain is chanted and the refrain itself. Anderson's analysis leans heavily on the assertions of Hentoff and Baraka, neither of whom can be said to have approached Coltrane's material from a neutral perspective. His invocation of 'human speech patterns' goes unsupported, and in order to justify his conclusion, Anderson is obliged to describe 'the four-note phrase that reproduced the cadence of the title' as though those four notes – and indeed the cadence – were an immutable, pre-destined consequence of the text, around which the rest of 'Acknowledgement' had to develop.

Anderson's assertion rests on a logical inversion. The phrase 'a love supreme' has no fixed or innate 'cadence' in speech. What Anderson hears in the four-note phrase is in fact the *production* – not *reproduction* – of a cadence which he then retrospectively declares to have been the inevitable consequence of the text. Revealing a bias towards language over sound which is common to many critics, Anderson's determination to hear the riff of 'Acknowledgement' as a mere vehicle for language causes him to miss the more interesting dialectics at work between the sounds of the record and the codes of the text.

A more productive approach to the relationship between text and music is outlined by Kimberley Benston, who says that *A Love Supreme* 'works as an antiphonal play between musical and verbal assertion', where the differences between the two types of assertion are acknowledged and yet both retain equal status.<sup>246</sup> In this conception,

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<sup>245</sup> Anderson, p. 110. My emphasis.

<sup>246</sup> Benston, p. 176.

the relationship between text and music is at its most interesting in the gap that separates the two, offering a space within which meaning can proliferate.

With Benston's approach in mind, this chapter interrogates the relationship between language and music in John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, particularly 'Acknowledgement', and also 'Psalm', the fourth and final track. It then reads A. B. Spellman's 1966 poem 'John Coltrane' and his 1969 poem 'Did John's Music Kill Him' as poetic commentaries on the same relationship. Both Porter and Anderson's analyses of the use of language are couched in terms which assume the word – and therefore print's – hierarchical privilege over sound. This chapter argues that Coltrane in fact, and Spellman in his example, questioned the authority-claims of *both* forms, and, through typographic and chirographic methods, far from Anderson's totalitarian 'erasure' of doubt, they proactively sought to *produce* it, synthesizing these apparently opposed forms and enabling the dialectical transformation of both.

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Close listening reveals that an audible signal of doubt can even be found encoded into the very second (at 6:04) before Coltrane's voice appears in 'Acknowledgement'. Just audible here is the dying dispersal of the final 'eme' syllable, the rest of the phrase having, apparently, been said off-microphone by Coltrane in the studio.<sup>247</sup> If this truly were 'the goal' – as Porter has it – of Coltrane's preceding saxophone solo, it is curious that such a lack of clarity was allowed to remain in the final mix. It undercuts the increased surety with which McCoy Tyner plays the preceding chords (6:02–03), and the way Elvin Jones reduces the number of notes he plays on his kit to open out the texture and make space for the voice. Rather than overlooking the fluffed entry as Ashley Kahn does when he romantically asserts that 'there is an air of inevitability in Coltrane's vocalizing the riff he's just performed on tenor, as if it's the only logical choice', the *real* moment of audible vocal arrival serves as a reminder that

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<sup>247</sup> Cf. Kahn, *A Love Supreme*, p. 103.

oral language develops first out of noise, and that, if any privileging order must be asserted within 'Acknowledgment', then it is one which places the music first.

The irony of Kahn's position is that it contradicts an observation he makes earlier in *The Making of a Love Supreme*, that the four-note riff is not unique to Coltrane. Indeed, it is a 'blues building block', which could be heard on Art Farmer and Quincy Jones' 1953 recording 'Mau Mau', and would be heard again on Led Zeppelin's 'Whole Lotta Love', and 'Willie Dixon's 'The Seventh Son'.<sup>248</sup> As with the melody of 'My Favorite Things', therefore, the 'love supreme' is not a 'revelation', it is instead an extant formula, which under the aegis of the Coltrane Quartet becomes an exemplar of processual transformation. Almost five minutes before any words are heard, at 0:33, Jimmy Garrison's bass establishes the four-note riff. Only from 4:54 does Coltrane begin to take the riff through a series of transpositions, before finally returning to the original F-minor key at 5:48.

The difficulties inherent in ascribing revelatory status to the emergence of 'a love supreme' are also made further apparent in this section of Coltrane's saxophone solo. His transposition of the four-note ostinato through a series of keys (all twelve tones of the diatonic scale), progressively moves the riff further and further away from the accompanying tonal centre of F-minor which continues to be asserted in the ensemble accompaniment during this section. The aural tension of dissonance is, as a result, continually heightened each time Coltrane modulates the pattern. Continually reworking the thematic material highlights the problems of Anderson's notion of doubt-free correlation between the music and the significations of 'a love supreme'. Instead, the valence of ongoing improvisatory process is asserted and reasserted. Prior to the entry of the voice, Coltrane and his band have, therefore, been engaged in a process of signifying stratification – layer upon layer of sounds added to the

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<sup>248</sup> Kahn, p. 99.

original layer, forming a sonic-collage in which the unity of single fixed meanings slips out of grasp.

Even when the vocal phrase 'a love supreme' is established, it does not sit, fixed, in the position of inevitable finality that Porter, Anderson and Kahn all desire of it. A second recording of Coltrane's voice (it is not, as Porter suggested, the voice of 'another group member'), is then overdubbed atop the original chant at 6:07, becoming particularly audible at 6:23.<sup>249</sup> The double-voiced phrase is repeated until 6:42, and so, with singularity literally denied even to the voice, an intertextual collage is created between the language and the music underscoring it. One final disturbance is permitted as the whole band, voice and instruments, modulate down from F-minor to E-flat minor, a switch suggestive of anti-climax.

Throughout 'Acknowledgement', therefore, the original riff is transformed into a palimpsest, atop which an accretion of repetitions and traces proliferates. In this way, the chant of 'a love supreme' does not represent a moment of ultimate revelation but is instead a confirmation of such a moment's perpetual unattainability. The relationship between the music and the language in 'Acknowledgement' performs the ambiguities between deferral and difference that Jacques Derrida's later coinage of *différance* enunciates: as its repetitions accrue, the language of the phrase becomes incrementally abstracted into music; the bonds between signifier and signified progressively loosened until they separate.<sup>250</sup> In that process, the concept of linearity joins up with itself and becomes a circular, *revolutionary* loop. The words then, having initially signified, become dissolved through repetition into the texts of the

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<sup>249</sup> Porter, 'John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*: Jazz Improvisation as Composition', 593–621 (p. 612); He is contradicted by both Kahn (p. 104), and David Wild ('John Coltrane: The Impulse Years', in *The John Coltrane Companion*, ed. by Carl Woideck (London; New York; Sydney: Schirmer Books, 1998), pp. 190–203 (p. 199).).

<sup>250</sup> Cf. Derrida, Jacques, *Margins of Philosophy*. trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 3–29.



music; a move away from singular semiotic association towards the non-associable proliferations of acoustic marking.

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On the 2002 'Deluxe' CD re-release of *A Love Supreme* can also be heard a live recording of 'Acknowledgement', made at the Antibes Jazz Festival in France in July 1965. Comparison of this version with its studio sister gives further valuable insight into the manner in which the sounds of 'a love supreme' were intended to function. The live recording opens in a fashion that establishes the four-note ostinato figure to be the only consistent element between the studio record and its new iteration. After the opening prelude, the ostinato is here introduced by *Coltrane* at 0:31. Then from Garrison's entry at 0:36 until 0:49, the two play the same notes (two-octaves apart), with the same rhythmic pattern, and yet they are a fraction out of synch with one another. Players of *Coltrane* and Garrison's standard would have had no difficulty locking in to simultaneity should they have wanted to. Therefore, we can assume that they made a conscious choice to open the in-between spaces that deny textual supremacy to the phrase. It is also significant that the phrase 'a love supreme' itself is never once vocalized in this version. The text is thus revealed to be dispensable. By extension, the version on the studio recording is shown to be just one of multiple potential variants. The listener is therefore forced – via the heard-drama of negotiations in sound (not words) enacted by Garrison and *Coltrane* on the live recording – to question *all* his or her previous conceptions of referential authority.

This questioning is continued by the alternative *studio* takes of 'Acknowledgement' which are once again included with the 2002 CD release. Made the day after the released take, this version features an expanded line-up of players, with Archie Shepp joining *Coltrane* on tenor saxophone, and Art Davis doubling the size of the bass section. Shepp and *Coltrane*'s interactions throughout this version at times achieve the conversational effect – again, exclusively through music – of their being

sometimes in dialogue and at others in parallel monologue. The section in which the riff is transposed once again exemplifies this. From 5:26, the beginnings and ends of Shepp and Coltrane's iterations of the motif overlap one another, such that the interior notes sound dialogically while the exterior notes sound atop one-another, creating that simultaneous monological effect. Both effects then add a new layer of tension and release to the continuing tension created by the switches through the keys.

Performed this way, the ostinato continues to bear a trace relation to the opening bass version. However, from 3:23 Coltrane – and then Shepp from 3:44 – releases the phrase into a new constellation of doubt and uncertainty, in which everything that formed the relatively stable sound of the original riff is pulled into flux. The rhythms are varied, the intensity increases and with it so does yet more tension. Jones, accompanying on drums, gets louder and louder, with the cymbal crashes on beat one of each bar bursting ever more acutely through the speakers, and being given an underlying thump by the equally increasing force of his simultaneous bass-drum pedalling. His Latinate right-hand cymbal bell patterns, meanwhile, become busier and busier, increasing the sense of forward momentum. This constant raising of volume, intensity and tension continues right through until 6:46 when, as per the release take, the ensemble settles back to the original ostinato.

This unreleased take sheds further light on the effect achieved by Coltrane alone on the released version. As the downward modulation most strongly suggests, the chant of 'a love supreme' is actually designed to be a moment of *anti-climax*. Coltrane himself said, in an interview published in French magazine *Les Cahiers du Jazz* in 1963, that:

when, some evenings, in beginning to play, we feel the inspiration, and we foresee the possibility of realizing good things, it seems illogical and unreasonable to us to shorten our solos [...] my ideas have to develop themselves naturally.<sup>251</sup>

In line with this, the peak of 'Acknowledgement', in all its various incarnations, occurs in concert with the exhaustion of the permutations that a single four-note phrase could bear. Thereafter, all is release. In this way, one can see structural parallels between 'Acknowledgement' and the 'Protest' and 'Prayer' parts of 'Tryptych' on *We Insist!*, with the incantation of 'a love supreme' taking the place of 'Prayer'. The crucial difference, however, as indicated by the absence of the vocalized phrase on either of the alternative studio takes or the live recording, is that the musical phrase's release into language on the first studio take was a product of *chance*. Not – as some would have it – the product of *a priori*, 'inevitable' design. Such claims are therefore the product of retrospective impositions of narrative order, which – as LeRoi Jones once said when reflecting upon receptions of Charlie Parker's music – was simply not consistent with jazz aesthetics or praxis. Parker 'wasn't certain [at the outset] that what happened had to happen like that', and nor, the evidence of the various versions of 'Acknowledgement' suggests, was Coltrane.<sup>252</sup>

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'Psalm', the final movement of *A Love Supreme*, invites and has inspired even more discussion about the relationship between words and music, and their valence to the construction of African-American identity. Whereas the introduction of language into the play of difference in 'Acknowledgement' leads to its own dissolution into sound, in the case of 'Psalm' it is the paratextual relationship between John Coltrane's written poem 'A Love Supreme' and the instrumental melody of 'Psalm' that inspires

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<sup>251</sup> Jean Clouzet and Michele Delorme, 'Interview with John Coltrane', in *Coltrane on Coltrane*, ed. by DeVito, pp. 169–83 (p. 174).

<sup>252</sup> Quoted in Hrebeniak, p. 196.

the interest.<sup>253</sup> Doug Pringle first posited the relationship between the two as early as 1965, saying that, in 'Psalm', Coltrane

sets to music the text in the liner, phrase-by-phrase, in the manner of liturgical plainsong. The true power of his performance can only be felt by following the text with the music. The vocal quality of Coltrane's playing is moving, and in this context he can best communicate his feelings about the spiritual realities he has found in his musical life.<sup>254</sup>

Pringle's vocabulary betrays the same essentialist and romantic tendencies that Porter and Anderson displayed in reaction to 'Acknowledgement'. The very idea of a 'true power' only accessible through reading places language in a privileged position over music as the essential predecessor of meaning. Close listening again reveals a much more complicated and subtle interrelationship between the two versions.

The supposed correlation between the track and the poem has been heard and written about at length by both Lewis Porter and Ashley Kahn once again.<sup>255</sup> Yet, these analyses are forced into painful contortions in their determination to establish what is – under scrutiny – a dubious relationship. Porter, in 'Improvisation as Composition', first claims that the music-text relationship in 'Psalm' is 'one note to each syllable' but then almost immediately adds '*apparently omitted* from the recording' as an asterisked caveat to *several* lines of Coltrane's poem (reproduced in his text).<sup>256</sup> Porter repeats the claim of correlation in *John Coltrane: His Life and His Music* only to contradict it once again, this time saying 'you will have to make just a few adjustments in the poem' in order to make it fit to the music.<sup>257</sup> Even while attempting to claim otherwise, Porter's caveats prove something fundamental: the cadences of Coltrane's melody may be suggestive of speech idioms, but they cannot offer a direct mimetic reproduction of speech itself. As much as it is possible to align

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<sup>253</sup> John Coltrane, 'A Love Supreme', in Coltrane, 'Liner Notes', *A Love Supreme*. The poem is reproduced in full in the appendix.

<sup>254</sup> Doug Pringle, 'John Coltrane: *A Love Supreme*', *Coda* (October/November 1965), p. 32.

<sup>255</sup> Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, pp. 244–249; Kahn, pp. 114–123.

<sup>256</sup> Porter 'John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*: Jazz Improvisation as Composition', 593–621 (p. 615). My emphasis.

<sup>257</sup> Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, p. 247.

a great deal of the text of 'A Love Supreme' with 'Psalm' it is also perfectly possible for the vectors that ostensibly keep the two connected to slip. Once lost, the ongoing correlation is then only recoverable thanks to the three-note (F<sub>4</sub>-Eb<sub>4</sub>-C<sub>4</sub>) cells which could be said to broadly align with the many instances of 'thank you God' in the poem. Yet even this, as soon as it is heard as a cell, becomes the subject of the perpetual deferring effects of repetition discussed in relation to the 'love supreme' riff in 'Acknowledgement'. Fixed interpretation is thus once more denied almost as soon as it is suggested.

A more useful term for the dominant characteristic of the relationship between the poem and the music would be interplay: an opening of, and exchange across, the productive gaps between the two types of performance. What we see in the interplay between the text of 'A Love Supreme' and its iteration in 'Psalm' is – to borrow from Henry Louis Gates – a mode of formal revision.<sup>258</sup> The text of the poem is both encoded and *recoded* in the textures of the instrumental. Those who wish to read 'Psalm' and 'A Love Supreme' as identical have, effectively, been tricked, since the two are always engaged in an interactive process of constant, mutual revision. The text is affected by the sound of the recording, and the sound of the recording cannot avoid being similarly affected by the presence of the word, a recognition which demands the avoidance of an atavistic retreat through considerations of intermediation.

Too literal a reading of the join between 'Psalm' and 'A Love Supreme' also risks elevating the recording itself to the perceived authority-status of a fixed document, a historical object which cannot be subject to revisions. Fortunately, as with 'Acknowledgement', the live recording of 'Psalm' from the 1965 Antibes gig gives more evidence to suggest that the text – whether constituted in word or music – represented only a starting point for thematic improvisations and re-invention of

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<sup>258</sup> Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, p. 54.

both poet and poetic subject. Within just the first twenty seconds of this live version it becomes impossible to ascribe a correlation between the melody lines and the printed poem. Cadences which could match the poem's opening line: 'I will do all I can to be worthy of thee O Lord' are apparent at the opening, but from there on the music and the words divorce, and the saxophonist begins an improvisation which renders the piece different in all but name to its studio-recorded predecessor. Only at 7:36, thirty-five seconds before this live version ends, does Coltrane even allude to the three-note 'thank you God' cell.

The two versions also diverge tonally. On the studio recording a meditative air prevails, Coltrane never overblows and his *tessitura* is restricted primarily to the middle and lower ranges of his tenor saxophone. The tempo of his lines also remains consistently still and controlled. On the live recording, by contrast, a more percussive, attacking voice is evident, with Coltrane playing in the upper reaches of the saxophone's range throughout. Rhythmically the two versions also bear almost no relation; on the live version Coltrane's lines are detached, percussive. Scalar runs occur at the speeds more typical of Coltrane's playing from the late 1950s and early 1960s. Where the F<sub>4</sub>-Eb<sub>4</sub>-C<sub>4</sub> of 'thank you God' was slow and purposefully understated on the released studio track, here a variation, alternating from C<sub>5</sub> up to Eb<sub>5</sub> and back, an octave above the studio version, forms the new referential cell of a short motivic solo between 4:16 and 4:35 – a solo whose melodic content has neither precedent nor antecedent in this performance.

The meditative, introspective sense of the studio recording is in turn replaced in the live recording with a sound that comes closer to frustration, and occasionally threatens to collapse under its own weight. Overblowing is now a constant feature of Coltrane's playing. This is particularly audible in the section between 0:45 and 0:57 and in the honks at 1:39 and 1:41 – the latter a low Ab<sub>2</sub> which jumps out of the mix – which are reproduced with a distortion that suggests the recording equipment was almost overwhelmed. The risk of a collapse into chaos is thereby introduced as a

permanent, overtone, presence within the surrounding order. The speed of Coltrane's playing suggests that – far from indicating meditative contentment – this iteration of 'Psalm' bespeaks a new turmoil, and therefore an ongoing process.

That sense of ongoing process is also enhanced in the accompaniments to both versions of 'Psalm', which are altogether more similar than the respective saxophone lead parts. On the studio recording, a rolling, tempo-free soundscape is created by Elvin Jones, Jimmy Garrison and McCoy Tyner. Set off by Jones' opening Timpani roll, the texture is rapidly established as metrically fluid but sonically thick, the slow attacks and long decays of cymbal rolls being added to those of the kettle drums which are naturally already far more resonant than their kit-drum cousins. These are supplemented by broken piano chords and interjected bass patterns, which court the prospect of the disciplinary regime of ordered rhythms without ever going so far as establishing them. In the live version, the drums are more overtly present, and Jones indulges in straightforward one-strike cymbal crashes rather than the constant crescendo and diminuendo of the rolls that feature on the recording. More bop-like patterns on the snare and toms are also a feature. In the main though, the supporting trio to the saxophone are just that. 'Psalm', in both its iterations, is a vehicle for the saxophone's unique voice to open the spaces between words and music, offering a model for newly formed identities based on improvisation.

One thing that is distinctly absent from *A Love Supreme* is the 'scream' that Sanchez, Baraka, and many other BAM poets, hear in Coltrane's music. Throughout the album, even on 'Resolution', the fastest-paced track, Coltrane's tone is controlled. This is true even when he operates in the altissimo register of the tenor, as from 5:29 to 5:42, reaching notes – such as a Bb<sub>5</sub> – that stretch the instrument to the limits of its physical abilities but do not consequently fray in the manner of a vocalized scream. Instead, with the notes remaining tonally clear, in the studio takes of 'Acknowledgement' and 'Psalm', the air of meditative internal improvisatory discovery prevails. This is enhanced by the modal chord progressions. As Porter

observes of 'Acknowledgement': 'the music always returns to F, and the listener tends to hear this [the solo playing] over an F even when it is not sounded. It is really transposition over a pedal point', and the same is true of 'Psalm' although here the tonal centre is moved to C.<sup>259</sup> The effect in all cases (and, as Porter again has detailed at length, 'Pursuance' and 'Resolution' also fit the pattern), is one of fundamental stillness and stability, despite the play of significations that are then unleashed in the melodic and rhythmic activity of the quartet.

Here the links to the Christian Church which are suggested by the titles of the movements in *A Love Supreme* become important. This is particularly true in the case of 'Psalm', which, in being so named, is drawn into a centuries-old Western musical tradition. Just as Miles Davis, in turning to modality, was in fact updating a medieval musical practice, the possibilities available in plainchant Gregorian psalmody are brought to bear on 'Psalm'.<sup>260</sup> This is most apparent in the metrical approach taken by the piece. Jones' timpani rolls and Coltrane's speech-rhythms return the piece to a state characteristic of that quality intrinsic to psalmody which was laid out in the 1961 edition of the *Liber Usualis*, the manual for plainchant singing:

no time or measure in the modern sense [...] no "strong beat" or "accent" occurring at regular intervals. Plainsong is an entirely different idiom. Its time like its rhythm is free - a free interlacing of binary and ternary groups [...] which, like the prose text which they clothe, glide along freely, in order and variety, forming periods with sections and phrase of unequal length and importance.<sup>261</sup>

Framed this way, 'Psalm', can be said to represent a completely distinct form of 'free' jazz, altogether different from that of Coleman's *Free Jazz* and Coltrane's own *Ascension* just a few months later in 1965. Rather than the deliberately disturbing

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<sup>259</sup> Porter, 'John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*: Jazz Improvisation as Composition', 593–621 (p. 608).

<sup>260</sup> James C. Hall provides this definition of modal music: 'medieval subscales anchored to one note with varied intervals – and, not incidentally, associated with early Christian Music in the west – tends to be less complex harmonically, yet not necessarily a less profound aesthetic experience'. (*Mercy Me: African-American and the American Sixties, Race and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 129.

<sup>261</sup> *The Liber Usualis*, with Introduction and Rubrics in English. Edited by the Benedictines of Solesmes, (Tournai.: Desclée, 1963), p. xix.



atonal approach of those pieces, 'Psalm' offers a version of jazz meter which is here governed exclusively by the breath and by the 'natural' cadences of music.

When mapped analogically onto the dialectics at play between words and music in 'Psalm', another explanation in the *Liber Usualis* provides the critical conceptual summary of the relationship between the two forms:

we must never lose sight of the fact that plainsong is a vocal Latin music, for this is the key to the understanding of its rhythmic and melodic structure. It has been grafted onto, and has sprung out of, the natural rhythm and melody of the Latin words, phrase, sections and periods for which it has been written.

Just as in plainchant, Coltrane's synthesis of words and music engages the two forms in a continuous discussion with each other, a discussion in which neither is subordinate, and both are functioning together.

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A. B. Spellman's literary career began in 1959 when he made his first contributions as a jazz critic to both *Metronome* and *Down Beat* magazines, after which he began a lengthy association with the Blue Note record label, for whom he wrote liner notes. These openings stemmed, in part, from his long-term association with his Howard University peer (from 1953 to 1956) LeRoi Jones. It was through Jones that Spellman was initially introduced to Dan Morgenstern, the editor of *Down Beat*.<sup>262</sup> He joined the Organization of Young Men, an 'adjunct' to the civil rights movement, in New York in 1961, and his poetry career began in print in 1965 with the publication by The Poets Press of *The Beautiful Days*.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Cf. 'Ain't but a Few of Us: How Black Jazz Writers Persevere' (2009) <<http://www.openskyjazz.com/2009/05/aint-but-a-few-of-us-how-black-jazz-writers-persevere/>> [Accessed 21 November 2016].

<sup>263</sup> Cf. Saul, p. 81

In the first half of the sixties, Spellman was an active member of the circle of poets and artists based in downtown Manhattan, principally the East Village. It was this circle, including other young artists such as Clarence Major, Bob Kaufman, Jay Wright, Tom Postal, Stephen Jonas, Harold Carrington and Sonia Sanchez, who first established a core of black 'new American' poetry which would later be anthologized in *Black Fire*. When Baraka moved to Harlem to establish BARTS in 1965, Spellman followed, and would be a key literary voice in the BAM thereafter, although – symbolizing the diasporic spread out of New York that the Movement soon effected – he moved to Atlanta in 1967, settling there with his soon-to-be wife Karen Edmunds, a staff member of the SNCC.<sup>264</sup>

Spellman particularly emphasized the valence of jazz to the BAM's aesthetic aims, and his 1966 book *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*, in which he profiled Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Herbie Nichols and Jackie McLean, cemented his reputation within the Black Arts vanguard and among the jazz fraternity. It was originally intended that John Coltrane would be the subject of one of Spellman's profiles, but the saxophonist, to Spellman's regret, turned him down:

I really regret that [Coltrane] would not consent to be included. [...] I later approached him again about doing a biography-this was about the time of A Love Supreme. He thought that it was a transitional period in his life. He was getting into Sufi studies and was undergoing a change in consciousness. He thought that he wanted to resolve all of that before he would consent to have his story told. I thought his voice-not as a musician but as a speaker-would be very important to get down, to capture his point of view.<sup>265</sup>

Instead, Spellman's first literary response to the saxophonist came in a poem titled 'John Coltrane', written in 1965 and included in *The Beautiful Days*.<sup>266</sup> The poem is a

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<sup>264</sup> James Smethurst, 'Retraining the Heartworks: Women in Atlanta's Black Arts Movement', in *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. by Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York; London: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 205–22 (p. 210).

<sup>265</sup> Spellman, quoted in Aaron Steinberg, 'A. B. Spellman: A Life in the Bebop Biz' (2005), *JazzTimes* <<http://jazztimes.com/articles/15605-a-b-spellman>> [Accessed May 15 2016].

<sup>266</sup> A. B. Spellman, 'John Coltrane', in *The Second Set: The Jazz Poetry Anthology, Volume 2*, ed. by Sascha Feinstein and Yusef Komunyakaa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 169. The poem is reproduced in full in the appendix.

rare instance of a prominent Black Arts Movement writer tackling Coltrane as a poetic subject while Coltrane was still alive, and its meditative, almost pastoral, tone is accordingly distinct from those poems written about Coltrane after his death. Likewise, 1969's 'Did John's Music Kill Him' takes a less rhetorically militant approach to its subject than would many of Spellman's contemporaries in the same year, its concern with the nature of poetry in relation to music also abundantly apparent.

The Coltrane to which Spellman responds in 'John Coltrane' is therefore the Coltrane whose most recent album release was indeed *A Love Supreme*. 'John Coltrane' also indicates a similar engagement with the nature of language, its relationship to music, and the effect both could have upon the construction of new forms and new identities. These concerns are made instantly apparent in the poem's subtitle: 'an impartial review'. This tells us that Spellman's poem is, from the outset, concerned with a cyclical process of re-seeing, of a William Carlos Williams-like avoidance of sentimental or associational acceptance of surface significations. The formulation and syntax of 'an impartial review' acknowledges a rhythmical and structural indebtedness to 'a love supreme' as a phrase. 'Review', meanwhile, tells us that what follows will be a re-seeing of John Coltrane, a transformation-in-text of remembered sound and identity.

The sub-titular declaration then forces the reader to look again at the preceding text, causing 'impartial' to be interrogated in a manner which challenges its own semantic claims of neutrality, forcing the reader to confront his or her assumptions in the process. As Colin MacCabe says while writing about James Joyce:

as we read a text we are convinced that the meanings we consume are present in the text and originate in the author. But just as the interaction of the shell and ear produce the roar that the drinkers hear, so it is the interaction between the discourses of the reader and the discourses of the text which produce the meanings

we extract. The sound is not present for the ear in the shell as the meanings are not present for the eye in the text.<sup>267</sup>

While Spellman's 'an impartial review' can be read literally and taken at surface-value as a claim to definitive authority status – non-partial, therefore complete, and reliable beyond argument, the reader consuming the meanings he or she assumes are constituent of the textual mark – those very imposed meanings which are brought to 'review' then force the word 'review' *itself* to be re-viewed, no longer as a noun, but as an instruction, and a reminder of the need to actively and continually re-assess and scrutinize the strategies of language.

Suspicion of textual fixity and engagement with the revisionary processes of improvisation are of course familiar territories for poetry in this period, as we have seen to some extent in the work of Baraka, Sanchez, Cortez and Jonas. A third interpretation of 'an impartial review' would see it as a sarcastic parody directed to critical writers whose opinions did so much to determine the fortunes of any artist. Jazz critics had, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, reached what would be a zenith of cultural influence. The practitioners of such criticism 'frequently supported their aesthetic judgement with authoritative invocations of supposedly universal criteria', criteria which were, in the overwhelming majority of cases, framed through white, male American eyes.<sup>268</sup> Moreover, they were criteria largely imported from the 'criticism of European high modernism - without qualification, to explain importance and meaning'.<sup>269</sup> As LeRoi Jones remarked in 'Jazz and the White Critic', 'most jazz critics have been white Americans, but most important jazz musicians have not been', the result, in Jones' eyes, being that a specifically African-American art form was being judged against standards to which its practitioners had no relation.<sup>270</sup> 'The

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<sup>267</sup> Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), p. 85.

<sup>268</sup> Anderson, p. 55.

<sup>269</sup> Hall, p. 21.

<sup>270</sup> LeRoi Jones, 'Jazz and the White Critic', in *Black Music: Essays*, (New York: Akashic Books, 2010), pp. 15–26 (p. 15).

music was already in danger of being forced into that junk-pile of admirable objects and data the West knows as *culture*'.<sup>271</sup>

It was this strain of critical writing that led *Down Beat*'s then associate editor John Tynan to term the music of Eric Dolphy and John Coltrane, which he heard live in 1961 (and which followed in the lineage of Coleman's *Free Jazz*), 'a horrifying demonstration of what appears to be a growing anti-jazz trend'.<sup>272</sup> 'Anti-jazz' was then adopted as a term by Leonard Feather in the pages of *Down Beat*, but – as Frank Kofsky points out – the same Leonard Feather also worked for record labels, producing liner notes for many of the avant-garde musicians (including Eric Dolphy) who had been singled out for censure by Tynan.<sup>273</sup> This conflict of interest – shared by many critics – mattered, since the critics held an important intermediary role between the jazz performers and their-record buying, and thus income-providing, public. Public critical denouncement could therefore significantly affect record sales, and thus livelihoods. That this power was held by white, non-musicians 'never ceased to amaze and infuriate' Baraka.<sup>274</sup> Spellman, moreover, directly challenged Tynan: 'what does anti-jazz mean and who are these ofays who've appointed themselves guardians of last year's blues?'.<sup>275</sup> By subtitling 'John Coltrane' 'an impartial review', therefore, Spellman simultaneously performs his own critique of the white critics, while setting himself up to be the neutral arbiter that they cannot be.

The claim to objective textual neutrality made by that subtitle can also then be seen as a mask; a long-used trope of African-American literature which, as Ralph Ellison explained, was worn by African-Americans 'for purposes of aggression as well as for

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<sup>271</sup> Jones, pp. 15–26 (p. 23).

<sup>272</sup> Quoted in Don DeMichael, 'John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Jazz Critics', in *Coltrane on Coltrane*, ed. by DeVito, pp. 149–57 (p. 150).

<sup>273</sup> Kofsky, p. 145. Kofsky, in fact, devotes an entire chapter to 'critiquing the critics', pp. 137–176.

<sup>274</sup> Jones, pp. 15–26 (p. 23).

<sup>275</sup> Quoted in Jones, pp. 15–26 (p. 23).

defence; when we are projecting the future and preserving the past'.<sup>276</sup> Under its defensive mask of impartiality, the future projected by Spellman in 'John Coltrane' is one of continual, processual revision, akin to the riff of 'Acknowledgement', in which the codes that give the voices of people like Tynan a position of privilege are dissolved. It is a strategy which Spellman goes on to use far more broadly throughout this short poem. Moving away from semiotics and towards form, we see that the first strophe is constructed in the manner of a pastoral elegy:

may he have new life like the fall  
fallen tree, wet moist rotten enough  
to see shoots stalks branches & green  
leaves (& may the roots) grow into his side

In spite of the predominantly monosyllabic vocabulary, the multiple internal rhymes based on the long "ee" sounds of "he", "tree", "enough", "see", "green" and "leaves" slow the pace of the reading and create an aural atmosphere which is smooth and calm. In the moments where semantics and phonics collide in this verse, as in the repeated long "a" of "fall", it remains in the service of an effect which, in a reminder of the 'Frère Jacques' reference in Sonia Sanchez's 'a/coltrane /poem', pushes the strophe tonally towards the soporificity of nursery-rhyme.

The proliferation of that internal rhyme scheme in the first strophe means that the percussive interruptions of "wet" and "rotten" are at risk of being overwhelmed by the dominance of the more-gentle sounds which surround them. For the reader, maintaining his or her focus through the tranquillity of the sounds and the imagery, so that those moments of transgression can be appreciated as such, becomes a significant challenge. It is precisely these moments, however, which commentate critically upon the affective strategies of textual effects, and simultaneously critique the manner in which subjectivity is linguistically constituted more broadly.

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<sup>276</sup> Ralph Ellison, 'Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke', in *Shadow and Act*, (New York: Vintage International, 1995), pp. 45–59 (p. 55).

In the second and third strophes of 'John Coltrane', the dissolution of textual unity is dramatized through the increasing fragmentation of the sentences:

around the back of the mind, in its closet  
 is a string, i think, a coil around things.  
 listen to summertime, think of spring, negroes  
 cats in the closet,  
 anything that makes a rock

of your eye. imagine you steal. you are frightened  
 you want help. you are sorry you are born with ears.

Where the first strophe is almost unpunctuated in the first three lines, interruption occurs through punctuation and parenthesis in the fourth line, which then continues to shorten the clauses that follow in the second strophe. The vowel sounds meanwhile shorten, with 'ih ', and 'ah ' sounds increasingly prominent, and the consonants becoming harder and more percussive. At the same time as the sentences increasingly disjoin, the narrative viewpoint switches from the third to the first person – a mirroring between form and content that indicates the subject of the self to be a more-fragmented constituent of language than the subject of the other. The return of the more languid vowel sounds in strophe three, which coincides with another switch of address, this time to the second person, confirms as much.

Finally, the imagery separated between the second and final strophes makes clear what is implicit elsewhere: Spellman wishes Coltrane's example to be taken as an axiomatic raising of the ear and sound to a position of sensory privilege over the eye:

listen to summertime, think of spring, negroes  
 cats in the closet,  
 anything that makes a rock

of your eye.

The increasing free-association of the imagery in this short passage is made analogous with *productive* metaphorical blindness. The implied ellipsis across the break between the lines symbolizes the potential of that kind of blindness in the form of the white space into which the reader can pour his or her own interpretive strategies without the distinctly partial guidance of the textual mark, and thus,

instead of the brow-beaten, 'frightened' subject constituted in the language of another, the subject is freed to play within an empty space. The primacy of the inner ear, made explicit in the final clause of the poem, has been latent within the surface of the text all along.

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'Did John's Music Kill Him', which James C. Hall was moved to describe as 'perhaps the most important Coltrane poem,' first appeared as part of the introduction to Stephen Henderson's essay 'Survival Motion' in *The Militant Black Writer in Africa and the United States*, an expanded version of a paper first delivered at a symposium titled 'Anger, and Beyond: The Black Writer and a World in Revolution' in Madison, Wisconsin on 8 and 9 August 1968.<sup>277</sup> The poem itself is an elegy to the dead saxophonist, but is at variance with the form in crucial ways. In relation to American poetry specifically, Marcellus Blount says that the elegy in America, since Walt Whitman's to Lincoln, 'has tended [...] to enact a rite of passage between men [...] the death of the empowered male figure becomes an occasion for the younger man to assert his *literary* authority'.<sup>278</sup> In the case of 'Did John's Music Kill Him', however, only the first part of Blount's formula is fully enacted. Complicated by the intertextual encodings of the memory of Coltrane's music, the transfer of power to a succeeding generation does not take place.

However, Coltrane's power over the poem is not in doubt, and is built up with theatrical discipline over the course of the first strophe:

in the morning part  
of evening he would stand

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<sup>277</sup> A. B. Spellman, 'Did John's Music Kill Him?', in Mercer Cook and Stephen E. Henderson, *The Militant Black Writer in Africa and the United States* (Madison; Milwaukee; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 109–10. The poem is reproduced in full in the appendix.; Hall, p. 265; Walter B. Rideout, quoted in Cook and Henderson, *The Militant Black Writer*, p. v.

<sup>278</sup> Marcellus Blount, 'Paul Laurence Dunbar and the African American Elegy', *African American Review* 41. 2 (Summer, 2007), 239–46 (p. 242). My emphasis.



before his crowd. the voice  
 would call his name &  
 red-light fell around him.  
 jimmy'd bow a quarter hour  
 til mccooy fed off block chords  
 to his stroke. elvin's thunder  
 roll & eric's scream. then john.

Everything in the first eight lines is rendered subordinate to the final word of the ninth, which accrues authority as a result. Textually silhouetting Coltrane in line two by drawing attention to 'his' presence while withholding his identity, Spellman highlights the corporeal absence of his subject while also, through the extended introductory routine, marking Coltrane's permanent symbolic presence. Dramatic 'red' lights reveal context, but leave the identity of the man himself in shadow. Meanwhile, the lesser characters in the drama are introduced one by one, Spellman punning on 'bow' to enhance the sense of subservience, even while naming the other members of Coltrane's 1961–64 band, all of whom were virtuosos in their own rights. Their musical contributions accrete until the stanza peaks at the howling 'scream' of Eric Dolphy, but then the period signals a total halt and sudden silence. At this moment Spellman calls back through literary history to the last line of Frank O'Hara's 'The Day Lady Died': 'when everyone and I stopped breathing'.<sup>279</sup> The pause enacted by the full stop in Spellman's poem creates a moment of pregnant delay into which, suddenly, the whisper (indicated by the lower-case 'j') of the nominative monosyllable undercuts the preceding *Sturm und Drang* in a manner which gives it even greater weight, standing alone at the climax of the strophe and demanding total and full attention of all watching.

The implied ellipsis between the first and second strophe furthers a sense of potential death, the tension of which is only released in the repetition of 'then john' at the opening of a new strophe, permitting the readership and the poet to exhale again. Taken a step further, it is a further iteration of the trope of rebirth; the poem, unable

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<sup>279</sup> O'Hara, Frank, 'The Day Lady Died', in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Donald Allen (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 325.

to bear the weight of the name it has just evoked, needs to begin itself again in a new context. 'john' is thus made available for reconstruction as a symbol – a uniquely literary/linguistic device – and the gap between the opening and second strophe serves as a metaphor for the transfer that Black Arts Movement poetry itself is in the process of effecting, turning Coltrane from corporeal essence to topographical sign.

Walter Ong has it that 'visual space appears to be [...] a special symbol of order and control',<sup>280</sup> so its disruption, whether productive or disruptive, reveals that 'appearance' to be no more than surface-deep. An instance of visual ellipsis such as the one above can therefore be seen as consciously contumacious. Ong observes that 'the sense of closure or completeness enforced by print is at times grossly physical', illustrating the point with newspapers, whose pages 'are normally all filled'.<sup>281</sup> However, even when typeset 'normally', poetry – as we have so far seen most noticeably in the poems of Sanchez, Cortez and Jonas – is a typographic form in which the possibilities of *unfilled* space can easily be explored. The final verse of 'Did John's Music Kill Him', aligned as it is to the right of the page, breaks the easy travel of the conditioned western reading eye from left to right and back again, forcing instead a right to further-right manoeuvre which is indeed 'grossly physical' in its rarity. Altering the normal proves that normal, therefore, to be a device of homogenized control, rather than an inevitable uncontrollable given.

Returning to the ellipsis between the opening two strophes:

jimmy'd bow a quarter hour  
 til mccoys fed off block chords  
 to his stroke. elvin's thunder  
 roll & eric's scream. then john.

then john. *little old lady* [...]

The drama of delay and deferral is apparent here. Vocabulary continues to be positioned as visual spectacle, in which the aural significations, 'thunder', 'block

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<sup>280</sup> Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, p. 38

<sup>281</sup> Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, p. 130

chords' and 'scream' are rendered subsidiary to the seen, ritualized spectacles of the 'bow', 'fed' and 'stroke', before the moment of maximum visual tension is reached inside that very blank space between the verses. In that space, the reader is freed to pour his or her own interpretations, and any one-to-one correspondence between the words on the page and the manner in which they are perceived ceases to be. It is the manumission of wild, contestable thought from the closed, controlled physicality of the printed text.

The forces unleashed in this wild, contestable space are such that a repetition is required at the beginning of the second strophe to bridge that space. In a structurally similar fashion to the arrival of the voice in 'Acknowledgement', a series of transformations go on to occur in the language and structure of 'Did John's Music Kill Him' once 'john' himself is brought into the text. The linear, third-person narrative of the opening strophe subsequently dissolves into a series of disjunctive allusions and symbolic inversions:

then john. *little old lady*  
 had a nasty mouth. summertime  
 when the war is. africa ululating  
 a line bunched up like itself  
 into knots paints beauty black.

The syntax is non-discursive, defying the normal prerogatives of sentence construction. The imagery is redolent of sound and its sources: 'ululating' – a trilled howl – comes from a 'nasty mouth'. Through this nasty mouth, however, identity can also be re-remediated if its power were to be harnessed by African-Americans themselves, something the poet evidently feels has been achieved by John Coltrane. 'Trane's horn had words in it' in as much as the transformations he wrought on his music were accessible to practitioners of African-American literacy, as much as their counterpart musicians.

A statement of defiance is made in the absence of capitalization, normative sentence hierarchy abandoned in a purely visual, literary manner. This is suggestive of a poet

increasingly confident, despite the death of his guiding icon. This sense of confidence is furthered, since hereafter the pronouns and prepositions shift to the first person and the narrative mode switches to autobiography. Benston suggests the repetition of 'john' at the start of the second strophe symbolizes a reconciling of the differences between the poet/reader's relationships with Coltrane pre- and post-mortem.<sup>282</sup> This may be the case, but, despite the initial confidence the opening of the third strophe demonstrates, on this occasion it is a reconciliation which fails to lead to the ultimate assertion of the younger man's literary authority in accordance with the norms of elegy. Instead, the distance of the disembodied 'voice' and disjointed syntax of the first strophe is retained, and indeed amplified, in the third strophe's symbolism:

trane's horn had words in it  
 i know when i sleep sober & dream  
 those dreams i duck in the world  
 of sun & shadow. yet even in the day john  
 & a little grass put them on me clear  
 as tomorrow in a glass enclosure

The poet, even with a voice, remains at one remove, only able to perceive the 'words' of Coltrane when in a drug-induced state of altered consciousness, or the unconscious state of sleep. The final line of the section confirms the continuing distance between the poet and the subject of his elegy even when the former is able to perceive the 'words' of Trane's horn. The two are tantalizingly and frustratingly separated from one another by the glass enclosure, an image of simultaneous visibility and invisibility, which speaks of the poet's awareness that there is something to grasp, but also of his frustration at his inability to obtain it. The dead man's horn still has the younger man trapped. In turn, the continuing subservience of literary authority to the authority the poet perceives in Coltrane's music is confirmed. The spaces opened by Coltrane's music ('little old lady', 'summertime' and 'africa') across the caesurae between the opening strophes enable an authorial voice to emerge, but its relationship with Coltrane is still one of passive subservience, in which the deceased man can still 'put them on me'.

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<sup>282</sup> Benston, p. 166.

In the fourth strophe, as alluded to earlier in this chapter, the poet evinces a cry of frustration at the limitations of poetry's formal demands. This is dramatized through a tension, evident throughout the poem, between its meter and its syntax. This is especially true from the second line of the fourth strophe:

life. the thing that beats out of  
me happens in a vat enclosed  
& fermenting & wanting to explode  
like your song

Poetry, figured in this passage as 'the thing', is simply too restrictive to enable the poet to externalize the explosive, transforming energies Spellman *feels* beating 'out of me', and the frustration is that he perceives the necessary vehicle – Coltrane's 'song' – but knows he cannot obtain it. The transfer of movement between 'out' and 'in' here suggests the mechanics of the act of breathing itself. The 'vat enclosed' therefore becomes a metaphor for the poetic *corpus* in both bodily and textual form, in which the desires of the artist and the demands of the form are engaged in a perennial tussle for supremacy.

This section also extends the theme of enclosed spaces begun in the 'glass enclosure' of the previous strophe, and the enjambments' attempts to follow the regulation of line by breath that Coltrane plays on the studio take of 'Psalm' ultimately fail to transcend the limits of form implied by the iambic division of the feet in these lines, and elsewhere in the poem. This is something which has in fact been apparent from the opening, manifest most clearly in 'jimmy'd bow a quarter hour', where the contraction after 'jimmy' functions to keep the stresses of that line in trochaic regularity. While the metrical arrangement eschews the consistency of iambic pentameter, enough of a pull is exerted by the implicitly-remembered traditions of regular poetic form such that the poem is not able to locate the relative freedom of free-verse.

The weight of this is sufficient to *invert* the norms of the elegiac form, with the second half of Spellman's poem becoming first a request for and then an enactment of the poet's own death. Coltrane, by contrast, symbolically, lives on:

kill me john my life eats  
 life. the thing that beats out of  
 me happens in a vat enclosed  
 & fermenting & wanting to explode  
 like your song.

so beat john's death words down  
 on me in the darker part  
 of evening. the black light issued  
 from him in the pit he made  
 around us. worms came clear  
 to me where i thought i had been  
 brilliant. o john death will  
 not contain you death

will not contain you

The poet, believing himself 'brilliant', turns out to be in the sort of basic, undignified and, presumably, unmarked grave to whose rest are usually sent the forgotten and unknown. The 'worms', a visual paronomasia with 'words', are finally revealed to be a composting agent, complicit in the poet's own failure to attain metonymic equivalence with Coltrane's music. The sole use of a collective noun in the poem makes 'us' as readers complicit with this failure. The direct addresses which open and end the strophe, and the mixture of prepositions switching from 'me' to 'him', to 'he', to 'i', and, finally, to 'us', do at least suggest that the poet has found a newly accommodating relationship with 'john'. Even that sense is undermined, however, when, through the interrogative scrutiny of the 'black light' of Coltrane, the poet and his community have their subjectivity symbolically displaced, and become the metaphorical 'worms' themselves.

In 2014, Spellman wrote that "'community" weighed a great deal' with the BAM, 'as the projectile momentum of the movements that filled the street required that one had a place to stand'.<sup>283</sup> In spite of this, however, it is notable that those 'movements'

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<sup>283</sup> A. B. Spellman, 'Introduction to Theory/Criticism', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 23–24 (p. 23).

were, in practice, not open to all. Larry Neal claimed, in 1968, that 'Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power movement'.<sup>284</sup> Spellman alludes to the relationship Neal suggests in 'Did John's Music Kill Him', but in a manner which leaves his own position ambiguous:

[...] africa ululating  
 a line bunched up like itself  
 into knots paints beauty black

Eliding the 'line' of Coltrane's playing with those of Black Arts Movement poetry, the newly knotted 'line' is connected to the ideology of Black Power by the final reference to 'beauty black' – a variation on Black Power's slogan 'Black is Beautiful', introduced to the vernacular by Stokeley Carmichael.<sup>285</sup> Spellman's image is not, however, uncritical of the notion, allowing as it does for another reading which suggests a degree of ambivalence about Neal's programmatic alignment of the two movements. Tied up into 'knots', the alliterative repetition of the 'ts' in 'itself', 'knots' and 'paints', supplemented by the 't' of 'into' and 'beauty', give an inner-aural sense of words tripping over themselves; while the accelerating pace of the two lines, undisturbed by punctuation, suggests a loss of control. Together, these effects suggest that while the ideology that demands 'beauty black' offers a distinctiveness of aesthetic, that distinctiveness might sometimes come at the expense of clarity of expression.

Both Spellman's 'Coltrane' poems are also notable for their lack of overt didacticism concerning racial and class-based divisions of identity that form such a strong feature of the poems of Baraka, Sanchez and Cortez, and, as we will soon see, Don L. Lee. The elegiac quality of 'Did John's Music Kill Him' looks inward rather than seeking to co-opt the performative orality of the preacher. Indeed, interiority is a trope that repeats throughout the poem in various guises and is announced at the beginning: 'in the morning part of evening' locates the poem in a mode of temporal interiority

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<sup>284</sup> Larry Neal, 'The Black Arts Movement', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 55–66 (p. 55).

<sup>285</sup> Gerald D. Jaynes (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of African American Society, Volume One* (Thousand Oaks; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 798.

which is then reified spatially in the description of the jazz club in which Coltrane's performance takes place.

'Red-light' symbolizes the relationship between jazz and prostitution which calls back to the music's origins as an art form whose roots had a close physical connection to the late-night street locale of the sex trade. A subterranean trade, the reference to 'red-light' evokes the interiority of linguistic coding, where entrance to the system is predicated on insider-knowledge. Throughout the second and third strophes, meanwhile, the emphasis on interiors is made greater and greater still. The line bunching up 'into knots', and the 'dreams' which leave the poet in a 'glass enclosure' are then followed by the artistic frustrations of the 'thing' fermenting 'in a vat enclosed'. The final strophe's description of a coffin meanwhile symbolizes the ultimate separation between poet and wider world, while Spellman's collective 'us' paints a picture of communal suffering within this world. The internal world of the poetic memory, meanwhile, is the metaphor within which the entire poem operates.

Spellman's rhymes and half-rhymes are also structurally interiorized: 'kill *me* john my life *eats* / life, the thing that *beats* out of / *me* happens in a vat **enclosed** / & fermenting & wanting to **explode** / like your song'; 'so *beat* john's death words down / on *me* in the darker part / of *evening*' and the reliance once more on the 'ee' vowel sound, but absolute absence of the word 'scream' or any other similar signifier, suggests Spellman once again seeking to establish a distinction of approach in his own poetry when set against that of his contemporaries.

The ultimate manifestation of this interiority is 'Trane's horn had words in it', and the feeling that Spellman establishes in 'Did John's Music Kill Him' suggests that his take on the attitude that Coltrane most usefully embodies for the African-American community is the meditative, spiritual looking-inward most apparent in *A Love Supreme*. The words in Trane's horn are not, therefore, as Lorenzo Thomas suggests, the constituent parts of a set of unified messages which 'the poet had only to



decipher'. Instead, their value – and the value of jazz improvised more generally – is in the irreducibility and subsequent *resistance* to unity of meaning that their processual relationship with their producers speaks. *A Love Supreme*, and Spellman's two Coltrane poems together demonstrate the intensely personal results that jazz and poetry can achieve through a set of formal negotiations with one another, when fitted into a framework of self-determination which admits heteroglossia and becomes a space of Dionysian disruption to the order of things.

## Chapter Five: Contested Spaces

### John Coltrane's *Ascension* and *Meditations*, Don L. Lee's 'Don't Cry Scream', and Jayne Cortez's 'How Long Has Trane Been Gone?'

*Ultimately our understanding of Coltrane's late art has to rest firmly upon his music and the unfolding of his artistic vision. It is always tempting to see developments in hindsight as inevitable, and Coltrane's music presents no exception.*

— Salim Washington.<sup>286</sup>

*Posthumously, Coltrane has had to live down the idea that he was some kind of saint during his lifetime.*

— Valerie Wilmer.<sup>287</sup>

In the previous chapter, we saw that A. B. Spellman, inspired by *A Love Supreme*, used 'Did John's Music Kill Him' to explore the interior world of the poet and of poetry, interrogating the manner in which the memories of John Coltrane and his music could contribute to the continuing development, or otherwise, of a new poetic aesthetic. Spellman's approach is, however, uncharacteristic of the manner in which Coltrane was most frequently treated poetically by members of the BAM. The textually remembered 'scream' of Coltrane's saxophone is a much more common trope, and a key technique used to effect the saxophonist's *post-mortem* metamorphosis into a Black Arts Movement icon.

However, that metamorphosis began seven years before the BAM, in John Tynan's description of Coltrane – in a review of the saxophonist's set at the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival – as 'an angry young tenor'.<sup>288</sup> Tynan's comparison, made in the pages of

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<sup>286</sup> Salim Washington, "'Don't Let the Devil (Make You) Lose Your Joy': A Look at Late Coltrane", in *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music*, ed. by Leonard L. Brown (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 123–42.

<sup>287</sup> Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life: The Story of the New Jazz* (London; New York: Quartet Books, 1977), p. 44.

<sup>288</sup> Gitler, pp. 41–44 (p. 41).

*Down Beat*, swiftly gained currency. The phrase pursued Coltrane – or was brought up by him – through numerous interviews over the following four years. In 1961 he said to Carl-Erik Lindgren between gigs in Stockholm that 'they [the critics] seem to think that it [my music]'s an angry sort of thing, as a rule'; and to Val Wilmer of *Jazz Journal* in London in 1962: 'some people say "your music sounds angry," or "tortured,"[...] you get all kinds of things, you know'.<sup>289</sup> Meanwhile, in an interview conducted immediately after Wilmer's with Kitty Grime of *Jazz News*, Coltrane articulated one of the effects he was concerned would stem from being so-characterized: 'I'd hate to think of an audience missing out on music, because they think it's nothing but anger.'<sup>290</sup>

Coltrane, with a clarity his political statements never matched, rejected such anagogic representation as fallacious, saying that 'if [my playing] is interpreted as angry, it is taken wrong. The only one I'm angry at is myself when I don't make what I want to play'.<sup>291</sup> The impression lingered, however, and was distilled even further by the writers and theorists of the BAM into those descriptions of Coltrane's 'scream', which, as Saul says 'became Coltrane's most magnetic quality for black arts poets in the 1960s'.<sup>292</sup>

Yet it was not until 1969, two years after Coltrane's death, that a plethora of poems – written by members of the BAM – responding to him and his music appeared. Two of those poems have already been discussed in this study: Sanchez's 'a/coltrane/poem' and Spellman's 'Did John's Music Kill Him'. To them can also be

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<sup>289</sup> Coltrane, quoted in Carl-Erik Lindgren, 'Interview with John Coltrane', in *Coltrane on Coltrane*, ed. by DeVito, pp. 55–59 (p. 55); Valerie Wilmer, 'Conversation with Coltrane', in *Jazz Journal*, (London, January 1962), pp. 1–2 (p. 2).

<sup>290</sup> Kitty Grime, 'John Coltrane Talks to *Jazz News*', in *Jazz News*, (London, December 27, 1961), p. 13.

<sup>291</sup> Or, perhaps, with his band members. Told by Randi Hultin after a gig at Antibes in 1965 that 'you played so angrily it sounded like you were irritated at something', Coltrane replied: 'I sure was! I can get pretty irritated with Elvin sometimes.' (Coltrane, quoted in Gitler, pp. 41–44 (p. 41); and in Randi Hultin, *Born under the Sign of Jazz: Public Faces, Private Moments*. New edn (London: Sanctuary, 2000), p. 165.)

<sup>292</sup> Saul, p. 222.

added Carolyn Rodgers' 'Written for Love of an Ascension'; Amos Mor's 'The Coming of John'; Jean Valentine's 'Coltrane, Syeeda's Song Flute'; and Jayne Cortez's 'How Long has Trane Been Gone?'.<sup>293</sup> Within these poems Coltrane became, as Kimberley Benston identifies, a topos: 'What we witness is the metamorphosis of Coltrane into "Trane", of man into archetype'.<sup>294</sup> Evidence supporting this claim is found in Don L. Lee's 'Don't Cry, Scream', which appeared in a 1969 collection of the same name:

the blues exhibited illusions of manhood.  
destroyed by you. Ascension into

scream-eeeeeeeeeeeeee-ing	sing
SCREAM-EEEEEEEEEEEEEE-ing	loud &
SCREAM-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-ing	long with feeling. <sup>295</sup>

Lee had contemporary analogues in Ted Joans' 'Homage to Heavy-Loaded Trane, J. C.', whose author hears 'screams of happiness/hot molted masses of marvellous messages/and HEAVY anger' in Coltrane's playing.<sup>296</sup> And we have seen already that Sanchez uses the idea in 'a/coltrane/poem': 'scrEEEcCHHHHHH  
screeeeEEECHHHHHHHH / sCReeeEECHHHHHHHH SCREEEECCCCHHHHH /  
SCREEEEEECCCHHHHHHHHHHH / a lovesupremealovesupremealovesupreme'.

Curiously, the BAM trope that Coltrane's work represented an agonized strain of programmatic political intent has been subjected to surprisingly little critique, even by those who have examined the 'Coltrane poem' as a subgenre at some length. We saw Gerald Early and Amiri Baraka's claims to that effect in the introduction. To their voices we can now add Kimberley Benston's, arguing that the 'movement from

<sup>293</sup> Carolyn M. Rodgers, 'Written for Love of an Ascension—Coltrane', in *The Second Set*, ed. by Feinstein and Komunyakaa, p. 162; Amos Mor, 'The Coming of John'; Jean Valentine, 'Coltrane, Syeeda's Song Flute', in *The Jazz Poetry Anthology*, ed. by Feinstein and Komunyakaa, pp. 140, 224; Jayne Cortez, 'How Long has Trane Been Gone?', in *Pissstained Stairs and the Monkey Man's Wares*, (New York: Phrase Text, 1969), pp. 41–43. The poem is reproduced in full in the appendix.

<sup>294</sup> Benston, p. 177.

<sup>295</sup> Don L. Lee / Haki Madhubuti, 'Don't Cry, Scream', in *The Second Set*, ed. by Feinstein and Komunyakaa, pp. 120–23 (p. 121). The poem is reproduced in full in the appendix.

<sup>296</sup> Ted Joans, 'In Homage to Heavy-Loaded Trane, J. C.', in *Black Pow-Wow: Jazz Poems*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), pp. 111–12 (p. 111).

phase to phase in his [Coltrane's] career, and indeed from phrase to phrase within individual pieces, seemed driven by an inexorable metamorphic imperative marked by violence and excess'.<sup>297</sup> This mimetic assertion of 'violence', which is made without substantiation, is representative of much critical commentary which posits Coltrane's music as the aural embodiment of violent anger. Iain Anderson approvingly quotes poet Ronald Milner describing Coltrane in true Black Arts rhetorical style as 'a man who, through his saxophone, before your eyes and ears, completely annihilates every single Western influence'.<sup>298</sup> Lewis Porter, meanwhile, made the observation in 1985 that 'while retaining the goal of intellectual involvement, [Coltrane] sought to communicate nobility, dignity, peace or even violent outrage'.<sup>299</sup>

In the midst of the other characteristics Porter lists in the above passage, the oxymoronic 'violent outrage' stands out, jarring to the extent that it comes across a little like an unthinking reflex insertion. This is worth highlighting since, as James Hall suggests there is 'good reason to *resist* the urgent tendency to politicize Coltrane'.<sup>300</sup> However, in practice this has seldom happened. As we saw at the beginning of the second chapter, Coltrane was, at best, guarded, when it came to his political views. He certainly never approached the overt forms of anti-racist protest of Max Roach and Ornette Coleman.<sup>301</sup> Equally, Coltrane's music took a long time to reach the aesthetic radicalism of Coleman, Taylor, or even two of his regular collaborators in the period 1960–65, Archie Shepp and Eric Dolphy.<sup>302</sup> Coltrane openly admitted that he was playing catch-up in this regard, saying in 1961 that

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<sup>297</sup> Benston, p. 123.

<sup>298</sup> Milner, quoted in Anderson, p. 110.

<sup>299</sup> Porter 'John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*: Jazz Improvisation as Composition', 593–621 (p. 593).

<sup>300</sup> Hall, p. 139.

<sup>301</sup> Two years after *Free Jazz*, in 1962, Coleman, following the example set by Sonny Rollins from 1959–1961, stopped performing, as, disillusioned at the inequity of payment he was getting for gigs compared to white musicians like Dave Brubeck, ('If I'm packing the house and making as much money for the man as people who are getting paid more than me, then wouldn't it seem that I should get the same amount?'), he raised his performance fee, which 'club owners, record companies, and producers of concerts would not meet' and he 'would not lower'. (Spellman, *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*, pp. 131–136 (pp. 131, 136).)

<sup>302</sup> On the unreleased second take of *A Love Supreme*'s 'Acknowledgement' (discussed in the previous chapter), Shepp's sound is quite audibly more frayed and 'distressed' than Coltrane's.

'when he [Coleman] came along [...] I didn't know where I was going to go next, you know. I don't know whether I would have thought about just abandoning the chord system or not'.<sup>303</sup> As 'My Favorite Things' and *A Love Supreme* amply demonstrate, Coltrane was exploring very *different* possibilities in his music of 1960–64, but little of it can be said to be imbued with the urgency that so characterizes *Free Jazz*.

This was the period in which Coltrane made his only recording which can explicitly be connected to a political event. 'Alabama' was released in November 1963, two months after the Ku Klux Klan attack on the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham of that state.<sup>304</sup> The attack left four young black girls dead and twenty-two other people injured. Coltrane's protest, such as it is, is registered mournfully, not violently. Performed in an ABA structure, the A-section of 'Alabama' lasts for almost two minutes, constituting a minor-key saxophone theme over a piano trill on C<sub>4</sub>, before the piece moves into a short B-section of standard swing, with the A-section then recapitulated from 2:47. Notable throughout is that Coltrane remains in the lower register of the tenor saxophone, whereas normally he liked to 'alternate high- and low-register statements in a kind of dialogue with himself'.<sup>305</sup> No such dialogue is present here, and a certain dirge-like quality is the result. Bill Cole, writing about this track, describes Coltrane's tone as 'ugly' before making the intellectual leap that this is 'likely to be an expression of the pain that for far too long far too many blacks have had to contain'.<sup>306</sup> Coltrane's intonation on the track in fact persistently *contradicts* Cole's claim. Indeed, Coltrane's tone on the vast majority of his recorded output – made in the studio and live – is stable, and betrays no tension in the physical sense of the word. The tone is instead controlled to the extent that it almost actively resists that slide into psychological correspondence or expressive romanticism.

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<sup>303</sup> Quersin, pp. 97–104 (p. 102).

<sup>304</sup> Coltrane, John, 'Alabama' (1963),

<[https://open.spotify.com/track/0V7EuJ17Bf8zYpS2XRL6pE?si=QYBX2\\_hSQjWDcva2j2y5nQ](https://open.spotify.com/track/0V7EuJ17Bf8zYpS2XRL6pE?si=QYBX2_hSQjWDcva2j2y5nQ)> [Accessed 13 July 2015].

<sup>305</sup> Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, p. 228.

<sup>306</sup> Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* (New York, London: Schirmer; Collier Macmillan, 1978), p. 31.

Neither Coltrane's music nor his public pronouncements, therefore, offer much to suggest that his was a model of programmatic intent that would offer much to the cultural-nationalist leanings of the BAM. This final chapter, therefore, is designed to separate the music of Coltrane's final years from the myths which the BAM developed around him after his death, and to offer a hypothesis for the motivations that lay behind the BAM poets' treatment of Coltrane at the very end of the sixties. It does this through close readings of *Ascension* and *Meditations* – the final, and most sonically challenging, studio albums released in Coltrane's lifetime – coupled with analysis of two 1969 poems, Lee's 'Don't Cry Scream', and Jayne Cortez's 'How Long has Trane Been Gone', which respond to Coltrane's later music in ways which share many of the same primary concerns, but which converse intertextually and stylistically in ways that productively illuminate *why* it was that Coltrane became an object of such topographical centrality to the poets of the BAM.<sup>307</sup>

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'This is strong stuff' is A. B. Spellman's warning in the liner notes to *Ascension's* listeners.<sup>308</sup> Released in two versions (Edition I and Edition II) in 1966, both iterations of its forty-minute length make Spellman's words seem the epitome of understatement.<sup>309</sup> Aurally demonstrating its growth out of Coltrane's previous record, the openings of both takes are built around the 'love supreme' riff from that album's 'Acknowledgement'. There, however, the similarities end. Each horn player on *Ascension* plays those notes as and when they choose, creating an effect akin to an orchestra tuning. However, the purpose denoted by that sound – the establishment

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<sup>307</sup> John Coltrane, *Ascension* (1965), John Coltrane, et al. (Impulse!, 543 413-2, 2000) [on ; John Coltrane, *Meditations* (1966), John Coltrane, et al. (Impulse!, AS-9110, 2009) [on CD].

<sup>308</sup> A. B. Spellman, 'Liner Notes', *Ascension* (1966), John Coltrane, et al. (Impulse!, 2000) [on CD].

<sup>309</sup> Edition I was released first, in February 1966, but Coltrane came to the belief that the second take (of only two), was superior, and it was released in September, replacing the original. Both are available on the CD release. (Cf. Frank Kofsky and Bob Thiele: 'The New Wave: Bob Thiele Talks to Frank Kofsky About John Coltrane', in *The John Coltrane Companion*, ed. by Woideck, pp. 203–04 (p. 209).

of tonal consonance – is in this instance subverted through the establishment and maintenance of dissonance. Effectively deconstructing Coltrane's previous work, the texture, as each player develops his own ideas around the four-note cell, builds to a fiercely intense sonic collage of parallel musical lines which bear no discernible relation to one another beyond their simultaneity. The same intensity of discord goes on to characterize the nine subsequent ensemble breaks, too. Underpinning this melodic disorder is Jones, who in these ensemble sections plays as one might ordinarily expect a drum soloist to, with rolls and other rudimental fills around the snare and toms being punctuated in an *ad hoc* manner by explosive cymbal crashes, played with fierce, muscular weight.

For all the intensity of sound, however, if one looks for something particularly *new* about Jones' playing in these sections, one struggles. Techniques he employed in the solo which opens 'Pursuance' on *A Love Supreme* are fully audible here, including the lack of identifiable meter. The one noticeably different piece of drumming praxis, which can be heard from 2:53 to 3:06 and again from 11:07 to 11:21, is the introduction of a hard, straight, regular alternation between bass drum and snare drum, both in combination with heavy cymbal crashes, a sound more readily associable with the heavy rock drumming of those such as Ginger Baker and John Bonham.

This is an indication of a wider truth about *Ascension* – namely that, despite appearing four years after *Free Jazz*, it follows a more conventional format than Coleman's earlier record. For instance, rather than solos being characterized by fragmentary interjections from other players as on *Free Jazz*, the soloists on *Ascension* are accompanied solely by the rhythm section. Also on *Ascension*, Elvin Jones is – for the final time on a Coltrane studio release – the sole drummer, whereas Coleman employed two. In the relatively equal balance between ensemble and solos, moreover, *Ascension* fits within, rather than breaking, a template established by the big bands in the late 1920s.



In some ways, Coltrane and Coleman's suites are similar. *Ascension* mirrors the earlier record's length, and shares its collage-like interplay of simultaneous playing from a horn section extended beyond the conventional bebop group line-up. In Coltrane's case, *Ascension* added Dewey Johnson and Freddie Hubbard on trumpet, Archie Shepp and Pharoah Sanders on tenor saxophone, Marion Brown and John Tchicai on alto saxophone, and Art Davis on bass to his regular collaborators Jimmy Garrison and McCoy Tyner. The overall sonic impression of the ensemble passages on *Ascension* are also similar to those of *Free Jazz*. In the solo sections moreover, the underpinning structure is *much* more conventional than on Coleman's record. Jones, Davis, Garrison and Tyner play with a recognizable swung common-time pulse, led by the drummer's ride-cymbal and underpinned by the bass players 'walking', with the pianist adding colour (and even-temperament) through off-beat rhythmic comping and variously-voiced chords.

In the cases of Johnson (Edition II: 7:45–9:30), Brown (Edition II: 25:10–27:16), Tchicai (Edition II: 18:50–20:00), Tyner (Edition II: 29:55–33:26) and even Shepp (Edition II, 21:10–24:10), the solos also adhere to what, by 1965, had become the conventions of post-bop praxis or to the model established in *Free Jazz*: comprising hard, fast runs, based not on chords but (very loosely) on scales (in this case, as Porter suggests, Bb-minor) and melismatic melodic motifs whose usefulness the soloist cyclically exhausts, discards and replaces.<sup>310</sup>

Coltrane's own solos on both takes do, however, contain moments which lend some credence to the BAM poets use of 'scream' as a descriptor of the sound. In edition I, they can be heard at 4:12–4:19, at 4:49, 5:00–5:01, and at 6:03 as Coltrane leads back into the next ensemble section. In edition II, these instances are more frequent and extended, occurring from 3:10–3:31, 3:53–3:59, 4:41–4:53 (with a particular peak at 4:47), and at the transition point once again, this time from 5:30–5:48. On these short

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<sup>310</sup> Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, p. 263.

occasions, the sounds Coltrane plays lose any easy correspondence to tonality or temperament, acquiring a raw vocal quality that *does* bear comparison to – for instance – Abbey Lincoln's screaming on *We Insist!*'s 'Protest'. These interludes however, remain in the temporal minority in both of Coltrane's *Ascension* solos. The majority of his playing can still be heard to have a directly correspondent relationship to the notes of the diatonic scale, with the distinct, hard tonality that had been Coltrane's signature since at least 1957.

Pharoah Sanders' solos on the two takes court vocality with much more consistency. Porter says, 'Sanders had played on modal pieces and chord changes, but at this point he was into *sheer sound*', and this is apparent on both takes of *Ascension*.<sup>311</sup> Sanders' Edition I solo begins relatively conventionally (11:16–11:23). However, from then on he begins to play and manipulate tiny cells of fragmentary notes of a duration of a single second or less. The resulting impression is of new ideas arriving into the performer's mind at such a rate that the player is engaged in a frantic attempt to externalize those thoughts as completely and immediately as possible. Indeed, at 12:23 we can hear a single note played repeatedly with a tone that evokes electronic signalling, an almost literal externalization of new neural connections being forged and expressed.

A 'scream'-like sound can also be heard in Sanders' solos on Edition I at 11:49, 11:57, 12:08–12:10, and in Edition II from 14:08. Here we see a directly comparative instance where the description is more apt for Sanders' playing than that of Coltrane, since not only does Sanders let the sound venture further away from identifiable tonality, but he also allows the pitch of his 'notes' to bend flat. In these momentary and fragmentary *glissandi*, the saxophone much more closely represents the interstitial rising and falling intonation of a human voice than Coltrane does even on the rare occasions when he is 'screaming'.

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<sup>311</sup> Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, p. 264.

Porter's assertion of Sanders' commitment to 'sheer sound' is borne out most clearly on the second edition. In a marked contrast with the relative familiarity of the opening part of his first-take solo, this begins with an ascent upwards through the saxophone's range played in a tone that almost defies description (11:55–12:08). Notes can – barely – be discerned, but Sanders' technique is such that they are produced within a gurgling, constricted, roiling breathiness which renders those notes a trace among the vibrations that are both constituent of them and also unleashed around them. From 13:32 to 13:34 and then again from 13:56 to 14:02, Sanders plays in the lower end of the saxophone's range, but again does so in a way that pulls it out of definable tonality. What can essentially be heard is the raw sound of air passing through a tube, as though any definable tone would represent an artificial imposition on the natural relationship between the performer's breath and his mediating instrument. And yet, also, in this version of the solo, Sanders moves into and out of this sonic world, from tempered to untempered playing. For instance, at 12:12 there emerges a crystal clear, overtone-free, and beautifully intoned E<sub>6</sub>, produced with such assurance that his saxophone acquires the tonality of a clarinet. But at the close of the solo from 14:08 to the return of the ensemble, Sanders produces moaning, falling sounds that sound like nothing so much as the wails of a dying animal.

Even where there is support for a 'screaming' interpretation of Coltrane's sound, therefore, it is by no means dominant, and, in its most extreme form, is not even produced by Coltrane himself. We can hypothesise therefore that *Ascension* is afforded its status in the Coltrane legend not because it marked a dramatic aesthetic shift in jazz *per se*, but because it marked a dramatic shift for *Coltrane*.<sup>312</sup> When Ornette Coleman arrived in New York for his 1959 residency at the Five Spot, he did so, to all intents and purposes, out of nowhere. Living in and developing his idiosyncratic technique in Texas and California, his immediate contact with the

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<sup>312</sup> Tony Whyton, *Beyond A Love Supreme: John Coltrane and the Legacy of an Album* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 75.

'great' figures of forties and fifties bebop, cool and hard-bop had been tantamount to non-existent. From this starting point, the energies unleashed in those residencies, complemented by the releases of *Something Else!*, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, and *Free Jazz*, ostensibly represented a complete rupture with what had gone before.

By marked contrast, Coltrane's career by the time of *Ascension* extended back over three decades, for the most recent decade of which he had been a high-profile figure within jazz and within popular culture. Indeed, a direct line could be drawn back from Coltrane at least as far as Duke Ellington, who first rose to prominence in the mid 1920s. Among others, Coltrane had played in bands run by Ellington orchestra alumnus Johnny Hodges, as well as Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk.<sup>313</sup> His style had evolved through swing, bebop, cool, his own 'sheets of sound' phase, the modally-inflected early-sixties work, including 'My Favorite Things' and, just a few months before *Ascension*, *A Love Supreme*.

Coltrane's stylistic switch to collective improvisation in the Coleman mould, therefore, while being a radical departure from his previous aesthetic, nevertheless could be retrospectively re-interpreted as simply the latest in a series of *gradual* evolutions through all the dominant jazz styles of the previous thirty years. Connecting the star figures of the jazz past to the present that he himself embodied when alive, and which, for Lee and his contemporary BAM poets, he still embodied after death, Coltrane's conversion gave historical legitimacy to the 'new thing', just as Coleman Hawkins' presence on 'Driva Man' did to Max Roach's statement of defiance in *We Insist!*. The conversion of Coltrane to the cause of 'free' collective improvisation (its coincidental occurrence being in 1965, the year the BAM was formed), finally rendered the form accessible to the experimentally-minded avant-garde, opening their eyes to its aesthetic possibilities.

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<sup>313</sup> Hall, p. 127.

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The aural evidence of Coltrane's next studio release – *Meditations* – suggests that the saxophonist's compositional and improvisational technique had moved towards a synthetic melding of the wholly disparate styles of his two previous albums. The results belie once again the programmatic political claims made for Coltrane's music by the BAM poets and many critics since, and suggest that *Ascension* stands as a one-off in the Coltrane canon.

*Meditations* was recorded in November 1965, but was not released until September 1966.<sup>314</sup> It was the last album of Coltrane's which featured either Elvin Jones or Jimmy Garrison, here supplemented by Pharoah Sanders on tenor saxophone and Rashied Ali on drums. Moving away from the *Free Jazz*-like single piece, Coltrane returns to the 'suite' arrangement of *A Love Supreme*. Even in the arrangement of the tracks, however, the synthesis of elements from both preceding records is apparent: several of the tracks merge into one another, à la *Ascension*, but, as per *A Love Supreme*, they do not all do so. The start and end of the organizational units titled 'Compassion' and 'Serenity' are in fact dictated by the grooves of the LP, not the music itself. This presumably deliberate confusion of beginnings and endings is in fact a recurrent motivic theme throughout the album – one established with particular clarity in the opening track, 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost'. Just as *Ascension* began with a sonic trace of *A Love Supreme*'s defining riff, the track's title continues the biblical thematic which the previous two albums introduced to Coltrane's output. Its soundscape – the dense simultaneity of the instrumental texture, the ferocity of its intensity – and, particularly, the techniques that the wind players employ – also makes 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost' the track on *Meditations* which represents most closely a continuation of the aesthetic style of *Ascension*.

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<sup>314</sup> Washington, pp. 123–42, p. 142.

This productive confusion is compounded by both the beginning and 'end' of the track. The manner in which the opening of 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost' has been studio-engineered, so that rather than a clean entry the saxophones of Sanders and Coltrane are brought to audibility by a very quick, but nevertheless distinct fade-in, invites the idea that the listener is being invited into a text which is already underway. From 9:37, for a period of around twenty seconds, a piece of engineering manipulation uncommon in jazz recordings (though reflective of the experimental studio work begun by the Beach Boys and the Beatles in 1965/66) is apparent – the two saxophones are switched backwards and forwards across the left and right channels of the studio mix, once again being faded in and out as at the beginning. Towards the very end of the track, meanwhile, at 12:29, the texture and dynamics completely alter. The rhythm section establishes a pulse that then continues to underpin the entirety of the subsequent track, 'Compassion'. According to the record company, however, 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost' does not end until 12:51, so for twenty-two seconds the sounds of the album's second track disrupt the taxonomic order of the first, thereby problematizing notions of authority in a now-familiar manner.

A similar disturbance of locatable, referential and originating authority is evident within the music itself, particularly in the playing of both Coltrane and Sanders with which 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost' opens. Emerging and then disappearing – alternating sound and silence – the two players' fluttered notes connect the process of artistic creation irrevocably and audibly to that of the breath – its waxing and waning – as a mimetic representation of physical inhalation/exhalation. Neither the opening repeated notes played predominantly by Coltrane – which hover in the microtonal space between  $A_{b3}$  and  $A_3$  to still further enhance the sense of dislocation and the blurring of hard boundaries – nor the simultaneous rapidly repeated three-note cells played by Sanders – are produced with the technical cleanliness that would give a distinct 'front' or 'back' to the individual notes. Instead, the technologically produced fade-in, with which the track

opens is then, once again, mirrored and extended within the surfaces of the saxophonists' playing.

The emphasis on the breath is also distinctly apparent when overtones (in this instance an  $Ab_5/A_5$ ) to the primary note become audible. Breath and sound combine here and elsewhere within the track to illustrate that plurality is always–already embedded within even ostensibly singular subjects – in this instance the individual notes of the diatonic scale – and that even within the simultaneity of musical production, the heard signs of that production can, and frequently do, still obscure this multiplicity as much as diacritical markings can within the sight-world of a printed text. Where on *Free Jazz*, fragmentation was deployed as the primary technique through which multiplicity was courted, here multiplicity is taken as a given, and the concern is with its revelation through a continual overcoming and extension of the technical, and therefore physical, limitations of the artist.

Even more than on *Ascension*, none of these effects constitute a sound that can, under scrutiny, legitimately be textually re-mediated as a 'scream'. Undoubtedly, Coltrane pushes the saxophone – and himself – far beyond the ordinary limits of its upper range. His solo on 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost', which runs from 2:20 to 6:46, creates a sound of quasi-tidal ebbing and flowing, incrementally building up to a point ever-further beyond the presupposed limits of the instrument. Rapid melismatic upward scalar runs frequently culminate in a honked note at the lower end of the tenor's range, before Coltrane sets off on another run up the scale. Those honks represent another connection to the breath, a moment of recovery which auralizes the permanent stalking 'other' that inexorably accompanies all moments of ecstatic revelation – the equivalent of the biblical Fall – and re-iterates the notion of revolution-as-cycle. What it allows, however, is for those moments when limitations are breached to reach extraordinary peaks. At 4:01, Coltrane reaches a pitched – not overtone –  $Ab_5$ , which is far beyond the commonly acknowledged upper limit of the

tenor range (Eb<sub>5</sub>), and – extraordinarily – at the climactic peak of the solo at 6:25, he plays an Eb<sub>6</sub>, a whole octave above that theoretical limit.

And yet, as with his playing on *Ascension*, these notes remain almost as distinctly tonal as those Coltrane played in the middle of the tenor's range on 'Alabama'. Despite undoubtedly requiring a huge amount of physical exertion (a relay-like 'handover' of solo duties to Sanders takes place, with both saxophonists playing simultaneously, from 6:29 to 6:46, and one can distinctly hear in Coltrane's contribution to this section the sound of a person who has exhausted their reserves of energy and is now slowing to a halt), and being pitched at a level that is certainly uncommon, Coltrane's command of the instrument is such that – even far beyond the uppermost definition of its normal limits – his playing never dissolves into noise.

In another parallel with *Ascension*, Sanders' playing is of another order altogether. The distinction between noise and music is signally collapsed throughout the four minutes or so of his solo on 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost'. From 7:28 to 7:50 especially, Sanders is blowing so hard that one can very nearly hear the *friction* between his embouchure, the reed and the body of the instrument. The effect is one of total artistic commitment. Not only does the outcome represent a dissolution of order into controlled chaos, but the process represents the dissolution of boundary between man and instrument, and consequently between the resultant artefact, its creator and the process of its creation. Coltrane's playing when he re-enters the piece at 9:03, clearly spurred to match the intensity of Sanders, is – while by any regular measure still extraordinary – positively quaint by comparison with the sounds being produced by his fellow saxophonist. A distinctly recognisable 'scream' emanates from Sanders' instrument at 10:10, for instance, while alongside it Coltrane is operating firmly within the comfortable *ambitus* of the Tenor's *tessitura*. No equivalent reversal takes place at any point in the piece.



What all these confusions of orderly boundaries indicate, once more, is that the full exploitation of the process of creation remains the ongoing concern, rather than the production of a work that satisfies any *a priori* considerations imposed from outside. The only limitations apparent here are those of the recording technology, restricting the work to the twenty-three minutes per-side capacity of the twelve-inch long-playing record. Of free jazz, Alfred Willener suggested, in 1969, that:

all that remains is a collective definition, in action, of periodization, of cadence, not the subjective interpretation of an experienced *external* regularity, but the ever-developing definition of a reference that is now merely *internal* to the group that is playing, with some regard perhaps for the audience.<sup>315</sup>

Willener's 'cadence' does not exist on *Meditations*. The polarities of beginning and end are, once more, denied, and the effect is one of continuing potential in a state of deferral, in which there really is 'nothing outside the text'<sup>316</sup>.

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The absence of definable meter which characterized *Ascension* continues on the first track of *Meditations*, with Jones and Ali playing (and being recorded) in a way which makes it nigh-on impossible to tell which of them is doing what. What is apparent is that between them a near-continuous roll of toms and snare drums is maintained throughout the full length of the piece. These are interrupted by a-rhythmic cymbal crashes, coincident with heavy snare rim-shots that together explode out of the texture. Buried within this dense wall of sound can be heard ferociously quick three-hit cells on one of the two ride cymbals, and – as from 8:08 to 20 – hi-hat closures, which occur in short bursts and then stop. From 2:26, a shaker and a tambourine can also be heard. The latter is played in a way which is a long distance from the rigidly metered 'whipped' tambourine on Max Roach's 'Driva Man'. As with the cymbal crashes and the bass drum 'bombs', which also interrupt the texture of 'The Father

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<sup>315</sup> Willener, p. 258.

<sup>316</sup> Derrida, *On Grammatology*, p.158.

and the Son and the Holy Ghost' without any pattern, the skin of the tambourine drum is accented with the player's palm at what appears to be almost random intervals.

Commenting on the addition of Ali to his group for *Meditations*, Coltrane was quoted in Nat Hentoff's liner notes for the album saying that 'I feel the need for more time, more rhythm around me. And with more than one drummer the rhythm can be much more multi-directional. Someday I may add a conga drummer or even a company of drummers'.<sup>317</sup> Particularly noticeable about the drumming throughout *Meditations* is its intensity – characterised by unrelenting speed in the opening twelve minutes and by volume throughout the album. The playing is so loud that Jimmy Garrison's bass is practically inaudible in the mix until the seventh minute of the second track, 'Compassions', when the rest of the ensemble finally decrescendos and the texture (temporarily) thins out.

Salim Washington suggests that on *Meditations*, Elvin Jones is 'playing in time and Rashied Ali [is] playing pulse'.<sup>318</sup> Washington fails to say how he distinguishes between time and pulse, and with the exception of 'Compassion', there is anyway no evidence on *Meditations* to support either distinction. Indeed, one of the most obvious differences between the interactions of Jones and Ali on *Meditations* and the double-drumming on *Free Jazz* is that, where the latter combines very distinct separate playing styles into a complementary collective disruption of regular time, the former sound as though they are simply engaged in a furious battle for supremacy.

Adhering to some form of consistent beat meant that Ed Blackwell and Billy Higgins' improvisations on Coleman's album had an internal logic that complemented the other player's work. The lack of any metrical patterning on *Meditations* may free Jones and Ali to essentially do as they like, but it also means that the only external percussive reference against which they could define their transgressions lies not in

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<sup>317</sup> Nat Hentoff, 'Meditations Liner Notes', in *Coltrane on Coltrane*, ed. by DeVito, pp. 263–64 (p. 263).

<sup>318</sup> Washington, pp. 123–42 (p. 118).

abstract temporal order but in the playing of the other. What results is certainly liberated from the restrictions of timekeeping, but its tumultuousness brings an internal antagonism which is antithetical to the 'collective' principles of improvisation that the 'free' style theoretically encouraged.

However, when the two drummers work more closely in tandem then new developments of improvisatory praxis could still be discerned, even within more traditional forms. Of particular interest in the bridge joining 'The Father the Son and the Holy Ghost' to 'Compassion' are the rhythm and the tuning of the drums. Having operated antagonistically and entirely out of recognizable meter for the previous twelve and a half minutes, Jones and Ali suddenly work in tandem to create an entirely recognizable, traditional jazz-waltz pattern. The toms, meanwhile, are tuned to a discernible Eb, Bb and Db, and played with hypnotic repetition in an order (Bb up an augmented second to Db, back down to the Bb, and then up a fourth to the Eb) and rhythm that once more re-sounds the 'a love supreme' motif from 'Acknowledgement', only this time transposed up a fourth to fit the – also discernible, by contrast with any of *Ascension* – Bb-minor tonal-centre of 'Compassion'. Contained in the new work, therefore, are audible traces of the old.

The encoding of history in the processes of the new – a principle which the aesthetic ideologies of the Black Arts Movement held so dear, and which so-characterized the jazz re-workings of extant material discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis – are thus clearly brought to bear upon 'Compassion'. This time, however, the transformation is being effected not simply on the given work of another tradition, but instead on given material composed by the *same person*. Coltrane stated in 1965 that he and his bands were always 'wanting [...] to move into a new area. We generally don't believe in standing still'.<sup>319</sup> The drumming at the end of 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost and throughout 'Compassion', allied with the confusion of beginnings and

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<sup>319</sup> Michael Hennessey, 'Dropping the Ball and Chain from Jazz', in *Melody Maker*, (London, August 14, 1965), p. 6.

endings throughout *Meditations*, acts effectively as an audible admission of Coltrane's engagement with the process of the discovery of new forms and refusal to treat even his own work as a static document.

The saxophone playing from the beginning of 'Compassion' to 0:54 and then – following a lengthy piano solo by Tyner – from 4:25 to 5:59 (which appears to be only Coltrane's), returns to the ballad-like quality of 'Alabama'. It is slow, plaintive, the tuning is tempered and firmly in the lower register of the saxophone. The same mood dominates the opening sections of 'Love', the third track of the album. It opens with a two minute and twenty-four second bass solo; Garrison offering a mixture of triple and double-stopped playing among more familiar single-note melodic improvisation. At 2:24, Coltrane enters, performing within the tenor's regular *ambitus* in an introspective manner now reminiscent of *A Love Supreme*'s 'Psalm'. From 3:01 Tyner plays increasingly loud tremolo chords with his left hand and rapid melismatic runs up and down the upper end of the piano keyboard with his right, in a manner also reminiscent of the opening of 'Psalm'. Indeed, purposeful reflectiveness is the mood most obviously characteristic of the first two thirds of 'Love'. Only from 6:07 does the intensity gradually increase, as Coltrane works his way chromatically up the registers once more, transposing motivic figures up through ever higher keys. Sanders re-joins the texture at 7:56, and the piece immediately merges into the fourth track, 'Consequences', which follows much more closely the formula of 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost', with the two saxophones trading motivic figures and lengthy solos over out-of-time, and bustling, competitive drumming once more apparent.

'Consequences' also ends, as did 'The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost', with a section that bears no relation whatsoever, idiomatically, to the rest of the piece. Tyner plays alone from 8:39 to the end of the track, in a manner which evinces the characteristics not of a jazz solo but of the compositions of a white 'classical' composer such as Max Bruch. The process of moving away from, and outside of,

Western European forms has therefore been brought – in revolutionary fashion – full circle. The boundaries and possibilities of 'jazz' have been extended such that the label effectively no longer applies. A similar taxonomic mocking takes place in the final track of the album, 'Serenity', in which nothing sounds serene at all, with one familiar exception: Coltrane's playing, which is that of a man entirely in control, improvising instinctively but with the motivation of self-discovery, rather than the antagonistic, angry pushing against imposed restrictions that later interpretations of his music, including those written by BAM writers, would attempt to force upon it.

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By 1969, as the Coltrane poem began to proliferate, the Black Arts Movement's geographical boundaries had expanded far beyond New York, and its adherents and contributors could be found all across the United States. Essays had been written in 1968 by Larry Neal in New York and by Maulana (Ron) Karenga in Los Angeles which, according to Madhubuti (Lee), writing in 2010, 'provided much of the theoretical basis' for the movement thereafter.<sup>320</sup> Symbolizing the connections and differences between the Neal/ Baraka and Karenga schools of BAM thinking, Lee's own poem, 'Don't Cry, Scream' (1969) acts to affirm many of the aesthetic demands of Baraka's 'Black Art' from four years previously. It also explicitly seeks to reconfigure the now-symbolic figure of Coltrane as the figurehead to an ideological cause – one which came closer in its overall conception of Black Cultural nationalism to the ideas of Karenga's Los Angeles-based US Organization.

In 1965, little distinguished Karenga and Baraka's outlooks. Karenga's *Kaiwada* philosophy held, as did Baraka, 'that black Americans needed to carry out a cultural revolution before they could mount a successful political campaign to seize and

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<sup>320</sup> Haki Madhubuti, 'Storm Coming: Memoir and History', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 254–64 (p. 255).

reorder established institutions of power and wealth'.<sup>321</sup> The difficulty in separating their ideas is apparent in William Van Deburg's placing of Baraka as an influence on Karenga, while James Smethurst claims that it was 'largely through Baraka' that Karenga's *Kawaida* philosophy was first disseminated among the BAM.<sup>322</sup> What is clear is that both placed an emphasis on radical cultural re-orderings as precursor and partner to the political changes necessary to escape the yoke of the systems that had, hitherto, neutered African-American agency.

Both also believed, along with Larry Neal, that culture was 'the most important element in the struggle for self-determination',<sup>323</sup> and that a crucial part of culture was mythology. Neal, in 1968, wrote that the North-Eastern BAM 'proposes a separate [Black] symbolism, mythology, critique and iconology', and approvingly quotes Karenga's listing of 'mythology' as the first of his seven 'criteria for culture'.<sup>324</sup> Just as Carolyn Gerard could write that the significance of Malcolm X 'far more than historical, is mythological', so too can the same be said of BAM attitudes to Coltrane. We can concur with Alfred Willener, therefore, that the *absence* of political declarations, combined with his early death, made Coltrane as attractive a potential mythic figure for the projected ideologies of the fragmenting Black Arts Movement as was Malcolm X for the total *clarity* of his political position.

Given their similar starting-points, it is ironic that

the influence of Karenga through Baraka helped lead to one of the most significant divides in Black Arts conceptions of culture, with Baraka and many activists in the Northeast (and elsewhere) retaining their notion of a popular avant-garde while Haki Madhubuti [Lee] and a number of black artists and intellectuals, especially in Chicago, posited a vision of an alternative avant-garde black culture that, like Karenga's, significantly *rejected* black popular culture.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Van Deburg, p. 172.

<sup>322</sup> Van Deburg, p. 176; Smethurst, p. 79.

<sup>323</sup> Neal, pp. 55–66, p. 59.

<sup>324</sup> Neal, pp. 55–66 (p. 55, p. 59).

<sup>325</sup> Smethurst, p. 84.

As the 1970s neared, the paramilitary approach of Karenga's US Organization began to infiltrate the originally much more loosely structured BAM, particularly in New York, where the failure of BARTS made the disciplines of military structure attractive to some. The increased militant tendency brought about by this process would ultimately lead to Baraka's rejection of nationalism in 1974.<sup>326</sup> As the movement began to fragment ideologically, we can therefore see that some of the poetry in 1969 about Coltrane, rather than establishing a unified myth for a homogenous movement, instead becomes a proxy for the BAM's internal divisions. The poems become a space in which the memory of Coltrane can be co-opted to a programmatic cause.

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Don L. Lee was born in 1942 in Little Rock, Arkansas, although the family moved to Detroit, Michigan when Lee was three years old. His father deserted the family soon after, and his mother scraped a living for herself, Lee, and his sister working as a janitor, moving rubbish up and down stairs. His mother died when Lee was sixteen. In Detroit, Lee became aware of literature, and, swiftly, a voracious reader. Regina Jennings claims that it was Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, giving 'figurative essence to racism', that was the prime influence in turning Lee's mind towards writing. He enlisted for what would be three years in the military in 1960, and it was the inherent racism within the military that 'inspired his desire to plot out an independent course for himself once out of the army'. In common with most of those who became associated with the BAM, it was Malcolm X's leadership that gave Lee the template for the sort of poet he wished to be. Inspired by 'Brother Malcolm' and his 'call to

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<sup>326</sup> And would also disgust Harold Cruse: 'these oppositional elements in the Black Arts were dangerously irrational, misguided, negative, and disoriented. They represented the terrorist fringe of the nationalist wing', (quoted in Smethurst, p. 240. )

clear conscious action', Lee 'deliberately produced proactive art to create a reconstructed vision of Africa in the psychology of the so-called Negro'.<sup>327</sup>

His mid-sixties poetry was inspired by both Malcolm X and LeRoi Jones' examples, and in 1966 he published his first collection of poems, *Think Black*. His second – *Black Pride* – followed in 1968, by which time he had been appointed 'Black Writer in Residence' at Cornell University, teaching courses on black literature and advising the Afro-American Society.<sup>328</sup> Betimes, in 1967, he had met Gwendolyn Brooks – who at the time was collaborating with Oscar Brown Jr. (Max Roach's lyricist on *We Insist!*) – and who swiftly became a poetic mentor and surrogate-mother figure to Lee. 1967 was also the year in which Lee's life-long commitment to the establishment of black institutions found its first solid manifestation, as he set up – with Johari Amini (Jewel Latimore) and Carolyn Rodgers – the still-extant Third World Press in Chicago for the specific purpose of publishing young black writers.

The assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968 was later identified by Lee as the moment at which the priorities for the Black Arts Movement shifted, with the movement's work taking on 'a new urgency':

we viewed our struggle as a part of the international African liberation movement. The Congress of African People, [Karenga's] US Organization, the Black Panther Party, a serious call for Black theology, the African-centred school movement, Black Power conferences and the creation of African Liberation Day all took up critical space for discussion, evaluation, and action.<sup>329</sup>

Thereafter, his cultural ideas began to shift in the marginally different direction of Karenga's, and away from Baraka's. As Emily Lordi puts it, the key symbolic difference was that Karenga and Lee 'disavowed the blues as regressive music that appealed to white people because it expressed black resignation', whereas Baraka, as

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<sup>327</sup> Regina Jennings, 'Cheikh Anta Diop, Malcolm X, and Haki Madhubuti: Claiming and Containing Continuity in Black Language and Institutions', *Journal of Black Studies*, 33.2 (November, 2002), 126–144 (p. 135); Madhubuti, pp. 254–64 (p. 254).

<sup>328</sup> David Llorens, 'Black Don Lee', *Ebony* (March, 1969), 73–80 (p. 78).

<sup>329</sup> Madhubuti, pp. 254–64 (p. 256).



we know, 'claimed the music with a vengeance'.<sup>330</sup> However, Lee did still hold common cause with Baraka in his belief that black literature 'is pregnant with the same energy as black music and black dance'.<sup>331</sup> He wrote in 1971 that 'black music is our most advanced form of black art', thanks to its being 'one of the few mediums of expression that was open and virtually free of interferences'.<sup>332</sup> His 1969 collection *Don't Cry, Scream*, published following David Llorens' extensive profile of him in the March issue of *Ebony* magazine, sold over 75,000 copies, and made Lee a major figure of the extended BAM diaspora.<sup>333</sup>

The title poem of the collection, 'Don't Cry, Scream', addressed to John Coltrane, tells us much about the direction Lee wished the BAM to move in, and about the manner in which the symbol of Coltrane was used within the BAM's own internal debates. Lee himself said that 'very few people understand the music of John Coltrane', and the poem's opening is particularly interesting for the manner in which it introduces the saxophonist:

into the sixties  
a trane  
came/out of the fifties with a  
golden boxcar  
riding the rails  
of novation.<sup>334</sup>

For all the 'neoteric' imagery of new beginnings evoked by the rhetoric of death, murder and rebirth that suffuse the rest of Lee's poem, this opening offers another potent reminder that 'revolution' is also a *circular* process. It offers support for Iain Anderson's observation that 'Coltrane's iconic status' among the poets of the BAM derived in part from the idea that 'Coltrane rooted his music sufficiently in past jazz styles and popular show tunes – at least until 1965 – to remain familiar, yet his

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<sup>330</sup> Emily J. Lordi, *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ; London: Rutgers University Press, 2013), p. 111.

<sup>331</sup> Llorens, 73–80 (pp. 77–8).

<sup>332</sup> Don L. Lee, 'Toward a Definition: Black Poetry of the Sixties (After LeRoi Jones)', in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. by Addison Gayle, Jr. (New York: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 235–248 (p. 235).

<sup>333</sup> Madhubuti, pp. 254–64 (p. 261).

<sup>334</sup> Lee, pp. 235–248 (p. 235).

sincerity and striving (evidenced most strongly in the years and music which followed *A Love Supreme*) distanced him from jazz music's detached modernist cool'.<sup>335</sup> As we have seen, the sound and structure (such as it is) of *Ascension*, is extraordinary, yet, refining Anderson's position a little, the track owes several dues to the distinctly engaged and far from 'cool' *Free Jazz* of Coleman, as well as to the work of Cecil Taylor and Albert Ayler in the first half of the decade. Lee, however, elides Coltrane's nickname with the title of a much earlier piece of jazz: Billy Strayhorn's 1939 composition 'Take the "A" Train', one of the signature tunes of the Duke Ellington Orchestra.<sup>336</sup> The implied trane/train pun therefore gains its forward momentum 'into' the 1960s, at least in part by being imbued with the energies released by the music of Ellington, a figure who – although still touring – by 1969 represented the relatively ancient past within jazz's accelerated temporal development.

The processes through which Lee intends to mythologize Coltrane are already apparent. The pun of 'trane', and the image of his 'riding the rails of novation' not only imbues him with a projective force, but it retrospectively imposes linear narrative order onto Coltrane's musical experimentation, suggesting that they followed a pre-ordained route to a defined destination. We have seen that Coltrane's music and words did not, however, support such an imposition. As Coltrane himself put it in 1966, 'I've had a strange career. I haven't yet found out how I want to play music. Most of what's happened these last few years has been questions.'<sup>337</sup> However, Lee's elision of 'rails' with 'novation', connoting the replacement of old with new, subtly aligns Coltrane's experiments with programmatic intent.

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<sup>335</sup> Anderson, p. 119.

<sup>336</sup> Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington, 'Take the "A" Train' (1948), *Ellington Uptown* <<https://open.spotify.com/track/2aPGkeuq6vEfyIBw4oNdUV?si=x5gDxNsZR-uEpbjKWWUig>> [Accessed 10 October 2013].

<sup>337</sup> Coltrane, quoted in Leonard Feather, 'Jazz Undergoes Transition, Finds Beat Getting Bigger', in *Milwaukee Journal*, (Milwaukee, March 5, 1966), pp. 1–2 (p. 1).

That this 'trane', symbolically representing past, present and future simultaneously, comes '*into the sixties*' '*out of the fifties*' (my emphases) in Lee's poem therefore illustrates the broader point, as previously mentioned, that Coltrane's adoption of the 'new thing' gave it a distinctly African-American *legitimacy*, rooted in jazz's past. This helps us explain the historical revisionism in which Lee indulges to add to the myth, implying that Coltrane was

blowing  
a-melodics  
screeching,  
screaming,  
blasting—  
driving some away,

and creating 'music that ached. / murdered our minds (we reborn)', when Coltrane was in fact still recording tin-pan-alley covers up to 1965, and, *Ascension* aside, never entirely abandoned pre-structured short-form songs. The prefix 're', of revolution and rebirth, demands a 'before', against which it can be defined, and to which it can return for that very definition, and it is that prior historical context which Coltrane's musical experiments in *Ascension* and *Meditations* possessed more obviously than did Coleman's *Free Jazz*. The 'familiarity' of Coltrane's past offers the promise that the same past had been transformed rather than obliterated, with the comforting prospect of recoverability that such a distinction engenders.

Ironically, Coltrane's name is thus invoked to add a similar legitimacy to the retrospective re-ordering of his exploratory musical experiments into a political project that Lee performs in his poem. Under Coltrane's assumed *aegis*, 'Black' is then portrayed in Lee's poem as the *only* approvable attitude for African-American identity. The blues, in Lee's interpretation, have outlived their usefulness. All they did 'was make me cry'. It is unsurprising therefore that the rest of the poem is concerned with fitting what Coltrane did into the same aesthetic. In the poem's dedication, Lee separates his poem from a major African-American artistic precedent:

for John Coltrane / from a black poet /  
 in a basement apt. crying dry tears  
 of "you ain't gone."

By deliberately evoking the subterranean location in which Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is introduced, yet asserting 'black poet' as an identity, Lee resolves the helpless expression of confused, Du Bois-like double identity which Ellison's nomad struggles to comprehend in terms first expressed in a song made famous by Louis Armstrong: ('what did I do to be so black *and* blue?').<sup>338</sup> He thereby reasserts a determination to use cultural production as a method for the assertion of self-determining agency. In the process he also implicitly elevates Coltrane's example above that of Armstrong, who – 'giant that he is' – was regarded with ambivalence by 1960s black musicians and writers for 'including blatant Uncle Tomism in his act'.<sup>339</sup>

The address of 'Don't Cry, Scream', switching regularly between 'we', 'you' and 'i', also explicitly establishes the poem's vision of 'blackness' as confrontational and exclusionary, considerably more so than even Baraka in 'Black Art', and far removed from what Stephen Henderson described as the 'curiously unreal and wonderfully naive' post-racial nonviolent utopian vision of Martin Luther King.<sup>340</sup> Lee is very clear who is *not* welcome to this world:

to the negro cow-sissies  
 who did tchaikovsky &  
 the beatles & live in  
 split-level homes & had  
 split-level minds & babies.  
 who committed the act of  
 love with their clothes on.  
 (who hid in the bathroom to read  
 jet mag. who didn't read the chicago  
 defender because of the misspelled  
 words & had shelves of books by  
 europeans on display. untouched. who  
 hid their little richard & lightnin'  
 slim records & asked: "John who?"

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<sup>338</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 10.

<sup>339</sup> Spellman, *Four Lives*, p. x.

<sup>340</sup> Stephen E. Henderson and Mercer Cook, 'Survival Motion', in *The Militant Black Writer in Africa and the United States*, (Madison; Milwaukee; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 65–133 (p. 110).

instant hate.)

Lee poetically describes what LeRoi Jones called the 'black middle class', which 'from its inception [...] has formed almost exclusively around the proposition that it is better not to be black in a country where being black is a liability'.<sup>341</sup> Repudiating King's utopian ideology and agreeing with Baraka, Lee reifies division by class *within* the racially determined African-American 'community' as an inevitable product of the black middle class's existence and attitudes. In the poem, the claim is made that these people have excluded *themselves* from this redefined blackness: 'some' are driven away from being 'black', those who accepted that the world existed 'around established whiteness', an establishment that Lee rejects without subtlety with his word-splitting caesura.

In the manner of a preacher insisting that his congregants' salvation is conditional on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, Lee insists that the authentic 'black' must not only reject the cultural mores of 'whiteness', but must also have a relationship with John Coltrane. Under this rubric, in order to burnish his own authority by association, Lee writes a dialogue between the speaker and Coltrane into 'Don't Cry, Scream: 'Your music is like my head' the poet says in the third strophe, and while a theoretical collective is suggested in the uses of 'we', the slippage back to the first-person address and the regular interspersal of proverbial episodes from the poet's life indicate that the poem is at this point autobiographical. The final lines of the poem confirm as much:

naw brother,  
i didn't cry.  
i got high off my thoughts—  
they kept coming back,  
back to destroy me.

& that BLIND man  
i don't envy him anymore  
i can see his hear  
& hear his heard through my pores.

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<sup>341</sup> Jones, *Blues People*, p. 124.

i can see my me. It was truth you gave,  
 like a daily shit  
 it had to come.

can you scream–brother?      very  
 can you scream–brother      soft

i hear you.  
 i hear you.

and the Gods will too.

The informal intimacy and confidence of the address to the 'brother' signifies the poet as now confident in his position as the earthly medium for the God-figure's message, a position which 'i hear you' is designed to establish beyond peradventure. Coltrane's ascension to mythic deity-status is confirmed in the final line, and the poet laces this conclusion with ambiguity over whether 'brother' is Coltrane or the poets' audience, a manoeuvre designed to further his own, earthly position of shamanic gatekeeper to a communal memory of the deceased saxophonist.

This positioning is at odds with the dissolution of ego into collective that characterizes the aesthetics of *Free Jazz*, *Ascension* and *Meditations*, and indeed it seems to contradict Lee's own statement, also made in 1969, that, when forming the OBAC (Organization of Black American Culture) in Chicago, its leaders, 'after a great deal of soul-searching [...], decided to subordinate [their] egos and personalities in order to work together as a body of one in bringing about a change of self in the black communities'.<sup>342</sup> Lee's fluid use of pronouns in 'Don't Cry, Scream' furthers this sense of distancing from the collective:

music that ached.  
 murdered our minds (we reborn)  
 born into a neoteric abberation.  
 & suddenly  
 you envy the  
 BLIND man–  
 you know that he will  
 hear what you'll never  
 see.

your music is like  
 my head–nappy black/

<sup>342</sup> Don L. Lee, 'Directions for Black Writers', *The Black Scholar* 1.2 (December 1969), 53–57 (p. 52).



This is further dramatized in the relationship the poet has to the 'BLIND man', first introduced at the start of the poem, but then only reappearing in the final stanza. When he does reappear, the separation indicated by 'you', and the accompanying 'envy', in the earlier example are both gone:

& that BLIND man  
 i don't envy him anymore  
 i can see his hear  
 & hear his heard through my pores.  
 i can see my me.

Now the poet not only removes the ambiguity but also re-writes the opening of the poem to retrospectively *erase* the presence of the collective first imagined by 'we reborn'. Where the blind man was previously held at a distance, perceived to have privileged access to sounds whose reception sight corrupts, now the poet's body itself merges with those sounds. The distinctions between the blind man and the poet, previously maintained in the difference between 'i' and 'him', finally dissolves through Lee's presentation of the porous interchange between sound and body into 'i can see my me'; sight and hearing now undifferentiated. This occurs in a manner that also makes retrospective sense of the capitalization of 'BLIND': a typographical effect only appreciable visually, its capitalized reassertion enacts a parallel assertion of poetry's right now to stand in a position of equal cultural valence alongside the corporeally muted sounds of Coltrane's saxophone.

The discourses of Lee's 'God' and god-like imagery erupt into a world in which 'the black man has always been, within white Christian ideology and especially in America, the analogic figure of the Devil' – <sup>343</sup> a specifically American echo of Frantz Fanon's contention in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that 'the black man is the symbol of evil and ugliness'.<sup>344</sup> The potency of this image did not go unnoticed in black artistic circles in the 1960s, either. As Nathan Hare said, 'while the colour white symbolized purity, black stood – stands now – for evil and derogatory referents'.<sup>345</sup> Jazz too had a

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<sup>343</sup> Eric Mottram, *Blood on the Nash Ambassador: Investigations in American Culture* (London: Radius, 1989), p. 185.

<sup>344</sup> Fanon, p. 106.

<sup>345</sup> Nathan Hare, 'Brainwashing of Black Men's Minds', in *Black Fire*, ed. by Baraka and Neal, pp. 178–86 (p. 180).



particular relationship to this analogy with the devil, having been described since its arrival as a popular phenomenon in the 1910s and 1920s as 'the devil's music', thanks to its perceived rhythmic 'dangerousness' and the fact that it was largely an African-American music.<sup>346</sup> Black writers suggesting – as Lee does here – that a black jazz musician was possessed of the equivalent moral authority of the white God were, therefore, breaking a series of dominant cultural taboos; an enactment of a wider trend led by the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X, in whose cosmology 'Black replaced white [...] as the origin of good in the world, and white replaced black as the source of all evil.' Where Allah replaced Jesus or God in Muhammed's world, Coltrane did the same in these 1969 poems – evidently in Lee's, and particularly in Amos Mor's 'The Coming of John', which is a direct parody of the biblical book of Genesis.

Such an inversion suggests that the confidence which Spellman's 'Did John's Music Kill Him' portrayed as having been removed by Coltrane's death has been restored. Benston, however, suggests that, for the BAM poets, 'Coltrane's death registers a disturbance at the core of modern black culture's claim to performative power sufficient to exceed a history of containment, to transgress the systematic codes that have sought to reduce African-American culture to a vacant sign of futility'.<sup>347</sup> Lee's identification with the blind man/Coltrane suggests that the process of the poem has restored much of that lost confidence. A confidence with which, at first glance, the final lines of 'Don't Cry, Scream' also appear to be imbued:

can you scream–brother?	very
can you scream–brother?	soft

i hear you.

i hear you.

and the Gods will too.

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<sup>346</sup> Journalist Arthur Brissance summarized the extent of this sentiment in 1922: 'Psychologists and psychiatrists have joined clergymen, denouncing modern dancing and "jazz" music. "Devil's music," they call it. It is worse than that; it is ugly music.' Arthur Brissance, 'Today: Let Them Dance', *The Washington Times*, 2 March 1922, p. 1.

<sup>347</sup> Benston, p. 145.

Now – newly perceptive through eye, ear and body – the poet no longer has to 'SCREEEEEEEEEEAM' to make his voice heard. Instead, the stage instruction 'very softly', whose sense is indicated both semantically and physically in the phrase's shunting (as per Sanchez's 'a/coltrane/poem') to the position of an aside, indicates a new intimacy with the addressee. The repetitions of 'i hear you', and then the final placing of Coltrane among 'the Gods' would appear to indicate a poem and poet that has found an answer to the question of how to 'extend Coltrane's vision from the realm of music and personal transformation to the world of institutions and politics'.<sup>348</sup>

However, closer reading suggests that the 'disturbance' which Benston suggests Coltrane's death caused is still latent in these final lines. As at the beginning of the poem, an initial assumption that it is Coltrane being addressed is one that these final lines do not support. The 'you' being addressed is anonymous, and the use of the generic 'brother' opens the possibility that it is the reader her- or him-self now being addressed. Similarly, 'can you scream' is imbued with dual meaning. At one level the question concerns its addressee's ability to scream, at another it functions as a request, one which recasts 'very softly', not as a description of intimacy, but of a withdrawal from the militant confidence evident earlier in the poem. The repetition of 'i hear you', meanwhile, acts as the poet's attempt to convince himself of something for which there is little substantiation. The vast white spaces which separate the question from the assertion, and in which both iterations of 'i hear you' sit, illustrate only silence and physical absence which visually *and* aurally mock the semantics of the statement. We are, it transpires, privy to a dialogue that has only one voice.

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<sup>348</sup> A question which John Bracey recalled having been at the forefront of the minds of BAM writers approaching Coltrane as a subject, in John H. Bracey, 'Coming from a Black Thing: Remembering the Black Arts Movement', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 650–55 (p. 653).

The very final line once again uses ambiguity both to enhance and simultaneously destabilize the sense of security and authority that has been evident in the majority of the poem hitherto. Enhancement comes from reading 'the Gods will', as either a straightforward assertion that the addressee's voice will be heard by the Gods, or an authorial statement that in addition to the sound of the 'brother' he hears the Gods also. Destabilization however comes in the sense that these Gods will hear only the same absence that surrounds the narrative voice, and in that Coltrane's earthly death is confirmed as a complete ending of his usefulness to the Black Arts Movement's cause. One reason, therefore, for the poet's determination to recover and refigure Coltrane with the surety of the 'scream' is, therefore, to mask the ever-present fear caused by this absence.

The suffusion of ambiguity throughout the poem's images and effects also establishes 'Don't Cry, Scream', as a heterodox space in which, allied with the thematic emphasis on rebirth, the poet, indebted to the saxophonist whose music 'murdered in our minds' for his own metaphorical death ('done caught me a trane') and subsequent rebirth, can attempt to perform the same process on the memory of Coltrane – in Lee's case, co-opting that memory to the programmatic desires of the Chicago BAM. The irony is that Coltrane, whose music – as evinced most clearly in the progression from *A Love Supreme* through *Ascension* and *Mediations* – was engaged in a process of continual self-rediscovery. His was not a project with a defined end, it was a transcendental commitment to the uncertainties of process.

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Inextricably linked with Coltrane's conversion into an icon are notions of masculinity. This is abundantly evident in the way Lee's poem constructs Coltrane. The saxophonist did not simply destroy the 'illusions of manhood' that came with the blues, he also 'left man images'. Lee's *own* images (en)gender the now exemplary figure of 'Trane' with a particularly aggressive form of muscular masculinity. The list

of sexualized adjectives in the opening stanza, 'blowin'', 'blasting', 'driving' confirm a sense of propulsive energy begun by the Trane/train image, and the effects attributed to that energy also illustrate a belief in the affirmative power of creative destruction; Trane first 'driving some' away, before his music 'murdered our minds'. The creation/destruction pivot is even performed in an imagistic rendering of Coltrane's personality: 'he was a life-style of man-makers & annihilator of attache case carriers.'

This emphasis on masculinity was once more of a part with Karenga and the US Organization's *Kawaida* philosophy. Unlike the New York grouping, US held that 'black women should be "complementary" to, rather than equal with, men'. In New York, Jayne Cortez had been a beneficiary of the (relatively) egalitarian approach to female participation that the BAM there permitted in its early years. Smethurst writes at length about the complex effect that masculinist and homophobic attitudes had within the Movement nationally, and, with the necessary caveat that both strains made their presence felt, concludes that 'one would have to go back to the early New Negro renaissance to find a major black cultural movement in which women played such leading roles prior to the 1970s'.<sup>349</sup> Cortez's conception of the type of blackness that John Coltrane could usefully be said to represent, which is explicated in her own 1969 poem 'How Long has Trane Been Gone', clearly engages in dialogue with Lee's. It establishes key points of aesthetic difference between the two, and in the manner in which Coltrane's memory would be drawn, which illuminate the aggregation of differences that destabilized the BAM as the sixties drew to an end.

An immediate point of difference can be found in the two titles. Whereas Lee issued an instruction, brooking no dissent, Cortez asks an open-ended question. More significantly, that question can be read as a rejoinder to Lee's two statements on the same subject, couched in linguistically similar fashion: 'Trane done went'. The essentialist leanings of Lee's rhetoric are, literally, questioned, and, as it transpires,

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<sup>349</sup> Smethurst, p. 85.

no definitive answer is provided by Cortez. Thus the reader, placed into a problematized relationship with Lee's poem by the poet's ambiguous address, is here re-established as a central agent of the text's productions of meaning.

Cortez also refers early to 'the musicians', plural, and then, as the poem progresses, lists jazz musicians past and present. John Coltrane is not here alone, as in many of the poems responding to him. Instead here also can be found 'Bird'/'Parker', 'Ornette' 'Pharoah', 'Holiday', and, crucially, *all* of these are proposed as people in whose image a black nation could still be built: 'Parker City--Coltrane City--Ornette City / Pharoah City living on Holiday street next to / James Brown park in the state of Malcolm.' The mention of Brown nods to the passing of jazz as the predominant popular African-American art form and its usurpation by the funk and soul that Brown pioneered, while all are included as the true heirs to the ideas of Malcolm X, whose position is pre-eminent in Cortez's vision.

'How Long' also emphasizes blackness as a homogenous *overall* cause, without any of the ambiguities of address which promote the poetic ego that can be found in 'Don't Cry, Scream'. Cortez's is a poem addressed to 'black brother', 'black sister', 'black children', and, ultimately, 'black people'. Yet Coltrane is positioned within the poem as an outsider, a man in his own orbit. In the sixth stanza Cortez suggests that black musicians are 'Giving you & your children a history / but what do you care about / history—Black History / and John Coltrane'. Far from Lee's presentation of Coltrane as an arriviste from the 1950s, Cortez positions Coltrane, both figuratively and literally within the *mise-en-page*, as a figure outside history, even the 'Black History' through whose capitalization authority and authorial preferment is signified. Coltrane is thereby transfigured into a symbol unrooted from the weight of historical experience, and thus open to be imagined and reimagined without tethering referents, something that his largely apolitical public pronouncements left space for. Here, as in all the post-mortem Coltrane poems, the figure of Coltrane becomes a

fiercely contested poetic space, a site of exploration of the limits of textual memory-recovery and transformation.

Simultaneously, however, Cortez clearly desires to present African-American cultural history (much as Baraka did) as distinct, a point made clear in her capitalization of 'Black History' and by the fact that it is named as such at all. The history of the African-American is here related to the history of others, but also is possessed of its own crucial, undeniable differences. This nexus of relationships to the past – rather than a single, linear relationship imagined by Lee's 'rails of novation' – is Cortez's key to establishing a new position of political agency in both the present and future for Blacks in America.

Tonally, 'How Long has Trane Been Gone' also contrasts with the aggression of Lee's. Indeed, it is a striking feature of Cortez's poem that none of the visual indicators of such harsh, shrill sounds are present at all, even as something to be denied. There is no capitalization, no use of exclamations in speech or punctuation. Even the *mise-en-page* is a model of visual order, something especially notable in comparison with the poems around it in Cortez's own *Pissstained Stairs* collection and with the Coltrane poems of Sanchez, Lee and Joans.

The one stanza of 'How Long' that does bring Coltrane's sound to the fore clarifies Cortez's reading of that sound. Rather than a screaming, wailing anger, we hear soft 'palpitating love notes'. 'Love' is softened even more by 'palpitating', which bespeaks a weightless, borderline *disembodied* quality far removed from the quasi-primal earthing of the 'scream'. Then a few lines later we are told of 'His music resounding discovery / signed Always / John Coltrane,' which once again points to a movement *out* of the straitjacketed circumstances of the present day, facilitated by the creative act of discovery, which Coltrane embodied through improvisation and innovation in his music. The 'discovery' that was sounded and 'resounded' in Coltrane's music is what made it possible for his sound to immediately signify that he was 'John

Coltrane'. Coltrane's self-identity was constantly shifting, which is the only thing, Cortez says here, that enabled it to *be* at all. His voice was not a historically fixed point, it 'palpitated' – a sound permanently in flux.

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We can glean further insight into Cortez's attitude to Coltrane's legacy through the recording of 'How Long has Trane Been Gone' that appeared originally on *Celebrations and Solitudes* (1974). This calls into question the usefulness of categorization itself – blurring the distinction between poetry and music – and allies Cortez's aesthetic approach closer still to the Baraka/Neal/Spellman way of thinking as distinct from the Lee/Karenga method.<sup>350</sup> The bass accompaniment of Richard Davis uses *glissandi* to slide between notes throughout (the first of many instances occurring at 0:15), another instance of aural revolt against the even-tempered scale which by this point (1974) had become synonymous among the *avant-garde* with the limitations imposed by European music theory upon freer-thinking musicians of all backgrounds. Indeed, within experimental music in the 20th Century the glissando had become something of a *casus belli* for those seeking to transcend arbitrary artistic limitations. The glissando was 'the site and product of intense negotiations between sound and musical sound', according to Douglas Kahn.<sup>351</sup> In 'Trane', Davis, by conjoining his use of glissandi with Cortez's words, extends the discourse of those negotiations to include vocalized words and their signified meanings.

The interaction between music and words in the recording of 'Trane' has further implications for the sign-systems of both. Despite the frequent sliding, Davis' bass still regularly returns to a pitched low E<sub>2</sub>. The note therefore serves, both explicitly *and* implicitly, as a pedal-note drone throughout the piece. This effectively locates the

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<sup>350</sup> Jayne Cortez, 'How Long has Trane Been Gone', *Celebrations and Solitudes*, Jayne Cortez and Richard Davis (Strata East, SES-7421, 1974) [on LP].

<sup>351</sup> Kahn, p. 83

music within an auditory collage of a multiplicity of referentially signified styles – the drone is a feature of Indian raga, the pedal note a trope in European classical polyphony since the renaissance. Somewhat closer to home for Cortez and Davis, the implication of a chord without its actually being voiced was a key part of the innovations wrought within jazz since 1955.<sup>352</sup> Through the use of this repeated note the music therefore becomes intrinsically overdetermined – so much is signified that it becomes impossible for anything to be signified, other than the self-reflexively didactic illustration of the non-referential nature of the exercise.

Another auditory disturbance of the sign-system comes from the fact that Cortez says 'B flat' in her unpitched speech-voice rather than singing a B flat in a pitched singing voice. This draws attention back to the possibilities of difference that proliferate within the semiotic sign system, and to how dependent those signs are on their medium of transmission. Performed in this way, the 'note' B Flat is simultaneously present (as a sign) and absent (as a signified), voiced (in name) and unvoiced (in intonation). This presence/absence, troubling the stability of the sign-system itself, places the signified into a constellation of uncertainty in which it is free to be reconfigured into a non-familiar position.<sup>353</sup> The consequence of this in terms of the written text is to disrupt the representational function of the text and the musical score as a sign system, thus further foregrounding the inherent instability of signification itself.

Preserved on record on 1974's *Celebrations and Solitudes*, Cortez's reading of 'How Long' is deeply bluesy. The syllabic tempo is slow, controlled. Her consonants are crisp, and an audible enjoyment in the expressive potential of vowel sounds can be heard in her elongated emphases of 'Coltrane', and the repeated 'long's of the title refrain. Borrowed clearly from the blues and from oral culture, are the mnemonic

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<sup>352</sup> DeVeaux, p. 67

<sup>353</sup> Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things : An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp. 3–18.



repetitions of that title or fragments of it which populate the text of the poem ('How long how long has that Trane been gone'), of Coltrane's name, the enjambment of repetitions, both direct and in half mirrorings, such as 'Rip those dead people off your walls Black people / black people whose walls' – all of which are the equivalent of riffs above which the 'melodic' content of the poem's message can develop. The idiomatic effects of this only really become apparent in oral performance.

Indeed, when heard in performance, Cortez's repetitions of the title act effectively as recapitulations of the 'head'. The statement around which the band — or the other words in the poem — can improvise and move in different directions, but to which they can and do return, underpinning the whole work as a frame. 'John Coltrane' serves a similar purpose, and so rather than a totemic icon, Coltrane is used instead as a trope, a rhythmic device and reference point enabling the 'you' to whom the poem is addressed to improvise their own identity *against* that reference point, but not – as in so many Coltrane poems – in doomed comparison to it.

In performance, therefore, the poem is revealed, even more than in its written form, to be a hybrid space, a melting pot of influences fused into a new set of discourses. Vocalized performance also hybridizes and multiplies the dialectics of the original text, just as improvised music does. Cortez's reading proves as much, coming even as it does from the controlled conditions of the recording studio, resulting in a fairly faithful correlation between the text and the performance. 'Bird' in the text becomes 'Charlie Parker' in the performance; the specificity of 'KGFJ' in the written document (a Los Angeles radio station which became one of the first in America to broadcast 24-hours a day in 1928), is opened out and generalized to 'stations' in the reading. Although these are minor variations they are sufficient to illustrate the poet's knowledge that the poem is not an anchored object doomed to be infinitely repeated. Instead, it is a starting point for vocalized, aural reinventions.

Cortez, therefore, makes clear the *process* through which a new African-American identity could, and should be forged. Unlike Lee, however, she leaves the *outcome* of that process unstated and fluid. Rather than fixate on Coltrane as an illustration of either a final destination or an original starting point, in Cortez's conception, the African-American could use the discursive fluidities of Coltrane's musical explorations as a model through which identity could be recognized as a continual re-production of self through a constant realization of difference. 'Discovery' for Cortez is not the end, it is the base point for more of the same, a note to be 'resounded', but the manner of that sounding is left open to plural possibilities, just as Baraka's offering the choice of 'silent' or 'LOUD' to his own 'black people' at the end of 'Black Art'. This commitment to plurality echoes back to the earlier line in 'How Long' in which Cortez describes 'a lost-found nation / within a nation'. Lee-like essentialist readings would posit that the 'Black Nation' is the destination, that is the final moment in the move from lost to found. However, set within the brackets of Coltrane's music resounding discovery, the image itself becomes one of continual process. Connected in two directions by the presence of the hyphen, lost and found are engaged in a constant back-and-forth.

*Ascension* and *Mediations* confirm that Coltrane, too, was concerned with an ongoing process of spiritual self-discovery via the improvisatory imperative of experimentation, with no fixed end in sight. Lee's poem drew on the processual emphasis, but saw in Coltrane's use of it an example that could be appropriated. What the intertextual conversations between 'How Long has Trane Been Gone' and 'Don't Cry, Scream', tell us most of all about the 1969 Coltrane poem is that Coltrane's music was to become of almost incidental relevance when compared to the mythological appropriation of his memory.

Indeed, the contest for control of Coltrane's memory, enacted in microcosm in Lee and Cortez's poems, is indicative of what Audre Lorde observed fifteen years later, that, in the 1960s, 'the awakened anger of the Black community was often expressed,

not vertically against the corruption of power and true sources of control over our lives, but horizontally towards those closest to us who mirrored our own impotence'. In a deep irony, the fixation upon Coltrane that began in 1969 can be seen to represent the point at which the highly pluralized, at times deeply contradictory heterodox artistic expression which had been admitted into the Black Arts Movement – and which we have seen some of in this thesis – began to be reduced to a simpler, more categorical, and consequently less productive, approach.

Evidence for this can be seen in as much as Lee's would go on to be the more familiar path taken by poets responding to Coltrane than would that of Cortez, symbolizing the end of the domination of the Movement's aesthetic direction by Baraka and the New York-based BAM poets. The results being, ironically, as James Hall said, that as Coltrane pursued the path of "total freedom," other artists came along to relocate him in history, converting that multifaceted commitment to ever-proliferating and multiple forms of self-discovery into a singular common denominator, 'ostensibly qualifying that romantic quest.'<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Hall, p. 112.

## Coda: 'So What?'

In November 1970, Albert Ayler was found dead, presumed drowned (though no autopsy was performed), in the Hudson River.<sup>355</sup> After Eric Dolphy in 1964 and Coltrane in 1967, the death of Ayler – whose 1965 album *Spiritual Unity* had taken the stylistic experimentations of *Free Jazz* and *Ascension* still further – is the most symbolically definitive of several events which took place from 1966 to 1970 which marked the symbolic end not only to the free jazz era, but in some ways to jazz as a coherent musical entity at all. The iconic Blue Note record label, responsible for many of the finest recordings in jazz, and some of its greatest album artwork, was sold to Liberty Records in 1966. Coltrane's death followed in 1967. Saxophonist Jackie McLean, an alumnus of Charlie Parker's groups, whose own 1959 album *New Soil* had begun to broach free form at the same time as Ornette Coleman, and whose decision to add Coleman to play on 1967's *New and Old Gospel* had legitimized the new style for many black listeners, had since turned back to more conventional forms.<sup>356</sup>

Perhaps the most significant musical signal of jazz's supersession as a cultural phenomenon in black music took place on 30 July 1969, when Columbia Records released *In a Silent Way*.<sup>357</sup> It was arguably the first jazz-rock 'fusion' record, preceding the even fuller embrace of electronica and rock that Davis would make in *Bitches Brew* a year later, and which would prompt Herbie Hancock to do the same

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<sup>355</sup> Christopher Meeder, *Jazz: The Basics* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008), p. 184; Albert Ayler, *Spiritual Unity* (1965), Albert Ayler Trio, TKCZ-79101, 1993) [on CD].

Ekkehard Jost wrote, of *Spiritual Unity*, that 'in no group of this time is so little heard of a steady beat [...] The absolute rhythmic freedom frequently leads to action on three independent rhythmic planes'. (Jost, p. 128.)

<sup>356</sup> Jackie McLean, *New and Old Gospel* (1968), Jackie McLean *et al.* (Blue Note, BST-84262, 2007) [on CD].

<sup>357</sup> Miles Davis, *In a Silent Way* (1969), Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

<[https://open.spotify.com/album/0Hs3BomCdwIWRhgT57x22T?si=4LHbsrA8Qf2No7mrW5c6\\_g](https://open.spotify.com/album/0Hs3BomCdwIWRhgT57x22T?si=4LHbsrA8Qf2No7mrW5c6_g)> [Accessed 23 January 2018].

with *Headhunters* (1973), and Weather Report with *Heavy Weather* (1977).<sup>358</sup> If Coltrane's death in 1967 took away from jazz the last of its great innovators, *In a Silent Way* marked the moment that Davis – the one remaining commercial jazz 'star'; a bop alumnus of the Charlie Parker Quintet; innovator in the cool, hard-bop and modal forms of jazz;<sup>359</sup> title artist on *Kind of Blue* and the only African-American jazz musician who enjoyed even greater commercial success than Coltrane in the late 1950s and 1960s – turned away from swing-based music. Davis's embrace of not merely the amplified instrumentation of rock music, but also its style, symbolized the end of jazz as an idiom in which aesthetic experimentation, allied with cultural penetration, released the energies of radical African-American political agency. The already extant Funk and Motown, then rap, and later hip-hop, would take over that role.

Davis had never embraced the 'free' style which was begun by Coleman, and continued by Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Eric Dolphy, and, latterly, John Coltrane. Indeed, in his autobiography he was arrogantly dismissive of them: 'it was just a lot of notes being played for notes' sake'.<sup>360</sup> Inspired by James Brown, Jimi Hendrix and Sly and the Family Stone – and noting the commercial success that they and other Motown, rock and pop musicians were enjoying – Davis concluded that jazz was 'withering on the vine', and decided to take his version of the music to a much more rock-oriented place.<sup>361</sup> The instrumentation of *In a Silent Way*, featuring electric bass and electric guitar, made its own statement to that effect. The music even more so.

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<sup>358</sup> Herbie Hancock, *Head Hunters* (1973)

<<https://open.spotify.com/album/5fmIolILp5NAAtNYiRPjhzA?si=J3h9VYFiRm61dI7sxGboOw>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]; Weather Report, *Heavy Weather* (1977)

<[https://open.spotify.com/album/2S2ujEbkeFUblmiNjfl1e0f?si=8X5KzkvZQpe\\_dY9bQU4VxA](https://open.spotify.com/album/2S2ujEbkeFUblmiNjfl1e0f?si=8X5KzkvZQpe_dY9bQU4VxA)> [Accessed 27 November 2017].

<sup>359</sup> Cf. Waldo E Martin Jr., 'Miles Davis and the 1960s Avant-Garde', in *Miles Davis and American Culture*, ed. by Gerald Early (St. Louis, MO: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2001), pp. 107–16

<sup>360</sup> Davis and Troupe, p. 251.

<sup>361</sup> Davis and Troupe, pp. 291–297 (p. 297).

Both tracks on the album sit on a single pedal point out of which all else evolves. The harmony is therefore entirely fixed and unmoving throughout. As Davis said of Joe Zawinul's title track, 'we changed what Joe had written on "In a Silent Way," cut down all the chords [...] I wanted to make the sound more like rock'.<sup>362</sup> The fact that the track and its melody were written at all marks a significant departure from the jazz idiom. Even the title of the opening track, 'Shhh/Peaceful' could be read as a censorious message of enforced passivity to the younger generation. Built around a single bass pedal-point on D<sub>1</sub> and D<sub>2</sub>, the music is hypnotically repetitive. The polyphonic, apparently disorderly fragmentation of collective improvisation is eschewed in favour of long solos accompanied by an unchanging rhythm section. Davis' solo, played in the understated, breathy fashion that had been his signature style since *Kind of Blue*, makes only one noticeably overt aural reference to standard jazz practice in the occasional insertion of flattened seconds (Eb<sub>4</sub>), as from 4:24 to 4:28.

His rhythm section, meanwhile, operates entirely in the rock idiom, with straight quavers and rigidly repetitive metronomic patterns in common-time (4/4), and phrases with minimal chord changes on both tracks of the album. Tony Williams' drumming returns to the strict maintenance of clearly defined tempo which, as we have seen, the most innovative jazz drummers of the sixties abandoned. On 'Shhh / Peaceful', Williams exclusively and constantly plays semiquavers on the hi-hat, opening them with his pedal on beats 2 and 4 and closing them on 1 and 3, the style that would later be adopted by Alex Acuña on Weather Report's 'Birdland'.<sup>363</sup> On the track 'In a Silent Way', continuous quavers on the hi-hats are supplemented by crotchet rim-clicks on the edge of the snare. It comes as a considerable shock when, for forty-two seconds beginning at 4:24, Williams opens out onto the ride cymbal and the snare proper, playing non-repetitively. The original pattern is reasserted at 13:52,

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<sup>362</sup> Davis and Troupe, p. 296.

<sup>363</sup> Cf. Joe Zawinul and Weather Report, 'Birdland' (1977, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. <<https://open.spotify.com/track/5PHNev6toiQRao7OnfFXMp?si=aRddGXO0SMuIGLr3EEu25A>> [Accessed January 25 2018]).

however. Any sense of swing is entirely absent, too. The 4/4-time signature is marked in duple-time divisions, with none of the triple-time feel characteristic of jazz.

On bass, Dave Holland plays only two notes of consequence on 'Shhh / Peaceful': the  $D_{1/2}$  pedal, and the dominant  $A_1$  that leads into it. The conventional dominant-tonic resolution in evidence here is another turn away from the innovations of the jazz harmonic developments in the preceding two decades in favour of the altogether more conventional and simple structures established in the blues. While Holland has more to do on 'In a Silent Way', the primary function his bass fulfils is, once again, to establish a continuous pedal point, this time on  $Eb_1$ . Relative variety comes with a fourteen-note riff, played in unison with the guitar of John McLaughlin from 8:19–9:05, 10:28–11:39 and 12:40–13:52. As with Williams however, there is no freedom at play on either track. The bass and drums are emasculated, placed back in the highly organized time-keeping role from which those in free jazz had been liberated.

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The Black Arts Movement tarried a little longer, its end being seen to have been confirmed by Baraka's rejection of nationalism in favour of Third World Socialism in 1974.<sup>364</sup> Baraka left believing that the movement as he had established it had been compromised from within by the more violently extreme nationalist position of Maulana Karenga, as discussed in the preceding chapter.<sup>365</sup> Jay Wright's 'End of an Ethnic Dream' gives a later perspective on the effect of this fallout.<sup>366</sup> Written in 1987 by a poet from New Mexico, the poem falls well outside this study's temporal and geographical boundaries. It is, however, useful in that it describes a sense of

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<sup>364</sup> Harris, in Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader* pp. xxviii–xxx

<sup>365</sup> Reginald Martin, 'Black Arts Movement', in *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*, ed. by Cathy N. Davidson, Linda Wagner-Martin, and Elizabeth Ammons (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 117–22 (p. 122).

<sup>366</sup> Jay Wright, 'The End of an Ethnic Dream', in *The Second Set: The Jazz Poetry Anthology, Volume 2*, ed. by Feinstein and Komunyakaa, p. 187

frustration at the perceived post-1974 waste of the creative critical interventions which the Black Arts Movement and the jazz musicians of the sixties had unleashed. Writing from an autobiographical perspective, Wright chastises himself in order to lament the failure of all to sustain the radical, culturally politicized momentum of the sixties:

Cigarettes in my mouth  
to puncture the blisters in my brain  
My bass a fine piece of furniture.  
My fingers, soft, too soft to rattle  
rafters in second-rate halls.  
The harmonies I could never learn  
stick in Ayler's screams.  
An African chant chokes us. My image shot.

Wright's imagery is laced with a cumulative sense of ennui and decay. Objects such as the bass – once energized by a marriage of design and purpose manifest in the creation of radical sounds – have been reduced to dormancy. Where the innovators of the various jazz styles from c.1910–1967 acknowledge the aesthetics of their predecessor, but also saw them as ripe for overturning, now, ironically, their example – embodied by Ayler in Wright's poem – suffocates any such potential. The hard-edged late-sixties rhetoric of Baraka and the original edginess of the sound of Ayler's saxophone have been fatally softened. Languid long vowel sounds, as in 'harmonies', and 'furniture', are bookended by equally soft consonants, the percussive attack characteristic of BAM poetry now all but liquidated. Even the monosyllables Wright uses: 'days', 'heat', 'love', are divorced from any sense of performative purpose, their deployment within such a context serving to stall rather than generate any sense of momentum.

The non-meeting of Jayne Cortez's 1969 demands in 'How Long has Trane Been Gone' for the establishment of 'Parker City', 'Pharoah city' in the 'state of Malcolm' are melancholically echoed by Wright:

This could have been my town,  
with light strings that could stand a tempo.  
Now,



it's the end  
of an ethnic dream

That end is manifest in images of the ephemera of the late twentieth-century cityscape:

coffee shops, bars,  
natural tonsorial parlors,  
plays, streets,  
pamphlets, days, sun,  
heat, love, anger,  
politics, days, and sun.

Tucking 'politics' away at the end of a long list emphasizes its removal from the ongoing daily concerns of the city. The energetic pursuit of positive political change that motivated the Black Arts Poets and the African-American jazz players, and which was transmitted in their work, is now an incidental part of a world constructed through the bland and generic. The poem's resigned conclusion recapitulates its opening image in order to admit that the ossification of the radical mindset is irrevocable:

It is the end of an ethnic dream  
My bass is a fine piece of furniture.  
My brain blistered.

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Max Roach's turn away from commercial concerns and towards active participation through music in the history and politics of civil rights was the starting point for a decade in which the innovations of jazz, even when performed by those – such as John Coltrane – who avoided political expressions, ceased to be an exceptional instance of a culturally distinctive and penetrative African-American artistic assertion. The poets of the BAM were able to internalize jazz's example, and to create work in their idiom that expressed a similar cultural distinctiveness. No longer was the music an escapist fantasy, hidden underground, in the mode of Ralph Ellison's

eponymous *Invisible Man*.<sup>367</sup> Instead, with Baraka's *Blues People* as a stimulus, the literary vanguard were enabled, by the sounds of the jazz vanguard, to produce new work that, in its energetic transformation of form, rhetorical distinctiveness and engagement with audience and process, could affirm a positive African-American aesthetic, rather than merely negating others' previous productions. As Harold Cruse heard from one of the BARTS' first students: 'he said, in effect, that *a black theater should be about black people, with black people, for black people, and only black people*'.<sup>368</sup>

The poets then responded by using certain forms that are explicit and latent in the jazz of the era. Of the explicit forms, the improviser's ability to be the music they performed in the moment of its composition – body, mind and art unified – was crucial. As Alfred Willener identified: 'one of the most important aspects of free jazz lies in the fact that it is above all an ever-changing, immediate exteriorization of life; it is therefore what, at a particular moment, those who are creating it (musicians and audience in their reciprocal relations) are'.<sup>369</sup> The identification of the mutually *involved* relationship between the audience and the performer in the creation of the work and of its meanings is one of the most crucial of the implicit forms in jazz that the poets then synthesized in their own work. As Baraka put it retrospectively, one of the BAM's aims was for, 'An art that is mass oriented that will come out the libraries and stomp.' Not only was the work to be active ('poems that kill'), but the people who read it, and listened to it, were to be, too.

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<sup>367</sup> As Rolland Snellings/Askia Touré expressed it in a poem, 'I'm not an Invisible Man. My song, like rain, / is universal. I'm not an Invisible Man, / my anger stalks on ghetto-legs', quoted in Rolland Snellings/Askia Touré, 'Poetry and Black Liberation', in *SOS*, ed. by Bracey, Sanchez and Smethurst, pp. 25–30 (p. 26).

<sup>368</sup> Cruse, pp. 39–45 (p. 41). Original emphasis.

<sup>369</sup> Willener, p. 234.

Baraka's 1979 poem 'AM/Trak' looks back on the Black Arts Movement and the late sixties with much more positive cultural confidence than Wright would eight years later.<sup>370</sup> The *telos* of the Movement is re-stated in AM/Trak's fifth section:

recognize the truth  
recognize reality

Jazz had shown throughout its short history that it could also, if culturally applied, liberate. The ways in which Coleman, Coltrane, Roach and others utilized given forms, created new ones and transformed old ones gave a route through which the cultural over-determination of identity from without, 'the truth' and 'reality', imposed upon African-Americans, were to be 'recognized', but also, crucially, 're-recognized'. What emerged was not fixed and unalterable, but unstable and fluid. By exploiting the power of language, the poetic form became a heteroglossic field in which troubled signification in turn became a means of potentializing cultural and political agency for a domestically colonized people. The jazz avant-garde and the BAM poets enabled, to adapt from Brueghel, an African-American carnival to fight – and for a short time even to *beat* – Lent.

That fight was enacted through the creation of new spaces into which disarticulated identity could begin to potentialize anew. Walter Benjamin writes that 'the state of emergency in which we [the oppressed] live is not the exception but the rule'<sup>371</sup> – a statement whose double meaning is elucidated by Homi Bhabha: 'the state of emergency is also always a state of *emergence*'.<sup>372</sup> Challenging, adapting and transforming; jazz and the BAM enabled a new cultural form to come into being – emerging, 'trying to be born' as a reaction against the cultural impositions of white society. Baraka's belief in the Black Arts' two totemic figures was undimmed in 'Am/Trak': 'Trane was the spirit of the 60s / He was Malcolm X in New Super Bop

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<sup>370</sup> Amiri Baraka, 'Am/Trak', in *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. by William J. Harris (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), pp. 267–72. As well as punning the name of the American railroad company, 'AM' stands for 'After Malcolm'.

<sup>371</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. and ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 263–75

<sup>372</sup> Homi Bhabha, from the foreword to Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. xxiv.

fire'. Perhaps. Yet one thing that has become apparent through looking closely at the dialectical syntheses at work in the jazz and poetry of the era is that there are far greater subtleties at play than can be found in a view of either form which focusses exclusively on militant separatist rhetoric. That militant stance disguises an overall methodology that we have seen is much more pluralistic and hybridized. The new forms which emerged over the course of the 1960s did not use the 'others' against which they reacted as a means solely for oppositional definition, but in a multiplicity of ways, as a fundamental part of their own construction.

This thesis makes no claims for canonization. There is a significant amount of further work that could be done in this area. As was acknowledged in the introduction, there are musicians and poets whose work is of every bit as much worth and interest to those herein that space simply precludes from this study. The music of Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp and Sun Ra could, for example, easily augment that of Roach, Coleman and Coltrane, while Michael Harper, Askia Touré, David Henderson, Henri Dumas, Larry Neal and Carolyn Rogers, among many others, could supplement Baraka, Sanchez, Cortez, Jonas, Lee and Spellman. Of those poets who are discussed here, a glaring gap lies awaiting full-length monographs of all of Sanchez, Cortez and Spellman's lives and their poetry from both the sixties and beyond.

However, this study does illustrate that using both jazz and the poetry of the BAM to release new understandings of both art-forms implicitly sheds light on a set of cultural practices in the Black Arts Movement – practices which are otherwise difficult to map – and illuminates a multiplicity of sub-cultural discourses that potentialize new fluid cultural identities in dialectical tension with sanctioned dominant forms. The effects of the relationship between the jazz and the poetry of this time can best ultimately be summarized by setting the words of the Baraka who reflected *post-factum* in 'AM/Trak' against those of the Baraka who was defining the new movement in 'Black Art'. Rather than creating music or poems that literally 'kill'

other forms, the musicians and poets of 1960-1969 enabled the emergence of a new art that came into being by a synthesis of new and old; resulting in music and poetry that could simply 'be reality alive in motion in flame to change (You knew it!) / to change!!'.

## Appendix: Poems and Lyrics

### Max Roach, Oscar Brown, Jr.: Driva Man

Driva man, he made a life  
 But the Mamie ain't his wife  
 Choppin' cotton, don't be slow  
 Better finish out your row  
 Keep a-movin' with that plow  
 Driva man'll show yer how  
 Get to work and root that stump  
 Driva man'll make you jump  
 Better make your hammer ring  
 Driva man'll start to swing  
 Ain't but two things on my mind  
 Driva man and quittin' time

Driva man the kinda boss  
 Ride a man and lead a horse  
 When his cat o' nine tail fly  
 You'd be happy just to die  
 Runaway and you'll be found  
 By his big old red bone hound  
 Pater oller, bring ya back  
 Make ya sorry you is black  
 Driva man he made a life  
 But the Mamie ain't his wife  
 Ain't but two things on my mind  
 Driva man and quittin' time

Driva man the kinda boss  
 Ride a man and lead a horse  
 When his cat o' nine tail fly  
 You'd be happy just to die  
 Runaway and you'll be found  
 By his big old red bone hound  
 Pater oller, bring ya back  
 Make ya sorry you is black  
 Driva man he made a life  
 But the Mamie ain't his wife  
 Ain't but two things on my mind  
 Driva man and quittin' time

## Max Roach, Oscar Brown, Jr.: Freedom Day

Whisper, listen, whisper, listen. Whispers say we're free.  
Rumors flyin', must be lyin'. Can it really be?  
Can't conceive it, can't believe it. But that's what they say.  
Slave no longer, slave no longer, this is Freedom Day.

Freedom Day, it's Freedom Day. Throw those shackle n' chains away.  
Everybody that I see says it's really true, we're free.

Whisper, listen, whisper, listen. Whispers say we're free.  
Rumors flyin', must be lyin'. Can it really be?  
Can't conceive it, don't believe it. But that's what they say.  
Slave no longer, slave no longer, this is Freedom Day.

Freedom Day, it's Freedom Day. Throw those shackle n' chains away.  
Everybody that I see says it's really true, we're free.

Freedom Day, it's Freedom Day. Free to vote and earn my pay.  
Dim my path and hide the way. But we've made it Freedom Day.

## Amiri Baraka: Black Art

Poems are bullshit unless they are  
 teeth or trees or lemons piled  
 on a step. Or black ladies dying  
 of men leaving nickel hearts  
 beating them down. Fuck poems  
 and they are useful, wd they shoot  
 come at you, love what you are,  
 breathe like wrestlers, or shudder  
 strangely after pissing. We want live  
 words of the hip world live flesh &  
 coursing blood. Hearts Brains  
 Souls splintering fire. We want poems  
 like fists beating niggers out of Jocks  
 or dagger poems in the slimy bellies  
 of the owner-jews. Black poems to  
 smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches  
 whose brains are red jelly stuck  
 between 'lizabeth taylor's toes. Stinking  
 Whores! we want "poems that kill."  
 Assassin poems, Poems that shoot  
 guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys  
 and take their weapons leaving them dead  
 with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland. Knockoff  
 poems for dope selling wops or slick halfwhite  
 politicians Airplane poems, rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr  
 rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . .tuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuh  
 . . .rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . . Setting fire and death to  
 whities ass. Look at the Liberal  
 Spokesman for the jews clutch his throat  
 & puke himself into eternity . . . rrrrrrrr  
 There's a negroleader pinned to  
 a bar stool in Sardi's eyeballs melting  
 in hot flame Another negroleader  
 on the steps of the white house one  
 kneeling between the sheriff's thighs  
 negotiating coolly for his people.

Aggh . . . stumbles across the room . . .  
 Put it on him, poem. Strip him naked  
 to the world! Another bad poem cracking  
 steel knuckles in a jewlady's mouth  
 Poem scream poison gas on beasts in green berets  
 Clean out the world for virtue and love,  
 Let there be no love poems written  
 until love can exist freely and  
 cleanly. Let Black people understand  
 that they are the lovers and the sons  
 of warriors and sons  
 of warriors Are poems & poets &  
 all the loveliness here in the world



We want a black poem. And a  
Black World.  
Let the world be a Black Poem  
And Let All Black People Speak This Poem  
Silently  
or LOUD



TEAROUT THEY eyes.  
 STRETCH they necks  
 till no mo  
 raunchy sounds of MURDER/  
 POVERTY/STARVATION  
 come from they  
 throats.

screeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeCHHHHHHHHHHHH  
 SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEECHHHHHHHHHHHH  
 screeEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE  
 EECCCCHHHHHHHH  
 SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE  
 EEEEECHHHHHHHHHHHH  
 BRING IN THE WITE/LIBERALS ON THE SOLO  
 SOUND OF YO/FIGHT IS MY FIGHT  
 SAXOPHONE.

TORTURE  
 THEM FIRST AS THEY HAVE  
 TORTURED US WITH  
 PROMISES/  
 PROMISES. IN WITE/AMURICA. WHEN  
 ALL THEY WUZ DOEN  
 WAZ HAVEN FUN WITH THEY  
 ORGIASTIC DREAMS OF BLKNESS  
 (JUST SOME MO  
 CRACKERS FUCKEN OVER OUR MINDS.)  
 MAKE THEM

SCREEEEEEAM  
 FORGIVE ME. IN SWAHILI.  
 DON'T ACCEPT NO MEA CULPAS.  
 DON'T WANT TO  
 HEAR  
 BOUT NO EUROPEAN FOR/GIVE/NESS.  
 DEADDYINDEADDYINDEADDYINDEADDYINWITWESTERN  
 SHITTTTTT

(softly da-dum-da da da da da da da da/da-dum-da  
 till it da da da da da da da da da  
 builds da-dum- da da da  
 up) da-dum. da. da. da. this is a part of my  
 favorite things.  
 da dum da da da da da da  
 da da da da  
 da dum da da da da da da  
 da da da da  
 da dum da da da da  
 da dum da da da da - - - - -

(to be rise up blk/people  
 sung de dum da da da da  
 slowly move straight in yo/blkness  
 to tune da dum da da da da  
 of my step over the wite/ness  
 favorite that is yesssss terrrrrr day  
 things.) weeeeeeee are toooooooday.

(f da dum  
 a da da da (stomp, stomp) da da da  
 s da dum  
 t da da da (stomp, stomp) da da da  
 e da dum  
 r) da da da (stomp) da da da dum (stomp)  
 weeeeeeeee (stomp)  
       areeeeeeeee (stomp)  
                           areeeeeeeee (stomp, stomp)  
 toooooooday (stomp.  
       day stomp.  
       day stomp.  
       day stomp.  
       day stomp!))  
 (soft rise up blk/people. rise up blk/people  
 chant RISE. & BE. what u can.  
       MUST BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE-E-E-E-E  
                           BE-E-E-E-E-E-  
                           yeh. john coltrane.  
 my favorite things is u.  
                           showen us life/  
   liven.  
 a love supreme  
                           for each  
                           other  
                           if we just  
                           lissssssSSTEN.

## Steve Jonas: One of Three Musicians

The first time I heard Ornette  
Coleman I thought  
about Picasso's

*Three Musicians*

w/ their neo-  
classical in-  
struments: cigarboxes w/  
soft line strains drawn  
across barrel staves, tin

cans thrown

(or kicked) in Congo Square

these "fakers"

with jaw bone percussions out of dead  
horses & instruments from

the child's hand

They reproduce the spasms, the screams  
the outbursts of dark religious ex-  
orcisms. these are not the

shoed peasant feet out of Brueghel's  
painting *The Kermess*, these are  
bare black feet pounding

delta clay

the wire & steel singing over

broken barrel staves,

saying a theatre is any place  
free associates come in  
to play.

## Jayne Cortez: ORNETTE

ORNETTE ORNETTE

Go listen to Ornette

Rambling Blesings

with Cherry Higgins Haden

O. D. C. B. holding church

at the five spot in

N. Y. C.

Listen to the shrill voice

Vibrating with

Love & Agony

The great drops of water

spilling from

tears inside

Hear the womb of spontaneity

A Quivering fever

rising

Rising rapidly from

Bitter broken rhythms

stomping

crying out

Fierce Freedom Screams

heard in the beating heart

of R & B

Revolution & Blood

Revolution & Blood

Liquid blood

foaming passionate

Violent blood

gushing from the life of

Ornette Coleman O.C.

O.C. Spitting black milk

blood milk

splattering

the bleached looters mask

with

a million strokes

of Naked Unashamed

Blackness

Walking Proud

## John Coltrane: A Love Supreme

I will do all I can to be worthy of Thee O Lord.  
 It all has to do with it.  
 Thank you God.  
 Peace.  
 There is none other.  
 God is. It is so beautiful.  
 Thank you God. God is all.  
 Help us to resolve our fears and weaknesses.  
 Thank you God.  
 In You all things are possible.  
 We know. God made us so.  
 Keep your eye on God.  
 God is. He always was. He always will be.  
 No matter what...it is God.  
 He is gracious and merciful.  
 It is most important that I know Thee.  
 Words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts,  
 fears and emotions – time – all related ...  
 all made from one ... all made in one.  
 Blessed be His name.  
 Thought waves – heat waves-all vibrations –  
 all paths lead to God. Thank you God.

His way ... it is so lovely ... it is gracious.  
 It is merciful – thank you God.  
 One thought can produce millions of vibrations  
 and they all go back to God ... everything does.  
 Thank you God.  
 Have no fear ... believe ... thank you God.  
 The universe has many wonders. God is all. His way ... it is so wonderful.  
 Thoughts – deeds – vibrations, etc.  
 They all go back to God and He cleanses all.  
 He is gracious and merciful...thank you God.  
 Glory to God ... God is so alive.  
 God is.  
 God loves.  
 May I be acceptable in Thy sight.  
 We are all one in His grace.  
 The fact that we do exist is acknowledgement of Thee O Lord.  
 Thank you God.  
 God will wash away all our tears ...  
 He always has ...  
 He always will.  
 Seek Him everyday. In all ways seek God everyday.  
 Let us sing all songs to God  
 To whom all praise is due ... praise God.  
 No road is an easy one, but they all  
 go back to God.

With all we share God.  
It is all with God.  
It is all with Thee.  
Obey the Lord.  
Blessed is He.  
We are from one thing ... the will of God ... thank you God.  
I have seen God – I have seen ungodly –  
none can be greater – none can compare to God.  
Thank you God.  
He will remake us ... He always has and He always will.  
It is true – blessed be His name – thank you God.  
God breathes through us so completely ...  
so gently we hardly feel it ... yet,  
it is our everything.  
Thank you God.  
ELATION-ELEGANCE-EXALTATION  
All from God.  
Thank you God. Amen.



## A. B. Spellman /John Coltrane

### An impartial Review

may he have new life like the fall  
fallen tree, wet moist rotten enough  
to see shoots stalks branches & green  
leaves (& may the roots) grow into his side.

around the back of the mind, in its closet  
is a string, i think, a coil around things.  
listen to summertime, think of spring, negroes  
cats in the closet, anything that makes a rock

of your eye. imagine you steal. you are frightened  
you want help. you are sorry you are born with ears.

## A. B. Spellman: Did John's Music Kill Him?

in the morning part  
 of evening he would stand  
 before his crowd. the voice  
 would call his name &  
 redlight fell around him.  
 jimmy'd bow a quarter hour  
 till mccoys fed block chords  
 to his stroke. elvin's thunder  
 roll & eric's scream. then john.

then john. *little old lady*  
 had a nasty mouth. summertime  
 when the war is, africa ululating  
 a line bunched up like itself  
 into knots paints beauty black

trane's horn had words in it  
 i know when i sleep sober & dream  
 those dreams i duck in the world  
 of sun & shadow, yet even in the day john  
 & a little grass put them on me clear  
 as tomorrow in a glass enclosure.

kill me john my life eats  
 life. the thing that beats out of  
 me happens in a vat enclosed  
 & fermenting & wanting to explode  
 like your song.

so beat john's death words down  
 on me in the darker part  
 of evening, the black light issued  
 from him in the pit he made  
 around us. worms came clear  
 to me where i had thought i had been  
 brilliant. o john death will  
 not contain you death  
                   will not contain you.

## Don L. Lee: Don't Cry, Scream

(for John Coltrane/ from a black poet/  
in a basement apt. crying dry tears  
of "you ain't gone")

into the sixties  
a trane  
came/out of the fifties with a  
golden boxcar  
riding the rails  
of novation.

blowing  
a-melodics  
screeching,  
screaming,  
blasting—  
driving some away,  
(those paper readers who thought  
manhood was something innate)

bring others in,  
(the few who didn't believe that the  
world existed around established whi  
teness & leonard bernstein)

music that ached.  
murdered our minds (we reborn)  
born into a neoteric abberation.  
& suddenly  
you envy the  
BLIND man—  
you know that he will  
hear what you'll never  
see.

your music is like  
my head—nappy black/  
a good nasty feel with  
tangled sons of:  
we-eeeeeeeeeeeeee                    sing  
WE-EEEEEEEEEEEEEE                  loud &  
WE-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE            high  
with  
feeling

a people playing  
the sound of me when  
i combed it. combed at  
it.

i cried for billie holiday.  
the blues. we ain't blue  
the blues exhibited illusions of manhood.

destroyed by you. Ascension into

scream-eeeeeeeeeeeeee-ing	sing
SCREAM-EEEEEEEEEEEEEE-ing	loud &
SCREAM-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-ing	long with feeling

we ain't blue, we are black.

we ain't blue, we are black.

(all the blues did was  
make me cry)

soultrane gone on a trip

he left man-images

he was a life-style of

man-makers & annihilator

of attache case carriers.

Trane done went.

(got his hat & left me one)

naw brother,

i didn't cry,

i just-

Scream-eeeeeeeeeeeeee e-ed	sing loud
SCREAM-EEEEEEEEEEEEEE-EEEEEEE-ED	& high with
we-eeeeeeeeeeeeee eeeeeeeeeee ee	feeling
WE-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE	letting
WE-EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE	yr/voice
WHERE YOU DONE GONE, BROTHER?	break

it hurts, grown babies

dying, born, done caught me

a trane. steel wheels broken

by popsicle sticks. i went out

& tried to buy a nickel bag

with my standard oil card.

(swung on a faggot who politely  
scratched his ass in my presence.  
he smiled broken teeth stained from  
his over-used tongue. fisted-face.  
teeth dropped in tune with ray  
charles singing "yesterday.")

blonds had more fun-

with snagga-tooth niggers

who saved pennies & pop bottles for week-ends

to play negro & other filthy inventions.

be-bop-en to james brown's

**cold sweat**- these niggers didn't sweat,

they perspired. & the blond's dye came out,

i ran. she did too, with his pennies, pop bottles

& his mind, tune in next week same time same station

for anti-self in one lesson.

to the negro cow-sissies

who did tchaikovsky &  
 the beatles & live in  
 split-level homes & had]  
 split-level minds & babies.  
 who committed the act of  
 love with their clothes on.

(who hid in the bathroom to read  
 jet mag. who didn't read the chicago  
 defender because of the misspelled  
 words & had shelves of books by  
 europeans on display. untouched. who  
 hid their little richard & lightnin'  
 slim records & asked: "John who?"

instant hate.)

they didn't know any better,  
 brother, they were too busy getting  
 into debt, expressing humanity &  
 taking off color.

SCREAMMMM/we-eeee/screech/tee   improvise  
 aheeeeeeee/screeeeee/theeee/ee   with  
 Ahhhhhhhh/WEEEEEEEE/screEEE   feeling  
 EEEE

we-eeeeeeWE-EEEEEEEEWE-EE-EEEE

the ofays heard you &  
 were wiped out. spaced.  
 one clown asked me during,  
**my favorite things**, if  
 you were practicing,  
 i fired on the muthafucka & said,  
 "i'm practicing."  
 naw brother,  
 i didn't cry.  
 i got high off my thoughts—  
 they kept coming back,  
 back to destroy me.

& that BLIND man  
 i don't envy him anymore  
 i can see his hear  
 & hear his heard through my pores.  
 i can see my me. It was truth you gave,  
 like a daily shit  
 it had to come.

can you scream—brother?   very  
 can you scream—brother   soft

i hear you.  
 i hear you.

and the Gods will too.

## Jayne Cortez: How Long has Trane Been Gone?

Tell me about the good things  
you clappin & laughin

Will you remember  
or will you forget

Forget about the good things  
like Blues & Jazz being black  
Yeah Black Music  
all about you

And the musicians that  
write & play about you  
a black brother groanin  
a black sister moanin  
& beautiful black children  
ragged . . . underfed laughin  
not knowin

Will you remember their names  
or do they have no names  
no lives-only products  
to be used when you wanna  
dance fuck & cry

You takin—they givin  
You livin—they  
creating starving dying  
trying to make a better tomorrow  
Giving you & your children a history  
But what do you care about  
history—Black History  
and John Coltrane  
No  
All you wanna do  
is pat your foot  
sip a drink & pretend  
with your head bobbin up & down  
What do you care about acoustics  
bad microphones or out-of-tune pianos  
& noise  
You the club owners & disc jockeys  
made a deal didn't you  
a deal about Black Music  
& you really don't give  
a shit long as you take

There was a time

when KGFJ played all black music  
 from Bird to Johnny Ace  
 on show after show  
 but what happened  
 I'll tell you what happened  
 they divided black music  
 doubled the money  
 & left us split again  
 is what happened

John Coltranes dead & some  
 of you  
 have yet to hear him play  
 How long how loing has that Trane been gone

and how many more Tranes will go  
 before you understand your life  
 John Coltrane who had the whole of  
 life wrapped up in B flat  
 John Coltrane like Malcolm  
 True image of Black Masculinity

Now tell me about the good things  
 I'm telling you about  
 John Coltrane

A name that should ring  
 throughout the projects mothers  
 Mothers with sons  
 who need John Coltrane  
 Need the warm arm of his music  
 like words from a Father  
 How long how long has that Trane been gone

John palpitating love notes  
 in a lost-found nation  
 within a nation  
 His music resounding discovery  
 signed Always  
 John Coltrane

Rip those dead white people off  
 your walls Black People  
 black people whose walls  
 should be a hall  
 A Black Hall of Fame  
 so our children will know & be proud  
 Proud to say I'm from Parker City—Coltrane City—Ornette City  
 Pharoah City living on Holiday street next to  
 James Brown park in the State of Malcolm

How Long  
 how long

will it take for you to understand  
that Tranes been gone  
riding in a portable radio  
next to your son whos lonely  
Who walks walks walks into nothing  
no city no state no home no Nothing  
how long  
How long  
Have black people been gone



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