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SACRED FREEDOM: SUSTAINING AFROCENTRIC SPIRITUAL JAZZ
IN 21ST CENTURY CHICAGO

by

ADAM ZANOLINI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2016

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Sacred Freedom: Sustaining Afrocentric Spiritual Jazz in 21st Century
Chicago

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Adam Zanolini

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

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by

Adam Zanolini

Advisor: Jeffrey Taylor

This dissertation explores the historical and ideological headwaters of a certain form of Great Black Music that I call Afrocentric spiritual jazz in Chicago. However, that label is quickly expended as the work begins by examining the resistance of these Black musicians to any label. I theorize that this resistance is due to the experiences of Black history, throughout which labels have been used to enslave, exploit, and control people. I begin by discussing early musical labels, several important n-words, and then the innovation of African diasporic subjecthood and its labels. Then Black is examined, along with several corollary social movements and Black music. Finally the Art Ensemble of Chicago's Great Black Music is brought forward as a healing descriptor, introducing the goal of healing as a characteristic of this musical tradition. In the next half-chapter, I apply the semiotics of Charles Peirce to jazz, with specific focus on the avant-garde. I theorize that the avant-garde's timbral focus is related to Peirce's concept of Firstness, and also to iconic representation. I then briefly discuss the history of spiritual jazz before reviewing the Afrocentric paradigm that many musicians represent in the music. I examine the lives, careers, and work of three Black spirit musicians in Chicago: Phil Cohran, David Boykin, and Angel Elmore. Then I bring together relevant aspects of the music, its history, and the people surrounding it, by considering four valences of space: 1) urban space, specifically the South Side which was a result of the Great Migration of Negroes from the south who became Black people in the North; 2) performance spaces, especially in view of the demise of Fred Anderson's Velvet Lounge; 3) sonic space, one characteristic of the Chicago music, which is a loaded possibility for creation to happen; 4) outer space, spiritual dimensions, and the musicians collective I'm part of called the MB Collective and the Participatory Music Coalition.

Acknowledgements

Ase to my ancestors, and to the musical elders and forebears that have made this music to nourish us all. Personal thanks to Patricia and William Parker who gave me my first opportunity to lend my best efforts to the advancement of this music I love so much. Thank you to Phil Cohran who taught me most about the substance and importance of Black music and Black culture. Thank you to David Boykin who helped me to find my musical voice and to experience the wonder of creation first hand. Thank you to Ernest Dawkins for letting me be a small part of his important efforts to advance Black music in the Black neighborhoods of Chicago. Thank you to Gira Dahnee, SuRa Dupart, Angel Elmore, Xristian Espinoza, Viktor le Ewing Givens, JeNae' Nicole Taylor, and Sojourner Wright for musical and spiritual collaboration. Thank you to Soji Adebayo, Bakarae, Walter Clark, Nemu El, Baabe Irving, Kwesi, Nebu, Nuwki Nu, Tracy, and other members of the Society for the Study of Eternal Life for their generosity and wisdom. Thank you to Eliel Sherman Storey, Roy Campbell, Sura Ramses Dupart, and Cooper-Moore for your musical insights, which led me onto the path of understanding the structures in music. Thank you to Douglas Ewart and Nicole Mitchell, Ari Brown and Fred Anderson, Margaret Murphy-Webb and Charles Heath, Wadada and Muhal, Cecile Savage and Josh Abrams, Hamid Drake and Avreeayl Ra, for your insight and inspiration. Thank you to my professors and my advisors who guided me through this processes – Stephen Blum, Peter Manuel, Jane Sugarman, Michael Salim Washington, Frederick Moten, Michele Wallace, and Jeffrey Taylor. Thank you to Gina Morrison for loving advice. Thank you to my mother Lynne Zanolini for existence and everything important about myself.

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Introduction

The South Side of Chicago is widely considered a very violent and dangerous place. Poverty and crime rates are extraordinarily high. The daily news often features stories of murder on the South Side, and Chicago's gun problem is a topic of national interest. Last year, there was even a new film by Spike Lee called *Chiraq*, a title that caused a great deal of controversy in Chicago by comparing our city to an intractable war zone. And so the image that's created of the South Side, and the one that many people have in their minds, is of a dystopian nightmare. But while living and working there, I have found that it is also full of beauty and riches. With miles of lakefront property, crisscrossed by transit, adjacent to the largest metropolitan area in nearly a thousand-mile radius, there is also an enormous reservoir of Black history and culture. On the South Side, I met Black musicians who are using their creativity, their voice, their notoriety, and their industry to do positive things for the Black community, working to remove the self-fulfilling stigma of their neighborhoods, and making it possible to imagine healthy communities in its place.

Now, jazz is changing. It has always been changing. Jazz is a music of changes. In the 21st Century, most jazz musicians in the world may not be Black. Most jazz audiences may not be Black. Yet jazz will remain an important part of Black culture and of ongoing Black history. I am not here to add my voice to those who declare that all jazz is essentially Black music by virtue of its origins and its qualities. I am here to document the way that many musicians practice and perform jazz as an expression of Black culture and identity. For many musicians, the Blackness in jazz is part of the reason they play it, part of why they play the way they play. For some musicians playing is a sacred, spiritual practice as such. Furthermore, jazz can teach us

about Blackness, Black culture, Black identity, Black history ... indeed, that's part of what it is here to do.

The impetus for my focus on sustainability came from a New York avant-jazz presenter's comment to me that the only place currently generating young Black experimental/creative jazz musicians is Chicago. She then thought harder and remembered musicians from New York and Washington, DC, but I was struck by my own experience of the strength of this current in Chicago compared to New York. While in some ways jazz was thriving – with increasing academic programs and a number of successful clubs in New York at least – Black people and jazz seemed to be getting a divorce. In New York, it was difficult to hear jazz in Black neighborhoods, themselves eroding under torrents of gentrification. And in the jazz clubs, it was much easier to see an all-white band than a Black one. But in Chicago, there was a Black jazz scene. New young Black musicians were emerging just as mid-career Black artists were reaching their full potential, and Black elders who were already legendary among musicians were finally being recognized by the public at large. When I returned to Chicago from New York in 2012, the South Side of Chicago was a place where almost any night of the week you could hear Black musicians playing jazz for a Black audience, in a place that was owned or controlled by Black people. Although the scene was but a shadow of its former self, many of the musicians were carrying on an intellectual tradition that had been developing there since the days of Sun Ra. My project was to find out why this was so, and whether we can expect it to continue to be so, and especially if there's anything I could do to help it continue to be so. In other words, I endeavored to learn about jazz in Chicago – where it is also thought of as one name that describes part of a larger field called Great Black Music – in order to shed light on the sustainability of this rich cultural tradition. How has the jazz in Chicago maintained its strength

among the Black community? What are the structures, institutions, and ideologies that enable this? What structures, ideologies, and institutions threaten it? Who are the people who make this Great Black Music continue to happen in Chicago?

Another key moment in the formulation of this project was when I proposed it, and one of my colleagues helpfully reading my proposal asked, “What *is* ‘black’ music anyway? I mean, music doesn’t have a color, right?” Significant ethnomusicological literature emphasizes the mutual imbrication of European American and African American musical traditions so as to question the existence of anything that seems like ethnic or racial purity in music. (Radano 2003) Yet we have Black musicians who play music with the certainty that they are representing and extending Black culture. There’s the Black Music Research Journal, the Center for Black Music Research, etc. This was a great challenge – to conceptualize what Black music is in Chicago now when it comes to jazz.

Here I found certain theoretical constructs to be applicable and illuminating. Afrocentricity is the paradigm developed by Molefi Asante and others to create scholarship outside of Eurocentrism, and the work of many Afrocentric scholars has been very influential among some of the musicians I’ve encountered in Chicago, and elsewhere. Furthermore, I argue that the musicians here are contributing a uniquely Black (or African) form of scholarship that has Afrocentric characteristics. Diaspora concerns both pragmatically and discursively constituted relationships among populations of Africa’s descendants in Africa and around the black Atlantic. And Peircean semeiotics reveals the fundamental role of representation in the construction of cultural identity – in its coherence as well as in its dynamism.

The scientific basis of race has been systematically dismantled, invalidated, and disclaimed, and it has become clear that the predominance of race within the American social

and cultural landscape comes from its function as one of the key mechanisms by which economic inequality have been maintained and power exerted. But the culture that developed in a society based on that discourse and on those power relations has far exceeded them. For a brief moment at the beginning of the Obama years, there were murmurings of the word “post-racial.” But later during the period of this project (which has roughly coincided with Obama’s presidency) we have seen the unrest following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO; the police murder of Eric Garner in New York; the sadly unsurprising travesty of justice following the murder of Trayvon Martin; the police murder of Walter Scott in South Carolina; the suspicious death in police custody of Sandra Bland in Texas; the police murder of Laquan McDonald in Chicago and its cover-up¹ – these are but a few, horrific examples that demonstrate the continued reality of race as a negative force in our society. But this dissertation is not strictly concerned with race. The idea that race can be spoken of in general, as though particular histories of specific people were irrelevant, is part of the legacy of racism. To speak of *race* implies that such categories as Asian, Black, Latino, white², Indian are somehow the same types of categories, when really they are qualitatively and substantially different. During my research I

¹ Every time I read this section, I realize I have to add another of these events.

² *Black* with a capital B refers to a people, not just a color, similar to the way one would capitalize *Kurdish* people, *Hmong* people, or *Aymara* people. *African American* is capitalized twice; even *Negro* is commonly capitalized, but for some reason, capitalization of *Black* to denote reference to a people draws objections. Yet Black is the most salient category for this inquiry in most instances, which will be made clear shortly. Therefore I have composed this note, even though it should be unnecessary. More necessary is the fact that I have been advised that white people do not consider themselves to be a *people* in the same way that the Black people I’m discussing do, and therefore, despite an inclination to respect them in this way, I leave *white* uncanceled. By that, may I also emphasize that the exnomination of whiteness gives it a different character than Blackness. This approach is shared by Touré (2012, ix) among others.

worked with the Black people, who have undoubtedly been touched and shaped to a great extent by the idea of race, and who out of a complex constellation of cultural, economic, spatial, spiritual, and historical factors have developed a culture that includes multivariate ideologies of identity, personhood, politics, spirituality and art. This dissertation is about musical expressions of Blackness from a jazz thought trajectory. It's about the sustainability of Blackness and Black music in a time when scientific discourses about race are falling away to reveal concrete social realities, when the presidency is held by the first African American man to do so, when the racial geographies of major cities are shifting more and more to the exclusion of Black people.

Because of the diversity and dynamism of Black cultural expressions, they should be seen as such: as Black cultural expressions, Black identity expressions, Black historical expressions which only with effort can be focused together to image a whole of interrelated parts, and which are always evolving and expanding. The Black music I found in Chicago is part of a vast and dense web of discourses – folk, popular, and scholarly – about what Black means. While many people are interested in the idea of race being finally banished to the dustiest annals of history, many Black people, finding our lives significantly determined by this ancient idea, are engaged not in efforts to erase race, but rather in developing our culture through music (along with literature, history, visual art, ritual, spirituality and religion, and other ways) finding our own meaning in our past, and envisioning a positive future for Black people.

So, back to the problem: the sustainability of Great Black Music. As it seems that these practices have been more common in the past in other places, and that they are more sustained in Chicago, while yet they are also observably less prevalent in Chicago than in its past, I herein attempt to understand something about its foundations and current state that can begin to explain why. Why Chicago? How can Great Black Music continue to thrive at the same time as the

scientific construct of race is being dismantled and Black neighborhoods are being gentrified into oblivion?

In order to address these questions it's necessary and desirable to delineate exactly what practices are within the scope of inquiry. Defining terms is the business of Chapter 1. First of all, calling the music *jazz* is a problem because musicians disclaim that term. I found it paradoxical, or at least wanting explanation, that jazz musicians should want to reject the word *jazz*. But this observation is ultimately descriptive, in that part of what defines these musical practices is that very disclaimer: the subject of the dissertation especially includes (but is not limited to) the work of those musicians who would disclaim, complicate, or otherwise distinguish it from the term *jazz*. The term *Great Black Music*, which was coined by the Art Ensemble of Chicago and adopted by the AACM, is a significant presence in the music and also significantly contributes to the scope of this inquiry. That term was designed to include some of what we call jazz, while still determining the boundaries of the category and emphasizing the importance of its cultural rootedness. More than the term itself, the spirit of the term is significant – it is an exercise of *self-determination*, and it indicates the importance of labels, names, and terminology to these practitioners. That importance has to do with the dire implications of labels placed on people – the categories and the possibilities they circumscribe. The choice of *Black music* in this instance represents a level of self-awareness that emerged under specific historical and spatial conditions. The term *Black* as we know it today developed in relation with other descriptors and cannot be understood without some understanding of that relationship and its history. Therefore I give an introduction to some of the history and interrelationship between the terms that have described Negroes, African Americans, and Black people. In describing the terms, a great deal of complexity is revealed. I discuss some early

labels for Black music – coon songs, Race music – which leads to a discussion of racial labels. In the next three sections of the chapter I discuss 1) Interrelated N words: nigger, Negro, negre and noire, and their relationship the violent categorization that enabled slavery and social death; 2) African/African American, which also includes an extended review of the concept of diaspora and the importance of music in developing relations among African Americans, the continent of Africa, and other nodes of the African Diaspora; and 3) the most salient category, Black, which I show is explicitly chosen by some musicians because of its resonance with the Black Power Movement and Black Nationalism. The section also discusses the Black Arts Movement, a politicization of the meaning of jazz, and in contrast the figure of Matana Roberts, who embodies a highly individualist construction of Black. Finally I advance the theory that the Black musicians who resist the label *jazz* do so because of their experience of being captured, controlled, and subjected to violence and atrocity based on externally imposed labels.

In the course of Chapter 1, we realize that part of what Great Black Music is, (or Black music, or Afrocentric spiritual jazz ...) is that music which represents great Blackness – to represent into being those unrealized states of Great Blackness, and to draw upon the Great Blackness of the past. Some Black music does healing spiritual work by representing great Blackness, great Black history, the great Black future (possibilities not yet realized). The essence of the object of my inquiry is its ability to represent Great Blackness as part of a concerted effort, not only to reflect it, but to create it and extend it. It is a representation that does very important work. I find it necessary and desirable to consider the modes of this representation – to think about the ways that music can mean. Therefore with Chapter 1½, I take an abbreviated sojourn into Peircean semiotics, which can help to penetrate deeper into the meaning within some of this and related music. I also find the reverse to be true: that a consideration of free improvised

music, which much of this is, can illuminate Peircean semiotics. I begin with a rudimentary exposition of Peirce's basic trichotemies – object, interpretant, and sign(vehicle)/representamen, then the icon, index, and symbol. I describe Turino's application of Peircean semiotics, by which he determines that indexical and iconic levels of representation have more emotional interpretants, and they are therefore more affective and effective in generating identity, group belonging, and nationalism. I venture deeper into fundamental Peircean principles of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness in order to illuminate a focus on timbre in the jazz avant-garde. And then finally, I discuss the Chicago music and its generative representation, attending especially to Nicole Mitchell's formulation of reflective, historical and visionary foci.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 describe three facets of the Chicago scene in which I found the strongest indications as to the music's sustainability. Chapter 2 focuses on Black ideologies. A key feature of Black music as I'm defining it is that it contains, comes out of, or addresses these Black ideologies. Afrocentricity is a formal theorization of Blackness and a Black perspective. Black ideologies have been operationalized and institutionalized into spiritual and religio-political movements that have strong roots in Chicago and which circulate through Black thinking about the music: the Black Hebrews, the Moorish Science Temple, and the Nation of Islam. This leads into the topic of spiritual jazz.

Chapter 3 focuses on people or figures. First, I discuss ancestors and elders, which are key concepts in an Afrocentric orientation. I then discuss the three musicians I got to know best during the course of my research, who could be considered to represent three "generations" of a musical lineage, or in any case three career stages in Afrocentric spiritual jazz: the legendary trumpeter, composer, harpist, inventor, astronomer, leader, and teacher Phil Cohran; mid-career saxophonist and composer David Boykin; and emerging clarinetist and pianist Angel Elmore.

Their ideologies and musical practices are examined, including some detailed accounts of their practices and endeavors, as well as thick description of my own personal experiences with them. The section on Phil Cohran includes discussion of astronomy, African deep knowledge, Afrocentricity, and a detailed analysis of a semiotically rich performance. The section on David Boykin includes thick description of his more spiritually oriented project – the Sonic Healing Ministries. The section on Angel Elmore includes a discussion of participatory music, which is an important feature of two of her projects – the Participatory Music Coalition and the MB Collective (both of which I was part of as well). In the course of discussing those musicians, I indicate pathways of knowledge transmission among them.

Chapter 4 focuses on the word *space*. Albert Einstein’s general theory of relativity teaches us that our reality has four dimensions – three spatial dimensions plus time as a fourth – and similarly, I found four dimensions of the word *space* in relation to this music in Chicago. First I discuss *place*, which is important and especially interrelated with my first dimension of space: urban space. Urban space in Chicago is highly segregated and was created by a history of migration – the Great Migration, which I discuss at length – and the South Side is one of the most important features of this scene that has given the music its distinguishing characteristics. The second dimension of *space* is the issue of performance spaces – or venues – which are of critical importance to the development and sustainability of the music. The loss of the most fertile venue for these musical practices was also a strong motivating factor in the conception of this project: What will the scene look like without Fred Anderson’s Velvet Lounge? Can we keep the spirit going? In this section, I discuss the fall of old venues, particularly the Velvet Lounge, the rise of new ones, and the consequences to the music. The third dimension of space is the idea of space within the music, which I call *intrasonic space*. This is one of the

characteristics of the music that's cited by practitioners as distinguishing the Chicago sound. It is also related to urban space and performance spaces insofar as music with intrasonic space is only possible in certain types of performance spaces (which are perhaps more possible where urban space is organized in certain ways). Those performance spaces are the ones that break away from the idea of jazz as entertainment music to sell drinks by, instead conceptualizing it as art (or spirituality). Those spaces are also related to sounds that iconically represent freedom as I discuss it in Chapter 1½. The fourth dimension (amusingly as in Einstein's general relativity) involves also time. The word *space* around this music can evoke visions of outer space because of Sun Ra, who was very influential in the emergence of the Chicago Black music scene. Outer space and the cosmos is also very much part of Phil Cohran's teaching. Cohran teaches archaeo-astronomy: getting in touch with the thought-world of the ancestors through knowledge of the stars. On the other hand Sun Ra, who was obviously also interested in the ancients, was very much concerned with the future, and he is cited as one of the pillars of Afro-futurism. Afro-futurism is very much in currency in Chicago and elsewhere.

Hypothesis: the sustainability of Great Black Music is to be found in spaces of exnomination of Blackness, where symbolic representation gives way to indexical and iconic representation, which are unavailable to argument and result in more affective interpretants. Describing a Eurological refusal of composers and music scholars to acknowledge the influence of African American, George Lewis invokes Fiske's concept of exnomination:

Fisk identifies 'exnomination' as a primary characteristic of whiteness as power: 'Exnomination is the means by which whiteness avoids being named and thus keeps itself out of the field of interrogation and therefore off the agenda for change ... One practice of exnomination is the avoidance of self-recognition and self-definition. Defining, for whites, is a process that is always directed outward upon multiple 'others' but never inward upon the definer (42).' (Lewis 1996, 100, quoting Fiske, John. 1994. *Media matters: Everyday Culture and Political Change*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.)

Music, performance, and visual art make representations of Blackness that pass into consciousness directly, without logical critique or evaluation. As Turino points out, labels, words, language, belong to the semiotic domain of symbols under Charles Peirce's semeiotic – as opposed to the two other domains: indices and icons, which he calls “nonpropositional semiotic domains.” (Turino 2000, 174) Symbols are available to *argument*, whereas icons and indices are not. The ideological work of Great Black Music, and all these interrelated forms of expression, create a sonic, performative space of exnomination of Blackness through representation that eludes argument, e.g. the iconic representations in Sun Ra's mythic persona. He postulated an ancient African of the future not only by his extensive and vigorous rhetoric, honed in spirited debate with the likes of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, but also by embodying one – visually, sonically – into a semiotically multivalent mytho-poetics whose impact could be felt as emotionally as it was rationally. It is part of the work of Blackness to overcome the hyper-rationality that was at the foundation of the execution of chattel slavery: you can't pay attention to humanity or feelings or spirit while designing a slave ship of the precise dimensions to hold the maximum human cargo or calculating how many niggers can die on the trans-Atlantic journey before the venture becomes unprofitable. And so, the importance of the *supra-rational* – mythical, spiritual, ritual, emotional, human – becomes perhaps the most fertile domain of Black representation.

Methods

My research was conducted using the participant observation method. I spent several years working at Arts for Art, inc., presenter of the annual Vision Festival of avant-jazz in New York. Then I travelled to Chicago where I served on the Board of the Live the Spirit Residency,

presenter of the annual Englewood Jazz Festival. In Chicago I attended several hundred jazz performances, which I documented in my field journal. The performances afforded me many opportunities to speak with jazz audiences, presenters, and musicians about a wide range of subjects, which often included the urgent state of the jazz scene, the trials of being a professional musician, the shuttering of the Velvet Lounge and the Hothouse (two of the city's more experimental clubs). I also played music in various jam sessions in Chicago. Most important was the Sonic Healing Ministries session led by David Boykin, which took place at the Washington Park Arts Incubator, and which I attended every week. I also participated occasionally in the 50 Yard Line jam session on 75th street run by Margaret Murphy-Webb, the Universal Alley Jazz Jam run by Dr. Siddha Webber, and the Sounds of the City jam session at Constellation run by Mike Reed. Through these jam sessions I met many more musicians, with some of whom I would later perform variations of free jazz, experimental music, Afrocentric-spiritual jazz and Black American music. I attended weekly classes on astronomy, Black culture, history, and music led by Phil Cohran. I became part of several arts collectives – the MB Collective and the Borderbend Arts Collective. Finally I formed the Participatory Music Coalition (PMC) along with Angel Elmore, Viktor le Ewing Givens, later joined by Sura Ramses Dupart, Gira Dahnee, Xristian Espinoza, Renee Baker and others. With the PMC, I worked to present and perform Afrocentric-spiritual jazz and Black American music on the South Side of Chicago.

1. Coming to Terms: Names, Labels, Genres, and History

By now, everybody should understand that Blackness is not a physical trait but a cultural phenomenon concerning a physical trait (or set of traits). Blackness is produced and reproduced through birth, and also through thinking and talking and other forms of representation. I seek to understand some of the ways that jazz expresses and represents Black history, knowledge, and culture by examining the music, musical practices, and music institutions of the South Side of Chicago in the early 21st Century. Chicago is a place where the production of Black culture and identity is at its most energetic. A few important examples are the Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, the Black Hebrew Israelites, gospel blues music, The African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AFRICOBRA), the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), and their concept of Great Black Music which has been developed and expanded by several other institutions and individuals. More recently, Chicago has been the hub for the Black Youth Project 100 activism organization. Jazz has become a global music, but it has roots in local traditions. Chicago has a strong local jazz tradition in what some might call an avant-garde, or experimental music, but which others simply called “that Chicago sound.” (Velvet Lounge website ca. 2005, www.velvetlounge.net.)

The ultimate goal of this work is to positively contribute to the sustainability of music that I like to call Afrocentric spiritual jazz, in which I include much of the music of certain members of the AACM, Sun Ra, Phil Cohran, David Boykin and other musicians living in Chicago. The music would all fall under the AACM’s term Great Black Music, but some people would call all or some of it *free jazz*, or alternatively *creative music*, or *experimental music*, or *improvised music*, or *avant-garde jazz*, or simply “the music” (with context and present company implying any necessary specification). When I began defining the scope of this project, the problem of determining the genre or subgenre of the music I study and practice presented itself

as a serious one. Determining the boundaries around any given musical practice, tradition, or genre can be extremely complicated. However in the case of this music, the task of definition is especially problematic because not only is the music at issue here difficult to categorize, but also many of the musicians who create it purposefully, deliberately, and strenuously resist categorization. This fact is emphasized when the word *jazz* is invoked.

While the musicians often resist being called jazz musicians, the music they make is usually classified as jazz by listeners and writers. After hearing so many musicians express dissatisfaction with the term *jazz*, I was hesitant to use the word at all, but I could not ignore it because of its prevalence in discourse among listeners and among other musicians. Some musicians reject the word *jazz* vociferously, while others use it without reservation, and still others won't comment on it unless asked, and then they are uncomfortable with the subject. Most use the word because it has benefits, but some seem uncomfortable and place some sort of quotation marks around it – “so-called jazz” for instance. As Henry Threadgill said, “Jazz is part of my vocabulary, but I’ve never considered myself a jazz musician.” (Pierrepont 2002, 25) Even within my own group the Participatory Music Coalition, we don’t agree: I say jazz. Sura Dupart says jazz. But Angel Elmore insists that we play Black American or Black Classical Music. Viktor le Ewing Givens goes further, even eschewing the word “music” in favor of “sound.”

In response to this, Pierrepont endeavors to step outside of the category *jazz* and conceptualize something larger than, yet still with relation to jazz, which he calls “*le champ jazzistique*” or “the jazzistic field.” (Pierrepont 2002) Pierrepont determines the *jazzistic field* as the music having emanated from the field-hollers, blues, spirituals and ring shouts that form the origin story of African American music as in Baraka’s *Blues People*, and then continues to

describe and theorize its evolution, its nature, and its trajectory according to the testimonies of many jazz(istic) musicians.

However, despite the richness of Pierrepont's research and the illumination that it sheds upon the subject, I do not believe that adding yet another term (and an etic one at that) to the already long list is the best approach. Rather than attempting to theorize characteristics or features of jazz or the jazzistic field, or Great Black Music or any other category *in toto*, I will be concerned more with the ways in which these categories are disputed, disclaimed, reinvented, and argued because I think the evolution of these labels, and the attempts to elude them, are an important aspect of being a Black musician. I wish to posit a relationship between the way musicians resist labels on their music and the way they resist labels on themselves. My theory is that the fact that many Black musicians reject the name *jazz* for their music, or at least have a very troubled relationship with it, comes out of the resistance to being named/labeled, which comes out of a history of enslavement and marginalization by means of categorization, naming and labeling.

This chapter, Chapter 1, advances the theory that many of the Black intellectual musicians who make this music are ever cognizant that to label it is to control it/to limit it and therefore to control/limit them. The similarity between the way the Black community refuses externally imposed labels on the music and the way We resist such name on Ourselves suggests that generations of experience of being categorized has proven that the act of labeling, categorizing, branding people is often a potent weapon against their freedom. I am chiefly interested in those musicians most likely to defy categorization because the defiance of

categorization is an essential assertion of power over one's blackself.³ The Black music I am talking about is not some naturally occurring phenomenon that just comes out of any-body with African ancestry. It's something that Black people have been crafting over decades, even centuries, which has evolved hand in hand with the identities We have striven very hard to forge in order to escape the categories of bondage. That's what I mean when I'm talking about Black music. I *primarily* talk about musicians of jazz – *primarily* in the same sense that the AACM's Great Black Music is *primarily* engaged with *jazz* as a descriptor more than other such descriptors, but not necessarily that the members of the AACM are very much concerned with any such descriptor whatsoever ... except insofar as the descriptors are sometimes required, insofar as the musicians are confronted with them relentlessly, and insofar as those descriptors constitute a battleground of self-determination.

This chapter, Chapter 1, starts out by locating Black music within a field of Black identity and Blackness amidst and including several other categories. But in contrast to the highly politicized constructions involved with Black power, the music I heard was usually less about politics and more about spirituality. Much of the Great Black Music adheres to a spiritual construction of Blackness, and indeed the music is a means by which spirituality is liberated from religio-political institutions. Ultimately, I believe the key to the sustainability of the music lies in this spiritual dimension. And its theoretical power is in its potential for generative representation.

³ See Lee [Madhubuti] (1970): "niggers don't change they just grow. that's a change; bigger & better niggers. change, into a necessary blackself."

Self-determination of Terms

The ambition for Black self-determination is reflected in the second of Maulana Karenga's Nguzo Saba (seven principles) of Kwanzaa – Kujichagulia: “To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.” (Karenga 2005) Kujichagulia was the title and subject of a song performed during a Kwanzaa concert in 2009 by the AACM Great Black Music Ensemble at the Velvet Lounge. Here's a picture of them performing it:



Figure 1 Great Black Music Ensemble members Talib-din Ziyad, Ann Ward, Salik Ziyad, and Dee Alexander perform “Kujichagulia” at the second location of the Velvet Lounge in 2009

Until relatively recently, what it meant to be Negro was defined by law, and it had legal repercussions which varied from one jurisdiction to another, from one time period to another. But these laws and definitions were not authored by Negroes. While many of those laws have

since been abolished, the society and culture they shaped remains in force and will remain so until new meanings replace the old ones.

Music was part of the definition, and the undertaking to revise the meaning of this identity, and to create new identities out of it, is effected powerfully by music. Through music, Black people have been able to create new identities by representing themselves to themselves and to others. There is a struggle and resistance to domination involved in Black people taking ownership of the terms that define their identities, and I will argue, in what defines their music. The Conscious musicians are aware that there is a power in naming. So they choose names for themselves other than their slave names. They also think carefully about labels for the Race, Us, Blacks, African Americans, niggers, Brothers/Sisters, Gods/Earths, Africans (in America) – which variously connect with political positionings, spiritual or religious orientations, and historical narratives. “The ideology of black nationalism emphasizes black self-definition and self-determination in contrast to the continuing efforts of white Anglo-America to define blacks and determine their role in the debate about race.” (Gordon 2003, 1)

A key act of representation is the choice of a name, a label, a sign that will represent a thing, a person, a people. Discourses of resistance have emerged in order to strike at this form of symbolic constriction. The idea of the slave name was made most famous by Malcolm X, who drew attention to the fact that Black people with English names have those names because their ancestors were once owned by someone with that ancestry. Their very name is a legacy of people having been owned. The act of replacing one’s last name with a placeholder X, or/and then with an African or Arab name, is a way of taking control of yourself by defining yourself in relation against the culture that named you. Old films of interviews by white newsmen with Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, or Maulana Karenga evince those interviewers’ derision and hostility towards

these names are evident in the tone of questions like: Is that your “real” name? What is your “real” name? Is that your “legal” name? (Siegel 2013; Pyne 1968)

Likewise, at the beginning of life, it has become commonplace for parents to reject English names like William and Catherine for names that sound foreign to Anglo-Americans. The rejection of English names can be interpreted as a rejection of English culture, or at least recognition of distinction from it. This rejection has very real consequences. At the beginning of the 21st Century, I worked on a project led by Marianne Bertrand at the University of Chicago that identified name-based discrimination by employers. It showed that people with Black names were 50% less likely to be called for a job than those with white names. (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004) Among many of the Black musicians, the practice of taking a new (African, or if not African, Afrikan somehow – perhaps Asian or in any case, emphatically non-European) name in place of or in addition to one’s legal name was common in the 1960s and ‘70s. Examples include Kalaparusha Maurice McIntyre, Eliel Sherman Storey, Kelan Phil Cohran, Malachi Favors Maghostut, Hamid Drake, Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith, and Famadou Don Moya.

Herman Poole Blount became Sonny, Le Sony’r Ra, and finally Sun Ra. A multiplicity of names also extended to his ensembles:

[interviewer John Sinclair]: You say you’ve changed the name of the band from the Myth-Science Arkestra to the Astro-Infinity Arkestra ...

SUN RA: Well, actually I didn’t *change* it – that’s just one of the dimensions. Because when I play sometimes I use “Myth-Science” – I’ve got some songs that come under that – and then I had some under the Solar Arkestra ... and then I got the Astro-Infinity – and all of them mean different things to me. (Sinclair 2009)

Similarly one of the core members of the Participatory Music Coalition – a scholar, vocalist, dancer, installation artist, space-shaper, archaeologist emcee – has called himself Viktor le Ewing Givens, or Viktor le, or L. V. Ewing, or Laurent Viktor Ewing Givens, or some

combination of those first, last and middle names/initials at various times during the year I've known him. Viktor's body inhabits a shifting terrain of related possible social unit beings, which makes it impossible to chain any of him down. This state of flux and the ability to use his identification itself as an artistic medium recall the way that Sun Ra was able to manipulate his identity into a mytho-poetic persona in order to embody (represent iconically) an historico-visionary political cosmology.

Why should a person have one and only one name? Why should a music have one and only one name? Why should a people have one and only one name? Because otherwise it/he/she does not fit into a database or phylogenic tree, without which it is difficult to have a commanding knowledge of them. Which is the very same reason why a person, a music, a people each should *not* have one and only one name.

There are very many words that have been used to label the people of African descent in the United States. Here's a list of some of them: nigger, darkie, coon, jigaboo, colored, Negro, spook, black, Black (with a capital B), Race Man, Afro-American, African American, soul brother/soul sister, brother/ sister, ... of color, Gods and Earths. But often when We're talking about Ourselves among Ourselves, We don't say any word at all. Perhaps We want to avoid the issue of which to choose so that We don't alienate Ourselves from those who choose differently. Perhaps it's because hatred towards Us has been so strong for so long that any word to describe Us has the air of an epithet. Or perhaps it's because white people are spared the burden of having to label themselves in this way, they being the exnominated category in the U.S. So we say Us (e.g. FUBU = For Us By Us, or Maulana Ron Karenga's Organization Us) or We vs. Them or

They, and it is unambiguous who We and They are.⁴ We work around having to name Us by saying “the Community,” which works partly because the terms “The Black Community” and “The African American Community” have become official parlance to describe Us as a whole, and partly because people of African descent have lived together in bounded spaces for so long because of legal requirements and for self-protection. I have adopted this emic non-label strategy of reference, which will be observed herein when I use capitalized pronouns We, Us, and Our. See also Haki Madhubuti:

after
painfully
struggling
thru Du Bois,
Rogers, Locke,
Wright & others,
my blindness
was vanquished
by pitchblack
paragraphs of
“us, we, me, i”
awareness.

(Madhubuti, Haki R. 2009. “The Self-Hatred of Don L. Lee,” in *Liberation Narratives: New and Collected Poems 1966-2009*. Chicago: Third World Press)

The search for the meaning of blackness is a struggle with roots as old as slavery. Early constructions of racial identity used by pro-slavery American nationalists invoked Biblical arguments. For example, early pro-slavery essayist Robert Walsh, and later Thornton Stringfellow, used biblical arguments that blacks were “a race under a divine curse condemning them to a role of servility, while whites are charged with the *responsibility* for their control.”

⁴ I grew up in a very white place, and this works both ways; white people who didn’t want to offend me, but who were nonetheless resentful that they should have to worry about offending me, would pause before saying, “you people” rather than choose a descriptor. For my part, I usually felt grateful that they had considered my feelings.

(Gordon 53-55) Stringfellow cites Genesis 9, 25-27 that God decreed slavery, “by cursing Ham and his posterity, Africans, to be in abject bondage.”(Gordon 55)

Black music helps understand the development of the racial and ethnic categories that have applied to Us over the centuries. Let the following discussion of terms illuminate the subsequent discussion of the music and meaning I found in Chicago. Let it not be construed to mean that any of the terms – Black, Negro, African American, Jazz, Great Black Music – must not be synonymized with the others, or that any of them exclude the others.

Early Musical Labels

Similar to Benedict Anderson’s print capitalism, minstrelsy and its parodic representation of the Negro was the beginning of American popular culture and served to constitute the imagined nation. (Lott 1993, 152-3) Throughout much of the 19th century, such a cultural and economic edifice was constructed around falsifications of Negro culture that even today many pernicious misrepresentations of Black people have not been dislodged. The hateful traditions of minstrelsy produced the epithet “coon” at the end of the 19th century and were used to label music: “A cunning amalgam of appreciation and mockery was a cornerstone of minstrelsy and was perpetuated in ragtime coon songs.” (Abbott and Seroff 2007, 12) In 1896, ragtime music burst into popular consciousness when Ernest Hogan’s “epoch-defining” “All Coons Look Alike to Me” exploded in popularity. (14) Hogan, a Negro, ironically helped to popularize genuine Negro music while at the same time popularizing an entire denigrating genre of music which became the slogan of Jim Crow racism and juridical subjugation of Negroes for decades. Negroes continued to participate in the musical practice of Negro-denigration because it was popular and profitable, offering rare opportunities for Negroes to gain entry into the entertainment business. The first all-Negro production on Broadway was presented in 1897; it

was called *A Trip to Coontown* and showcased coon songs typical of their period. (Moon et. al 2011) The label that defined the genre not only named the subjects of the songs, it also defined their parameters, limiting the types of images, behaviors, speech and manners that could be depicted. It was taken to heart all across America. For example, Abbott and Seroff (2007) report that a Chicago policeman used the slogan to justify having shot the wrong Negro in 1897. (14)

The Fisk Jubilee singers began touring in 1871, presenting some of the earliest self-representations of Negro culture to a national audience. (Burnim and Maultsby 2006) On the other hand, Zora Neale Hurston stressed the importance of authenticity and attacked sanitized, watered down presentations of Negro spirituals in concert halls. (Hurston 1995, 804) Around 1919, James Reese Europe's band spread Negro music to France and also recorded 40 songs for Pathé. (Foreman 1968)

In 1921, Okeh records began a "race" series of recordings, for at that time the terms "Race Men" and "The Race" had begun appearing in the *Chicago Defender*. The *Chicago Defender* intervened to convince the Victor Talking Machine Company to produce recordings of Race music; it exhorted all Race Men who owned a Victrola to notify the company so that they would know what a large market Negroes could be. (Foreman 1968, 36) Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" sold 75,000 copies in one week, which began a movement to market musical recordings to Negroes. (*ibid.*) Later in 1921, Negro-owned Pace Phonograph was organized and created the Black Swan label of *race records*. They declared: "All stock-holders are Colored, all artists are Colored, and all employees are Colored ..." (78) The company was bought out by Paramount in 1923. (80) The pressing of *The Race* into phonograph recordings of Negroes for Negroes (though thereafter sold by and profiting whites) was not without debate. These early *race record* series eventually grew into the genres Rhythm and Blues, Black records, and R&B. *The Race* was

chosen from among other candidate descriptors such as Colored, Negro, and Libranian during a time when the term Negro, which remained the proper term for many years thence, was being rejected because of its frequent perversion into the epithet nigger. (93)

Nigger, Negro, Necro, Nègre, Noire

Legendary trumpeter, harpist, instrument maker, Sun Ra collaborator, AACM co-founder, teacher, astronomer, band leader, herbalist, philosopher and father Phil Cohran has admitted to being a radical ... insofar as the ridiculous term *radical* means: contrary to structures of thought that perpetuate white aggression and domination. When teaching about Black history and culture, Cohran sometimes deploys the term *nigger* with a very specific and purposeful meaning. Sometimes he even suggests a subject called niggerology. This is what I would call radical. But his use of the term ingeniously takes into consideration one way that African Americans are different from Africans in Africa, from Afro-Caribbeans or Black Brazilians: We are subject to, and subjects of, the word *nigger*. He uses it with compassion, with contempt only for the violence that has created such social and psychic conditions. And most importantly, he uses it in his teaching, which is ultimately always about helping the people. Cohran posits that We are a distinct people with Our own history, Our own culture, and Our own problems. He uses the word *nigger* in order to conceptualize a people who have inherited the unique strength along with the psychic trauma that resulted from slavery. Cohran points out that Africans in Africa and African immigrants in America usually reject Us. Sometimes Haitians and other Afro-Caribbeans do too. Jamaicans, on the other hand, have known the violence of *nigger*, and perhaps that's why strong Jamaican leaders like Marcus Garvey and former AACM Chair Douglas Ewart have been extremely effective in the United States. Where it is revealed that non-Americans share the same problems (or have an interrelated history and culture) non-Americans may therein be included on that basis.

It's an important designation because it's the word – the “n” word – we all have to deal with. The fact that it's impolite, that it's avoided, is a veneer. The social and institutional structures apparently designed to perpetuate inequality specifically for Us – the war on drugs, the prison system – say “nigger.” The constant police presence and surveillance in Black communities – which, while increasing brutality nevertheless always fails to reduce crime – says “nigger.” The disinvestment in Black communities such as Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel's recent shutdown of fifty schools in Chicago's Black neighborhoods, or the University of Chicago's refusal to provide a much needed trauma center that would serve the serious needs of the Black neighborhoods in its immediate vicinity suffering from atrocious gun violence – those conditions say the word *nigger*.⁵ *Nigger* is the word that's seething beneath the surface of all those other words here in America. Cohran points out that niggers are descendants of slaves and that We may do many unfortunate things because our individual and collective psyches are damaged from many generations of abuse. I myself don't know that I've really ever been African American. I'm still studying to be Black. But I was a nigger even before I was born. *Nigger* is the word they must never say, but with which We are obsessed. Is there any other one word that says so much? That means so much hatred? *Nigger* is a violent word because if you can be called a nigger, it means that you are subject to any conceivable degradation, up to and including – even exceeding – death. Being a nigger means that white people may torture, maim, rape, and abuse you, murder you in the most evil and terrifying ways that “humans” can imagine. *Nigger*

⁵ December 2015: After years of protests and pressure by community leaders, the University of Chicago has finally relented and announced plans to build an adult level 1 trauma center. (“In About-Face, U. of C. Medicine to Build Adult Trauma Center on Hyde Park Campus,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 17, 2015.)

means to be so abhorrent and wretched that justice or rights do not apply to you. Obviously *nigger* is a word We must resist absolutely, but from which We can never manage to completely escape ... because *nigger* is how We got here. *Nigger* is the force of colonialism and the birth of capitalism gathering up people from anywhere in Africa, stuffing them into this slave ship category. And that's why, as painful as it may be, facing the word *nigger* is an important starting point for dealing with all these alternatives to *nigger*. Black music – along with literature, art, poetry ... Black oratory – is the manifestation of our sublime humanity, the rocket fuel propelling us away from the gravity of sub-terrestrial, below-decks, nigger-hell into the stars of Sahu – the cosmic eternity of our ancestors.

In *Practicing Diaspora* Brent Hayes Edwards writes about the word *Nègres* vs. *Noirs* and *Hommes de Couleur*, analyzing an article about the terminology written by Lamine Senghor (not to be confused with Leopold Senghor, the first President of Senegal). The article interestingly chooses *Nègre* as the unmarked term, then attacks *Noir* and *Homme de Couleur* as terms that are being used by colonials to divide and conquer the Black people. (Edwards, 32) At first it seems almost as if Lamine Senghor argued that we should all agree to be niggers (proud niggers), but Edwards' point is that *nigger* and *Nègre* are not the same. Each has its own history and implications. Edwards goes through some similar terminological schema in English, considering *nigger*, *Negro* and *colored*. None capture the exact nuance of *Nègre*. The book is about the strenuous effort of translation between all these different histories and cultures – Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, African Americans – and those who were trying to imagine them all as one people. And it goes all the way to the most basic level: not only the different experiences, but the very word to call themselves must undergo a strained translation.

Sun Ra believed that *Negro* comes from *necro* meaning dead. (Szwed 1997, 106)

Whether his etymology, perhaps borrowed from *Nigromancy* by Roger Bacon (*ibid.*) is valid, a correlation between death and the identity marker *negro* is almost inescapable. Edwards writes that the French *nègre* and the Spanish *negro* developed as terms that included a designation as slave. (Edwards 2003, 27) Orlando Patterson (1982) writes about slavery as social death. Patterson argues that in the history of human civilization, slavery was not uncommon. He examines slavery in several ancient cultures, including the Chinese, the Romans, the Ashanti, the Somalis and others, and he identifies common and uncommon features in each society's practice of slavery. His concept of social death runs common throughout the different practices. It involves a permanent separation from one's kinship, heritage, status, property, family and society which is the equivalent of death. Furthermore, very often, slavery was a substitute for death. Instead of being killed in war, or executed for a capital crime by the king, state, etc., a person was enslaved. So, by right they should be dead. And that's why, says Patterson, it was often not illegal for masters to whip their slaves to death. Patterson argues that since slaves are already dead, to kill them is not a crime. (Patterson 1982, 5) There is clear evidence that this meaning followed the word *Negro* even after slavery. Disco-poet and former AACM President Khari B. provides a litany of names and horrific fates of but a few of the many people lynched in the United States and elsewhere from the end of the civil war into the 21st Century. (Khari B. lyrics to "Look What They Did 2 My Boy" from Ernest Dawkins' *Un-Till Emmett Till* 2009) And the extra-judicial execution of unarmed Black men is the topic fueling a resurgence in public awareness of Black struggle now in 2016.

One musician and adept student of esoteric Afrocentric knowledge traditions current in Chicago referred me to a documentary video that used textual and iconic evidence

(interpretations of images carved in stone) to link *nigger* and *Negro* to the word *naga*, the serpent deities of ancient Hindu and Buddhist mythology. (Adams *Sambo* film) The African presence in Asia and Black Asian origins have been important subjects for several distinct groups of Black thinkers, especially the Nation of Islam. The narrator explains that the *nagas* were African people associated with the serpent because of their ability to transcend death – the quality represented by the snake, which was thought to be immortal because it shed its skin. (*ibid.*)

The word *nigger* has been reborn to represent a kind of inclusiveness. The cooptation of the negative term *nigger* used in a positive sense by African Americans themselves has a long history. There is evidence that this is true as early as the 1910s, demonstrated in James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which refers to this usage. "I noticed that among this class of colored men the word 'nigger' was freely used in about the same sense as the word 'fellow,' and sometimes as a term of almost endearment; but I soon learned that its use was positively and absolutely prohibited to white men." (Johnson 1912, 47) Mississippi Fred McDowell can be heard using it in the blues "What's the Matter Now" recorded in 1959. And so it continues to be, thereby both representing and enforcing an exclusion of white people. The Last Poets' "Niggers Are Scared of Revolution" (1970) is a usage that presages the word's prevalence in rap music. (Kennedy 2002) The fact that *nigger* is frequently used in rap music can be very confusing. Some try to clarify by differentiating between *nigga* and *nigger*, emphasizing the difference between Black and white pronunciation. Randall Kennedy supposes that this use could be a way of "throw[ing] the slur right back in their oppressors' faces." (Kennedy 2002, 38) Kennedy characterizes this use as either "defiant appropriat[ion] and revalu[ation] such [as] words ... bitch, cunt, queer, dyke, redneck, cracker, and bastard" or as a tragic acceptance of African Americans' lowly position in society. (*ibid.*) Juliette Harris (2014) put it eloquently

while comparing the use of the word with Kara Walker's imagery: "we may view nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger speech in youth culture as an exorcism of word's negative connotations. And an odious epithet becomes a harmless banality; it loses its traumatic power by being overworked and exhausted."

Kennedy also sees that its use functions to exclude white people. (Kennedy 2002) My understanding is simply that a person's position creates presumptions: A white person using the word *nigger* invokes the power of absolute racial superiority over someone, with all its corollary violence. A Black person using it could only be using it in commiseration with others who experience that violence. It's in that sense, of shared experience of violence, marginalization, and subjugation that I hear young people address each other as "my nigger" as a form of inclusion. So that even my teenage Dominican neighbors in Washington Heights NYC, who even in the same instant would object to being called black, could address each other as "my nigger." Perhaps they find themselves marginalized in the place of hatred that is designed for niggers, but which as such embodies another kind of belonging. On the other hand, Arrested Development's song "Everyday People" exhibits a use of the term that distinguishes between honorable, conscious, peaceful-unless-provoked Africans (heroes) on the one hand, and violent, thuggish niggers (villains) on the other.

Negro has now come around to be substituted sporadically for the word *nigger* in contexts where something more consonant with common post-hip-hop usage is meant, but where one wants to avoid the word *nigger*. It has an irreverent edginess with less offense; or it is an amusing variation. *Negro* also has a new nascent saliency among practitioners of historically rooted Blackness. The use of the word in more contemporary times emphasizes identification with ancestors who carried that identity before the 1960s. Some people want to rescue the word

Negro from obsolescence (and offensiveness) because many generations of our ancestors were identified as Negro, and just because We have undertaken to wrest control of our identity away from the oppressors shouldn't mean being alienated from our ancestors. We often still refer to the spirituals as "Negro Spirituals" referencing the common identity of their time. The Negro League Café on 43rd Street in Chicago paid tribute to that era in baseball, and had a weekly jam session circa 2005. As of this writing in 2016, Theaster Gates' Stony Island Arts Bank on the South Side of Chicago houses the Edward J. Williams Collection of Negrobilia.

Herein, I will use the word *Negro* to refer to people of African descent in America who lived during times in which that word was in common usage, before We undertook to radically reform Our identity labels by the adoption of terms such as *African American* or *Black* (see discussion *infra*). While jarring to the modern reader, this usage is meant to draw attention to the important achievement that was the advent of more empowered labels and also to give credit to the people who managed to survive and triumph from within this category of captivity.

African and African American

The exclusivity of identity has come to support a coherence of culture and traditions, preventing those priceless treasures from being completely subsumed by the dominant culture in the United States. By the genius of thinkers like Diop, Asante, Garvey, and Cohran, this identity has developed into a teleological, Diasporic subject position, the goal of which is to unify all people of African heritage having endured European exploitation and colonialism, and to relate them to a common African place of origin. African American identity has thus inspired investigations into the history of Africa and its relationship to African American people.

Gordon talks about some of the rhetorical antecedents of the term *African American*, which constituted a new subject position with an African heritage but with some claim on America. (Gordon 2003, 35) He deals with two abolitionist texts from 1829 – David Walker's *Appeal to*

the Coloured Citizens of the World and Robert Alexander Young's *Ethiopian Manifesto* – which rhetorically constructed “a people” under the advantageous labels indicated in their titles as well as *African* (or sons of Africa) and *black*. Despite these choices, in the society at large on both sides of the color line, they were still called *Negroes*. (Gordon 122) Importantly, at the time those texts were in circulation, one of the dominant debates was whether free Negroes should be sent “back” to Africa (a land most had never seen) or whether they could live free in the United States. Early Negro abolitionist efforts – the Massachusetts General Colored Association in 1816 and the National Negro Convention in 1830 – focused on opposing the African Colonization Society and its idea that free Negroes should be deported. (Gordon 74) The texts Gordon analyzes: 1) rhetorically create a collective [Black] subject, 2) who is of Africa 3) who also has claim to America through blood, sweat and tears, and 4) they call that subject to action against slavery/racism. Neither promoted – rather they argued against – a return to Africa (Gordon 2003, 99)

Marcus Garvey's call for unity in the foundation of the United Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) brought Africa to the foreground in his Back to Africa movement, advocating emigration. (Cronon 1969) Though Cronon reports that the U.N.I.A.'s Black Star Line shipping company was not so much conceived as a transportation link to facilitate emigration to Africa as it was a Black-owned business venture (52) U.N.I.A.'s publication *Negro World* worked to spread awareness of African history. (47)

In the 1960s, the word *Black* replaced *Negro* (see discussion *infra*; I save discussion of *Black* for the end of this section because *Black* is the term that's most relevant to this dissertation and leads to further topics). Beginning in 1988 in Chicago, Jesse Jackson, made visible by his run for President of the U.S., led a campaign to replace the term *Black* with *African American*.

(Martin 1991, 83) The shift was meant to mark the difference between a racial category and an ethnic group, advocating the latter. (Martin 1991, 86)

Debates swelled around the new term in the late 1980s and early 1990s. (Martin 1991) But by the time I'm writing this dissertation, *African American* seems to have become the preferred language of political discourse. Barack Obama and Colin Powell have used it to self-identify. It has become an "objective" or unmarked term for use in academia. But I have not heard it used in self-identification among Us as often as *Black*, except in a public address to audiences including white people and in public writings, though it is quite possible that this is particular to the *Black* communities I've known in Chicago and New York.

An earlier variant *Afro-American* is documented as early as 1905. (Foreman 1968, 93) However, it is very rarely used at all recently, as far as I'm aware. David Boykin discussed the term's impotence in comparison to *Black*. (Boykin 2013, see quotation *infra*.) In 1922, James Weldon Johnson used the word *Aframerican* in the preface to his *Book of American Negro Poetry*. (Johnson [1922] 2008) 41, 45, 46, 47, 49) In 1968, *Afro-American* competed with *Negro*, *Black* and *Colored* in popular consciousness, evinced both by poll numbers and by usage in *Ebony* magazine. (Martin 1991, 93-94) In Saidiya Hartman's book, she describes the Ghanaian practice of referring to Black Americans in Ghana as *Afros*. (Hartman 38) Hartman describes one important difference between *Afros* and Ghanaians: *Afros* had loved President Kwame Nkrumah for his philosophical positions, while many Ghanaians disliked him because his ideological goals overshadowed the practical exigencies of running the country, which resulted in poor living conditions. Similarly, people wish to make the distinction between immigrants and children of immigrants who came from Africa to America after slavery, and those who are the descendants

of the slaves. It is a way to recognize the distinct culture that has developed here, and especially to recognize the struggle and suffering of those times.

Afrocentricity posits an African identity – calling for unifying reference back to the continent, often even excluding any post-hyphen designation (not African-American, but simply African, even if born in the U.S.). I have seen variations that modify the spelling to *Afrikan*, e.g. in the Afrikan Village & Cultural Center of Chicago. The feeling and discourse of belonging to a distant place of historical origin is the subject of diaspora.

Diaspora

“This spiritual music ... is the way out. It is the way back. It is the sankofa.” – Phil Cohran

Bound up with the African and African American identity is the state of being of the African Diaspora. A diaspora is a people dispersed from some previous homeland. Synchronically, the concept of diaspora can describe a group of people who are separate from other people in the place they live because their presence is a result of migration. The concept of diaspora has been interesting to scholars especially for the way this state of societal being complicates nationalist identities, and for its increasing saliency as mobility, migrancy, and urbanization have characterized the turn of the 21st Century.

As scholars discuss the declining primacy of the nation-state, “diasporas have emerged in scholarly and intellectual discourse as ‘the exemplary communities of the transnational moment’” (Tölölyan 1996, 4 quoting Tölölyan [1991]) William Safran gave a set of fairly rigid criteria for defining diasporic communities: 1) the people are dispersed from an original center in a traumatic way, 2) they have a collective memory of the homeland, 3) they don’t believe in becoming assimilated in the hostland, 4) they wish for or plan a return to homeland, 5) they are committed to what’s going on in the homeland, and 6) group consciousness is defined by

relationship to the homeland. (Safran 2005) Such criteria are derived from what are considered the three archetypical diasporic groups: the Jewish Diaspora, the African Diaspora, and the Armenian diaspora. However, the rigidity of this definition has not circumscribed the term's increasing use in scholarship for groups that don't precisely fit it. For instance, the Jewish, Armenian, and African Diaspora were all clearly coerced, but do the sort of economic incentives offered by the European colonials to the Indian people to get them to migrate to the West Indies count as coercion if those methods can be considered trickery? Tölölyan argues that the definition has changed to incorporate this sort of motivation. (Tölölyan 1996, 13) The ability of the definition to expand to accommodate such divergent motivations for dispersal is what makes diaspora so useful, but it also expands the concept to the point where it seems to encompass almost all migrants. Rogers Brubaker finds that the concept is becoming "promiscuously capacious" and losing its teeth. (Brubaker 2005, 4) He warns us to be wary of "groupism" – the tendency to assume people are a group. Groupness has political power, as does its perception, but are people really a group? Just because people come from the same place does not necessarily make people a group, nor a diaspora. One must ask whether, and if so how, they are acting as a "community" with reference to that common origin. Tölölyan says that colonialism, racism, slavery and oppression had turned a diverse group of Africans into an African Diaspora, which was widespread and heterogeneous, "yet recognizable as 'one' in certain discursive contexts and for certain political purposes." (Tölölyan 1996, 13) Tölölyan proposes the distinction between an ethnic community and a diaspora – that the latter has an orientation towards and identifies with the homeland, in contrast to the former. E.g. Italian Americans are more of an ethnic community inasmuch as they never talk about moving "back" to Italy, don't speak Italian, don't care about Italian politics, etc. Tölölyan would prefer to speak of individuals

or smaller groups as acting diasporic, since the distinction between diasporic and ethnic he's developed depends on practices that are inconsistently dispersed throughout an entire ethnic and/or diasporic community. (18)

Tölölyan finds six issues that congeal around these new social formations: diaspora, ethnicity, nationalism, transnationalism, globalization, and post-coloniality. Collective memory is also very important to a diaspora, as is contact with people in the homeland and a loyalty to that land. James Clifford proposes that instead of definitions and oppositional relationships, we should look at a sort of coherent “constellation” of “adaptive” responses to living in displacement. (Clifford 1994, 310) Diasporic language is replacing minority language (we're not a minority; we're of the majority of someplace else.) (311) Clifford sees diasporic consciousness as an alternative to homogeneous national culture, or to cultural hegemony – an alternative way to live in the nation-state differently.

Martin Sökefeld (2006) points out that diasporas are created by imagination, not by dispersal. He argues that the imagination of a community is not a collective consciousness; rather it is a discourse in which belonging, origins, and the truth of the group are disputed (not homogeneously shared). In every case, it's necessary to join up with a diaspora. What this and all other theorizations of diaspora make clear is that migration alone is not enough to constitute a diaspora. An ongoing relation – be it material or discursive – between the population in question and their homeland is key. And so, in the case of the African Diaspora, it becomes very important to discuss the ways in which Negroes, African Americans, and Black people have actively engaged their being *of* Africa.

Brent Hayes Edwards' *Practicing Diaspora* (2003) addresses important discursive aspects in the formation of the African Diaspora. He writes that the Harlem Renaissance was

precipitated by the emergence of anthropology as an academic discipline in the 1920s, which generated many Negro anthologies and a fervor for documentation of anything Negro. Edwards points out Jane Nardal's observation that before the 1920s, New World Negroes thought of Africans as savages, and Africans thought of the New World Negroes as Slaves. France was an important crossroads where Black people from America encountered African and West Indian Black people. Jazz and other "transnational circuits of expressive culture" in the 1920s brought about an "internationalisme noir." (Edwards 2003, 18-19) Edwards' point is that in order for different Black peoples to think of themselves as the same, they have to generalize to such an extent that they're left with an ineffectual abstraction. (Edwards 2003, 23-4)

Stuart Hall argued for an active construction of identity, which presently, actively positions selves in relation to a historical narrative. About Jamaica he wrote that there had been constructed "a 'new' Africa of the New World, grounded in an 'old' Africa: – a spiritual journey of discovery that led, in the Caribbean, to an indigenous cultural revolution; this Africa, as we might say, necessarily 'deferred' – as a spiritual, cultural and political metaphor." (Hall 1990, 231) Muhal Richard Abrams said, "Africa ... is a mixture of a lot of things, especially after having come through the colonial period ... What's important is not a physical but a mental return." (Lewis 2008, 301)

In the title track of James Mtume's album *Alkebu-lan*, the vocalist speaks the idea of going back to self and going back to Africa: "Talking about going back to self. To our beautiful Black natural self. Back to Africa. To Africa. To Africa. Back. Back back back back back ... to self. To self. To self. Organizing and unifying in the land of Alkebulan. The land of the Blacks." (Mtume 1972) In this formulation, Africa can be seen as something within Ourselves; the desire

to return aimed at an internal homeland. Which is certainly reasonable, given the fact that the homeland – Africa – is now much changed by colonialism, capitalism, and external control.

Among the people I've spoken to, the desire to return involves more than a physical return to the continent of Africa. It's a return to a state of freedom from the collective mental, emotional, and social conditions wrought upon the victims of slavery, colonialism, and exploitation. Many of the musicians I've come to know are engaged in active exploration of African philosophy, cosmology, symbology. They incorporate Ghanaian adinkra symbols and concepts into their work. They incorporate Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) deities, concepts, symbols, and cosmology into their work. They become students, sometimes initiates and even priests/priestesses of African Diasporic spiritual practices/religions. Vocalist Sheri Scott, who was featured on Earth Wind and Fire's first album, is a priestess in Yoruba religion. Vocalist, dancer, and actress Cher Jey Cuffie-Samatch was a guest participant in the first Participatory Music Coalition concert, soon joining the Coalition, and she added Yoruba songs and dances she was used to practicing in Baltimore. PMC member Viktor Ewing Givens derives lyrics and visual elements of Cuban Palo, Haitian Vodou, traditional African American spiritual practices (i.e. hoodoo) into his performances. Robert Irving III, former musical director for Miles Davis and active Chicago pianist, composer and leader incorporated Kemetic cosmology into his 2004 recording *Hezu Em Medu Rey Kemet (Songs in the Language of Kemet)*. These are but a few examples of Black musicians in Chicago developing freedom and positive identity through cultivating a relation to an origin place in Africa.

Yet, at this moment there are many American Black people whose Diasporic identities have brought them physically to Africa. They have their own experience of what Africa is – real experience that is also informed by Stuart Hall's "Africa deferred" – which is transforming that

spiritual, cultural, and political metaphor into a spiritual, cultural, and political reality. This can be heard in the music and witnessed in the spiritual practices of some of the musicians in Chicago. For instance, emerging pianist / clarinetist Angel Elmore grew up in Kenya, where her parents lived as missionaries when she was a child. Drummer Sura Dupart travelled to Nigeria and learned drums there. Dupart also discusses Atu Harold Murray (A.K.A. Black Harold) who had just come back from Africa in 1970 when he formed the Sun Drummer group in which Dupart as well as drummer Kahil el Zabar had early formative experiences. AACM Chair Ernest Dawkins performs frequently in South Africa, where he maintains a residence. Dawkins says that it's important for Black people in America to know that there is a place for them in Africa. The Chicago-based Earth Center – an inter-city Kemetic history and culture organization – organizes annual pilgrimages to Burkina Faso and has established a center in that country. In pursuit of this research, I've met many people for whom a trip to Africa is high on their agenda, and I've met a few who have left America entirely.

So we can see this desire and realization of return, probably expanding as African Americans gain more resources and the ability to travel to Africa, and as they hear more and more people's stories of going to Africa. However, Paul Gilroy's important theoretical intervention in diaspora was another big question: What is a diasporic people's relationship to other diasporic people who are of the same homeland but who are living in different hostlands? An affinity develops between people who are diasporic of the same homeland around the world, and connections based on those affinities serve as pathways for knowledge, empowerment, money, culture – all sorts of things. Gilroy invited us to seek to understand the ways in which the different places of the African Diaspora have communicated with each other because instances of Black identity everywhere have been informed by such communication. In *The*

Black Atlantic, Gilroy started with the premise that Black people in America (and a mythical place called Black America) have been central to understanding Blackness not only in the United States but in many other places where Black people live. Besides the examples that Gilroy gives in the Caribbean and the UK, with regard to jazz we see a marked effect in South Africa where during apartheid, people looked to images of Black American jazz musicians for models of what it could look and sound like to be a Black modern subject. Such images were anathema to the regime which wanted native Africans to remain rural people, and which disallowed any claims they made upon modernity. The apartheid government effectively banished successful touring musicians like Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, and others like Louis Moholo Moholo and Dudu Pukwana emigrated to Europe rather than endure harassment by the government.

In Chapter 3 of *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy focuses on music and explicitly states his reasons for doing so. The book's argument involves the memory of plantation slavery as a unifying discourse to the people of the black Atlantic – that the terrors of slavery are continually remembered in discourse defining what Blackness is, whether in the United States or Britain, the Caribbean or elsewhere. The atrocities of slavery were “unspeakable.” In the plantation societies that formed the historical foundation of many of the black Atlantic populations, access to literacy was forcibly withheld from slaves. (Gilroy 1995, 73) But music was something that they were more free to engage in, and therefore music became a fundamental way of encoding knowledge and experience such that it rose to a level of discourse equal in importance to speech or text. Since then it has been a key channel of communication between the different nodes of the black Atlantic. Thus, “The power and significance of music within the black Atlantic have grown in inverse proportion to the limited expressive power of language,” and music is as important a mode of communication as speech. (Gilroy 1995, 74) He criticizes the practice of reducing all

thought to text because much of Black thought, since slavery, has been encoded in performance rituals, gestures, and other sorts of signification specifically alternative to text. (Gilroy 1995, 75)

This is an important point to bear in mind when considering the work of Radano, whose “conventional historical study [*Lying up a Nation*] ... works from an evidentiary body of texts that supply the record of the African-American musical past.” (Radano 2003, xiv) Radano is a self-proclaimed “empiricist,” refusing to trust “tales” and “stories” (i.e. oral history about music), whereas Gilroy’s observations expose the limitations of approaches that cannot see beyond written history. (Radano 2003, 5; Radano, public lecture at Columbia University January 31, 2009) At the time of any primordial jazz, for instance, many Negroes were illiterate. Few whites saw Negro culture (which would have been largely hidden from them anyway) as something to write about. And the institutions that might have preserved those documents did not exist in Our communities.

My initial understanding of the importance jazz musicians in the African Diaspora was premised on the idea that Black music contains special knowledge about the history and experience of being a Black person in America. This knowledge came to rest among Black musicians’ by virtue of their historical role as organs of public discourse during times when Black voices were excluded from other avenues such as politics or control over print and broadcast media etc. Far more than only entertainers, Black musicians are often keepers of tradition, tellers of histories, socially and politically active agents, organizers, leaders, and thinkers. Identity – be it racial, ethnic, gender, national, or whatever – is something that is continually being defined and redefined, so that, for instance, Blackness or African Americanness, is created by what people say it is, what they think it is, and how they represent it. The Chicago musicians I’ve encountered have demonstrated many ways in which Black

musicians, particularly since the 1960s (but also going back to the 1940s in bebop, *see* Lott 1988) have taken ownership of their subjectivity by constructing a positive Black identity using history and by forging new connections with other peoples of the African Diaspora such as Caribbean people, Brazilian people, and African people.

There have been many scholars debating to what extent jazz is an African musical form. In order to relate this music to the people and their political struggles, throughout the history of the music, people have made a convincing case for the idea that jazz is of Black people – that it was invented by them, that they are the best players of it, that it contains essentially black meanings which escape white or other listeners to the music, that it contains survivals of West African culture, that it relates to other music in the African Diaspora by virtue of these survivals. Ingrid Monson does this in her introduction to the edited volume *The African Diaspora: a Musical Perspective*. (2003) Her introduction implies the idea that jazz is essentially Black, and that such essence derives from historical African musical concepts and forms, is thus related to their contemporary African descendant musical forms, and relates to musical forms of Black people in the Caribbean, Brazil and other places. Monson's chapter is informed by Gilroy's chapter on music in *The Black Atlantic*, while some of the chapters in her edited volume struggle to attach their analyses to a theory of diaspora. For example, Travis Jackson's chapter on ritual in jazz performance does not engage with any of the questions that diaspora has been theorized to entail but instead seems to assume that wherever ritual is to be found in jazz simply must relate to the other, more ritualistic cultures of Black people in the Caribbean and in Africa. In contrast, Monson's own chapter on Art Blakey's Africa, while not critically engaging diaspora as a concept (which she takes care of in her introduction to the book) offers an analysis of Art Blakey's relationship to Africa and is informed by more sophisticated discourse on diaspora. Art

Blakey was a very influential drummer whose group, The Jazz Messengers, set very high standards in the style of jazz known as hard bop, which emerged in the 1950s. Some writers have argued that the hard bop style represents a recovery of Blackness after commercialization and concomitant whitening of the earlier bebop style resulted in cool jazz – that hard bop was a conscious return to Southern roots in blues and spirituals. (see Jones 1964; Charles Mingus *Blues and Roots*) Jones/Baraka's understanding of the Black people was that they are not African people but American people, and so their entire history as a people is bounded in time, beginning with slavery when, forcibly disconnected from Africa, they were forced to build an entirely new culture out of scanty scraps, and along with it, an entirely new musical tradition. (Jones 1964, see *discussion infra*.) In her treatment of Art Blakey's relationship with Africa, Monson (2003) shows Blakey's view of the relationship between jazz and Africa in similar terms. She speculatively concludes that Blakey made statements such as that jazz has nothing to do with Africa in order to emphasize the unique achievement of African Americans in *creating* jazz – that they didn't just inherit it but were agentic in its construction. (Monson 2003, 346)

Art Blakey's prominence in the style that some jazz literature champions as a style that sought to restore authentic Blackness to jazz makes Blakey's relation to Africa all the more interesting. Monson reports that he was converted to Islam by the Ahmadiyya movement, and subsequently decided to travel to Africa to live for a year or two beginning in 1947. (Monson 2003, 336) While he was there, he studied Islam and met some of the people of Nigeria and Ghana. After he returned, he was a major innovator in hard bop through the 1950s. In the period 1957 to 1962, Blakey recorded several albums – *Ritual*, *Drum Suite*, *Orgy in Rhythm*, *Holiday For Skins*, and *The African Beat* – that Monson argues contain many elements of African rhythm, which she strongly suggests Blakey acquired during his time in Africa. (Monson 2003,

337) Apparently, when his usual rhythm section proved unable to precisely execute the African rhythmic concepts Blakey wanted to incorporate, he assembled an Afro-Cuban percussion section, including Sabu Martinez, who could better understand the rhythmic layering that Blakey was trying to create. (Monson 2003, 340) Furthermore Monson argues that the fact that these albums were recorded around the time of Ghana's independence expresses an awareness of West African politics, an "invo[cation] of African Diasporic connections at the time of Ghanaian independence ... " (Monson 2003, 339) She is interested in why Blakey gave conflicting statements about his time in Africa, sometimes denying altogether that music had anything to do with his time there, and other times saying that he got musical ideas while living in Ghana. Her chapter, whether wittingly or unwittingly, emphasizes the importance of spirituality for the sense of connection with Africa that musicians and other African Americans of this era were exploring. The fact that there was an emerging consciousness of the relationship between the Black people of the United States and Africa largely filtered through Islam (sometimes creating more of a link between American Black people and other Black diasporic peoples as in Blakey's relationship with Cuban musicians) is complicated by the fact that different people came to this awareness by different paths. Monson points out that the Ahmadiyya movement, which was somewhat of a splinter of the larger Islam and has not been recognized by many powerful figures in Islam, was very different than the Nation of Islam, which is the more famous group of Black Muslims in the United States. (Monson 2003, 333) The main difference at issue here between the two groups in the 1950s and '60s was on the question of separatism or Black Nationalism: where the Nation of Islam stressed separateness from white America, the Ahmadiyya movement emphasized looking beyond racial or ethnic distinctions. (Monson 2003, 333) Monson suggests that the reason that Art Blakey denied the connection between Africa and jazz is because, in the time of the Black

Power movement, when people were asserting a connection between Africa and jazz in order to advocate a Black Nationalist agenda, Blakey, under the influence of the Ahmadi's multi-racial teachings, felt compelled to decry what he called the "fascis[m]" of the Black Power Movement. (Monson 2003, 346) She also suggests that his later rejection of these albums relates to his "fierce opposition to racial politics" which may come from the Ahmadi's inclusive philosophy. She further explains his rejection of the Africanness in jazz as perhaps a way of saying that the African American contribution is something in itself – that Black people in America aren't Africans, that jazz was a remarkable achievement of Black people in America, and that to say that jazz is African music is to negate that distinctly American achievement.

Monson's chapter addresses the history of the connection between other Black musicians and Africa in the 1940s and 1950s, sometimes through Islam. Eric Porter (2002) in *What Is This Thing Called Jazz* points to the number of Black musicians, and African Americans more generally, that were turning to Islam. Porter recounts that Blakey converted to Islam after having been beaten by police, and we also learn that Blakey for a time ran a Muslim mission out of his apartment in New York. (Porter 2002, 78) Porter writes that the turn to Islam by many musicians was "a product of the will to defy social categories that fueled the imaginations of many musicians. Thus a broad-minded approach to both life and art could serve as a weapon in the struggle against the absurdities of race in American society." (Porter 2002, 79) This sort of motivation could further help explain Art Blakey's decision to travel to Africa. In any case, Monson portrays Art Blakey's forays into African and Afro-Cuban forms as something much more than the sort of faddish exoticizations that were more common in the earlier history of jazz. Rather she suggests that they are expressions of a connection to, an interest in, and a sense of commonality with West African political developments, forms of spirituality, and a shared

interest in anti-colonialism. This work is a very instructive theorization of the African Diaspora, relative to other studies of the relationship between African and African American music, because instead of merely picking out African musical elements in jazz – especially rhythmic patterns – Monson interprets why those elements are there to be found, and she does so in terms of the contemporary relationship between Blakey, the musicians in Africa, and those coming from Cuba. Also, she refers to the political and spiritual motivations that Blakey seems to have had in incorporating these references. We can understand African American people paying closer attention to Africa around the independence of Ghana in the late 1950s and through the 1960s while new African nations were emerging. Africans as rulers over their own new sovereign nations were inspirational during these times of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement.

Finally with regards to diaspora, I wish to suggest that the Black identity that developed in Chicago resulted not only from a forced, traumatic mass migration from Africa to the United States, but also from the South to the North. The Great Migration is a history that is shared among most Chicago Black folk, and Southern roots are a subject of much discussion. Many Black Chicagoans maintain ties to the South and have family there. Chicago Black culture has a markedly Southern accent. The migration from the South to the North, the trials and difficulties of building a place for themselves in the northern city, and the new experience of confinement that came out of that migration had the most proximate ramifications in terms of the development of Black identity. On the other hand, it's not clear that Black folk in Chicago commonly claimed any Southern identity as such. The Black identity that developed there rather came to reference Africa as homeland.

It's also very significant that while most of Our ancestors moved to the South in chains against their will, they moved from the South to the North by their own volition, with their own courage, their own resources. The colonies they established in Northern cities allowed them not only to escape intolerable conditions and terrorism in the South, not only to access economic opportunities unavailable in the South, but also to maintain, develop, and extend African American culture in a new region. I will return to the Great Migration in Chapter 4.

Black

“Black identity ... is lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires.” (Gilroy 1995, 102)

First, it is important to understand that *Black* is more than a color of skin, or an appearance, or a collection of phenotypes otherwise defined. The identity *Black* has a history which is part of its meaning, and much of its history involves a relationship with other labels that have attached to descendants of Africa in the United States and elsewhere. The identity *Black* has subsumed within it a relationship with and a contradistinction to these other identities, and the development of a differently politically powerful subject position in a post-civil rights era. While black had for some time been used as a descriptor, the idea that one could be Black and proud, or Black and powerful, was a development that is now inflected in its deployment, nowhere more so than in Chicago. One advantage that *Black* has over *African American* is that the former disregards nationality and therefore has the power to unite people irrespective of the national boundaries that crystallize white-supremacist geographies.

Phil Cohran articulated his reasoning for his preference for the term *Black*: the Honorable Elijah Muhammad chose that word as a source of power. It's important to take into account the constructions of Black identity that grew out of the Nation of Islam, just as it's important to

consider the Black Power movement, whose very name is a revelation that Black people can and should seek power and can begin a discourse of empowerment. Similarly, when Ayana Contreras asked saxophonist David Boykin whether he was an “Afro-Futurist,” he answered “No and Yes.” No because he’s not a big fan of the term. But in terms of marketing his music, it’s a useful term. He said he’s not fond of the word because it’s “Afro” like the hairstyle. It says nothing about power, whereas Black Futurism comes from a position of power (like the Black Power Movement). People talk about Black power, not Afro power: “People use the term Black as opposed to negro, as opposed to colored, as opposed to Afro-American ... to signify power.” (Boykin 2012) In this statement, he indicates two things, which are also relevant to the word *jazz*. First, there are some words with which the musicians have a love-hate relationship. Like *jazz*, which is both etymologically problematic and useful for marketing, so the word *Afro-futurism*. Second, he demonstrates the serious intellectual engagement with terms that I’ve encountered among these Black musicians. Boykin has continued Sun Ra’s tradition of scholarship, writing a master’s thesis on Sun Ra entitled “Space Man or Race Man” focused on Sun Ra’s commitment to the advancement of the Black race. (Hall 2010)

“The phrase ‘Black Power’ had been used by Richard Wright, Paul Robeson, and Adam Clayton Powell in earlier decades [and was] revived by Stokely Carmichael in 1966.” (Martin 1991, 84) “Until the late 1960s, black was an insult for many Negroes.” (Martin 1991, 90) Political scientist Ben L. Martin points out that using the term accompanied an embrace of theretofore undesirable physical characteristics of African descent – dark skin, African hair. “Within little more than a year of Stokely Carmichael’s calls for Black Power in mid-1966, young blacks – especially in the urban North – stopped using Negro except in ridicule. Black was associated with youth, unity, militancy and pride ... ” (Martin 1991, 92)

Black Musical Authenticity and The Black Arts Movement

Gilroy points out that authenticity has been at issue in the music since at least the 1870s when the Fisk Jubilee Singers presented a repertoire of spirituals as an alternative to minstrelsy. (Gilroy 1993, 88) Minstrelsy represented the birth of popular culture – the first time when performers traveled around the United States performing the same acts of imitation, parody, and ridicule. Thus, the contestation over authenticity in Negro culture has always been at the center of popular culture itself. Gilroy discusses Zora Neale Hurston's appraisal of the Fisk Jubilee singers, whom Hurston considered inauthentic. For Gilroy, what's interesting is not whether her appraisal is correct, but that she feels compelled to draw a line around what is authentic and what is not. (Gilroy 1993, 92) Hurston went even further than the examples Gilroy used to describe her commitment to defining authenticity when she wrote about the Negro Folk Concert she put together in New York City in 1932. According to her autobiography, the whole concert was meant as a corrective to impure or inauthentic contrivances of Negro music. (Hurston 1939) Those other performances showed Negro music that had been "tampered with" and were not done in the style that one would hear in a Southern church or some other real setting, and Hurston indicted those other performers as guilty of "squeezing the rich black juice out of the songs" in order to present a "musical octoroon to the public." (Hurston 1995, 804) Her performative remedy to such practices combined Negro work songs with Bahaman folk dancing and was given the authentic setting of a Florida railroad camp (though the performances took place in concert halls). This combination of the American and West Indian folk culture was for Hurston an appropriate expression of authenticity, though she reports that the Bahamans and Americans didn't get along very well. Apparently the Bahaman dancers were hurt when the American singers kept calling them "monkey chasers." The performance and Hurston's writing about it demonstrate 1) how Hurston felt that it was her duty as a (real) Negro to police the

boundaries of authenticity in Negro music, 2) that such authenticity was strongly associated with the rural South, and 3) that when different groups of Negroes were brought together for the purpose of expressing authentic Negro culture, tension along national lines resulted. Also, it is one early case in which Negro authenticity is challenged, redefined, and constructed through performance.

Several decades later, LeRoi Jones, later known as Amiri Baraka, along with Larry Neal, Jayne Cortez and others, was one of the chief proponents of the Black Arts movement, which was the cultural arm of the Black Power movement of the 1960's and '70's. His book *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* was a revolutionary history of Negro people in America which traced the development of their place in the United States through music. His central thesis was that the music was inextricably intertwined with their experience, and the music they created changed as their conditions changed. For Jones, "The blues is the parent of all legitimate jazz ..." (Jones 1964,17) Running through his account of jazz are cycles of purity and pollution, or, more often, "dilution": when the people moved from the South to the Northern cities, their culture was diluted. Only the Southern people who came up had the pure music; the ones raised in the north were closer to European music. Piano rags came into fashion, and were closer to authentic Negro music than the piano sheets that spread through the nation, which were a popularized dilution of the pure. The only place to hear the real stuff was in the "gutbucket" joints. In ragtime, Negroes used white piano techniques they heard in white show music. The white show music was really popularized imitations of minstrel music, which was itself an imitation of Negro music. Thus he exclaims, "The hopelessly interwoven fabric of American life where blacks and whites pass so quickly as to become only grays!" (Jones 1964, 11)

It is important for Jones that Africans became Americans, and this transformation resulted in the advent of the blues: “[The blues] is a native American music, the product of the black man in this country.” (Jones 1964, 17) First there were the slave work songs and spirituals. African religious musical forms had to undergo a complete “transfer of reference” because, unlike the multitude of saints in the Catholic new world countries upon which were mapped the various *loa* or deities from West African religion, there was no such possibility in Protestant U.S. While the first African slaves had used Africa as a reference, their children, having never known Africa, used America as a reference. These are the first Black American songs, which still used a great number of “Africanisms.” (Jones 1964, 18) Plantation owners suppressed references to African gods and also prevented the use of drums after learning that the drums could be used to communicate and coordinate subversion. (Jones 1964, 19)

The language used in the early work songs incorporated some new world languages – French, English, Spanish, Portuguese. They picked up the necessary words, pronounced them as well as they could, but importantly, in Herskovits’ words, “cast [them] into an African grammatical mold.” (Herskovits [1941] 1990, 280) Important differences exist between Western and African aesthetics such that the Western aim is to remove the natural and have the artifact, some pure round tone that eliminates any harshness, whereas the emulation of natural things, such as the cry or scream of the human voice, is something desirable in jazz and blues instrumental music. These are at odds, and Jones says, could still be seen in the difference between the cleaner, softer sounding white musicians, and the Black musicians which play harder. He compared Paul Desmond and Charlie Parker on the alto. Borneman writes “while the whole European tradition strives for regularity – of pitch, of time, of timbre and of vibrato – the African tradition strives precisely for the negation of these elements.” (Jones 1964 31)

Twenty-first century writers are yet trying to get to the essence of what constitutes Black music, what it's made of, what's rooted in Africa, and therefore in a sense what's authentically Black about it. Travis Jackson (2003) challenges the common discursive disconnection between jazz and other African Diasporic music such as in Candomblé and Haitian Vodou. He criticizes the Western Europe-oriented scholars who focus on the music's form instead of its concept and who "fail to distinguish between the expressive medium of musical sound and the conceptual bases that inform its production." (24) So, it is with the goal of exploring connections among diasporic nodes that he inquires into the relationship between performance and ritual. Jackson points out how important the blues is in jazz, and that Blackness is essential to the jazz idiom. He goes on to discuss interviews of musicians, emphasizing the importance of individuality more than novelty:

Blues derived playing and expression ... become not a function of harmonic and rhythmic complexity ... [neither just simplicity]; rather they are concerned with projecting "strength" and "power" through the way in which one approaches whatever rhythmic, harmonic or timbral resources are being utilized. (41)

"[The] blues aesthetic" is the sum of the reflective and normative assertions that musicians have made regarding processes of performance, interaction and evaluation ... [i]t is constituted by "learned" practices derived from and continually fed by African American musics and culture. (52)

For Jackson, jazz is an "African derived 'conceptual approach' to making music." Elements of discourse about jazz that are rooted in Western classical music are resultant from attempts to legitimate jazz in the face of classical-oriented detractors, and therefore musicians who say that their music is based on the blues do not contradict themselves when in the same breath they talk about their music in terms of the European classical tradition, for instance, "jazz is America's classical music."

Black music is said to have an essential quality. Some call it soul. Some call it funk. Robert Farris Thompson (1984) said that the word *funk* comes from the kikongo word “lufuki” which refers to the scent of a body that’s exerted itself. (104) “This Kongo sign of exertion is identified with the positive energy of a person. Hence ‘funk’ in black American jazz parlance can mean earthiness, a return to fundamentals.” (105) Cornel West defines funk: “This funk is neither a skill nor an idea, not a worldview or a stance. Rather it is an existential capacity to get in touch with forms of kinetic orality and affective physicality acquired by deep entrenchment in – or achieved by pre-theoretical styles owing to socialization in – the patterns of Afro-American ways of life and struggle.” (West 1999, 479)

The impact of *Blues People* was profound in the development of Black identity (despite the word *Negro* in the title) and in defining the Black Arts Movement. Jones was also seminal in defining a relationship between the Black Arts/Black Power Movement and free jazz. Several writers including Jones/Baraka attempted to define a new Black aesthetic related to the new form of Black Nationalism emerging in the 60’s. Baraka’s *Black Music* collects a number of his essays on the emerging avant-garde scene in New York, including “The Changing Same” in which he furthers his argument of a continuity of Black music that has seen various interruptions and dilutions. Through that continuity he posits a connection between the contemporaneous genres of 1960s avant-garde jazz and R&B. This later essay can be seen as part of the project to define a new Black national identity through aesthetics, in which he and other writers, such as Larry Neal, set out a path for expunging (or “destroying”) white aesthetic values from Black cultural production. (Neal 1968) The radical separateness that Baraka expresses leads him to choose avant-garde jazz as the primary new Black music because he finds it relatively free of European influence and therefore entirely new, Black, and American. Jones spends a lot of time railing

against the Black middle class and how they have always striven to clean themselves of all things Black. In his works they are the antagonists to the aesthetic principles of Black music second only to the white people.

The Black Aesthetic, edited by Addison Gayle (1971), collects several important works including Jones/Baraka's "The Changing Same" as well as Larry Neal's "The Black Arts Movement," which helps to digest the sort of politicized aesthetic they were advocating. Neal describes the relationship between Black Arts and Black Power: "The Black Arts and Black Power concept both related broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics." (Neal 1968, 272) He goes on to explain that the Black aesthetic is all about rejecting (he says "destroying") Euro-American aesthetic values because they are anti-human. The Black aesthetic eschews "protest" literature (or music) because protest appeals to the moral authority of the dominant culture, which authority is rejected by Black Power. Finally, the Black aesthetic is ethical. These works are illustrative of how Jones, Neal and others of the Black Power movement wanted to use the new jazz music to help them create a new Black national identity.

Several 21st Century perspectives take issue with the idea of ascribing this new politicized aesthetic to the (then) new jazz music. Jason Robinson (2005) discusses musicians' resistance to the Black Power movement's politicization of their music. He says for instance that while Coltrane was a favorite of Baraka and others who wanted to use the new jazz as a musical emblem of the new Black Nationalism and its aesthetic which rejected white and middle-class values, Coltrane's music was not nationalist or even expressly Black music, but rather had more of a universalist and spiritual conceptual foundation. Much the same was true for Eric Dolphy

and Albert Ayler, and although Archie Shepp did fit more neatly into the Black Arts Movement's paradigm, he too took issue with some of its tenets. Robinson argues that musicians of the new Black music inhabited a "complex dialogic space" which, contrary to unifying discourses of writers like Jones/Baraka and Larry Neal, sought "wide-ranging approaches to the confrontation of hegemonic structures through experimentalism and improvisation." (Robinson 2005)

Robinson's essay is very helpful in understanding the motivations behind Jones' insistence in "The Changing Same" that the latest musical expression of the Black aesthetic was free jazz despite the fact that the new Black music was not popular with Black people. Jones/Baraka took the position that R&B, which *was* popular in the Black community, and free jazz were essentially different kinds of the same thing. Eric Porter (2002) discusses points of tension between the Black Arts writers and free jazz musicians. Porter calls attention to the difficulties that jazz musicians of this era had in negotiating the increasingly competing interests of making their livings as musicians on the one hand and making their music socially relevant on the other.

Paul Gilroy discusses the drawback of politically grounded perspectives creeping into anthropological analysis. (Gilroy 1993, 99-101) Writers on the subject of Black music are confronted with a precarious problem of trying to represent Black people with respect to their diversity of experiences and identities while still proceeding along the lines of their commonalities. One difference between the essentialism to be found in Hurston's assertion of Negro authenticity, and that in Jones'/Baraka's is that Hurston is still responding to the aftermath of minstrelsy, a powerful, intercontinental form of inauthenticity, whereas Baraka is trying to formulate an aesthetic emblematic of a Black nation within a nation, the chief boundary of which must be a distinction from whiteness and thus, for him, only the very Blackest of the Black, without a trace of whiteness, will suffice. Such polarizations, inherited from the racial schema

invented by Europe in order to define Others to be dominated, are problematic. Both remain trapped within a fatal paradigm. But at the same time they are part of the lived reality of the Black people and form the substrate on which large portions of many people's personhoods are constructed, so that to write from outside of the racial binary, even if that were possible, would be to risk alienating the people whom the crux of the project is to unify. What remained the same from Hurston's effort to the Black Arts Movement was the imperative to represent Us well – either accurately in order to defeat rampant mis-representations, or in a way that opened up new possibilities for Black becoming.

Musicians, poets and artists in New York were deeply engaged with defining and expanding Black music. For instance, in an article published in *The Cricket* – the magazine published by A.B. Spellman, Larry Neal, and Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones – drummer/percussionist Milford Graves defined Black Music:

Black music is a living and experienced music and not one to be studied from any western intellectual source (textbooks, schools), that the only source is through actual spontaneous improvised participation among our fellow black brothers to positively assemble and direct our feeling – visions that we have experienced in life. (Funkhouser 2003)

The antipathy Graves shows towards Western intellectual traditions (academics) is not unique to him, and I can testify that it is still very much present among Black musicians even as more Black musicians enter the academy. Many of the Black musicians in Chicago I spoke with take a position similar to this and LeRoi Jones' in *Blues People*. What makes music Black is at once its African aesthetics and also its distinction from Western music (Western aesthetics) and that is epitomized by the blues (Jones 1964, 17).

In Chicago, I found it much more common than in New York to find the blues in a jazz performance. Often, in very events that focus on Conscious, experimental and unusual music, the

musicians would play a blues as a way to relieve the intensity of the often jarring and unfamiliar music. And I think it also conceptually brings the new music into relation with a well-established tradition. In Chicago, many musicians and listeners think of jazz as a descendant of the blues. As Jones said that the blues is the parent of any legitimate jazz, Phil Cohran said that jazz is just what happened when Black musicians got bored playing the blues every night and started to elaborate on it. (Cohran interview on WNUR, February 24, 2014) Cohran's perspective is especially valuable because he was on the scene when jump blues was extremely popular, playing with Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Big Joe Turner, and Jay McShann for example. As David Ake indicates, jump blues players such as Louis Jordan are often elided from jazz histories (Ake 2002, 42). Ake discusses how in New York, the beboppers (with the exception of Charlie Parker) eschewed blues changes in order to distinguish themselves from the country folk, while this is less true in other places (49). (Having been strongly admonished "No blues!" while casually playing jazz in New York, I can relate to this observation; such a thing never happened in Chicago.) Cohran's account seems to bolster Ake's point that jump blues must be also considered part of the foundations of jazz. It also calls into question the linear model of the evolution of jazz, in which New Orleans' music travelled up the Mississippi River boats, took root in Chicago, and then found its highest expressions in New York City. Jazz is probably better thought of as a wide field of musical practices that coalesced from as many streams of activity as the many directions into which it eventually branched out. Ake's observation indicates limitations of a dominant, New York-centric viewpoint when it comes to what counts as jazz. Finally it also points out the limited utility of the genre boundaries, and it helps us understand why musicians, while acknowledging them, can also tend to minimize the importance of such definitions.

In Chicago, the Black Arts Movement engendered the creation of many Black organizations. The Wall of Respect was a project of the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC pronounced Oba-si) completed on August 26, 1967. (Murray and Locke 2009) Haki Madhubuti (F.K.A. Don L. Lee) was one of the poets in OBAC who went on to found Third World Press, the Institute of Positive Education, and many other Black institutions. AfriCOBRA (AFRIcan Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) splintered off from OBAC. When interviewed by Graham Lock, AfriCOBRA founding member Wadsworth Jarrell said that the idea was to create an entirely African American aesthetic, free of European influences. (Murray and Lock 2009, 152) Abena Brown founded the eta Creative Arts Foundation in 1971, which was at the time the “only African American full service cultural arts collective in the nation.” (Zabar 2014) Most importantly for the discussion here, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) was founded in Chicago in 1965, which will be discussed more fully at the end of this Chapter.

Complicating Black: Matana Roberts

Alto saxophonist Matana Roberts is an AACM member who is from Chicago but is now based in New York City. Through a project she calls Coin Coin, after one of her ancestors, she explores ten generations of her family’s history in the South and in the North. A Black woman, one of the things Matana was surprised to find was that her family tree includes people of Irish and Welsh descent as well as people of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee Native American societies. Since uncovering these origins, she often emphasizes the capacity of Black identity to include many other ethnic groups. She thereby subverts the model of racial exclusivity inherited from European colonialism and slavery.

Rather than any unified single Black identity encompassing a Black nation, Roberts focuses on a personal identity, or rather a construction of self, that is in a continual process of creative exploration and perhaps re-creation through her music, which involves Blackness, femininity and feminism individually constructed, and social responsibility. However, this construction is related to a larger Black people in that We have all undergone processes of essentialism and the erasure of individual difference, either as the target of racist discourses or as participants in strategic essentialism with the goal of liberation from hegemonic structures of power. She advocates awareness that Black people in America have a great diversity of histories, involving countless trajectories, the variety of which is often detrimentally elided by Black History however politically nuanced.

Coin Coin is a series of compositions based on her family's history in the South and North back through seven generations. (Roberts, May 6, 2008) Roberts sings of specific experiences which may not be seen as representative of all Black historical experience, such as the extraordinary case of her ancestor Coin Coin, the project's namesake, who inherited land from a Frenchman with whom she'd had a relationship, and then worked that land to raise money enough to buy her family out of slavery.

In the 21st Century, actually beginning in the 1990s according to some, there has emerged a concept of "post-Black" in which many of the accepted tenets of Blackness were challenged. Writer Touré (2012) elucidates this idea, calling into question the rigidity of the concepts of Blackness. Former AACM president Khari B. also engages with this concept. He offered this description of his *One Man Show of Art by Negro: A Redo* held at the DuSable Museum of African American History in November 2014: "A poetic exploration of self-definition, image

and power as it pertains to race in a ‘Post Black’ World.” (Khari B. promotional material). His performance, however, did not deploy or critically engage with the concept.

Complicating *Jazz*

The musicians who first played music we would recognize as jazz probably did not use the word *jazz*. Gushee (1994) suggests that the term was first applied when New Orleans’ music was presented as a novelty in San Francisco. Jelly Roll Morton attested that in his time, the music was referred to as ragtime played hot. (*ibid.*) Several theories exist about how the name came about but most suggest that the term *jazz* probably did not originate with the musicians and that it was the promoters and the record companies that came up with the idea to name it *jazz*. Thus the concert promoters and the critics started defining what it was to be jazz. The critics started determining what was good about the music, what can change and what must remain in order to qualify as jazz, or what could be denigrated and maligned as anti-jazz. But almost all the critics, concert promoters, and the owners of the record companies were white. This is part of the reason why some Black jazz musicians have a problem with the term *jazz*.

Matana Roberts, like many other musicians and writers, distinguishes between commercial concerns and artistic ones. About how she feels about *jazz*, Roberts says, “I’m neutral most times. Sometimes I like it and sometimes I don’t. But categories are really only for commercialization in this day and age so no need to get too wrapped up in that debate in my opinion.” (pers. comm. 2008)

When she told me this, it reminded me of the ambivalence identified by Dennis-Constant Martin in his essay “Les musiques face au pouvoirs.” (2004) Martin focuses on the relationship between music and power in sub-Saharan Africa and on how colonization, concomitant urbanization, and decolonization have undergirded historically recent developments in that

relationship. Whereas in pre-colonial times (and currently in places where such pre-colonial structures have been preserved) “musicians [had] maintain[ed] a relationship of interdependence with the powerful,” colonialism modified that relationship. (119) The moment/site of colonization was marked by a new strong feeling of ambivalence, in which people were faced with European domination that offered attractive trinkets and positively transformative technology while at the same time it humiliated, exploited and oppressed them. So it’s not that African musicians either a) supported the establishment, or b) denounced it. Rather the musicians, along with everybody else, tended to remain ambivalent. In places where scarcity of resources combines with abuses of power the people, including musicians, are often repulsed by the abuses of power while simultaneously coveting the benefits to be had by the favor of the powerful. Thus, “the dominant current is that of ambiguity.” (118)

Similarly, while jazz musicians have wanted and needed the benefits of a relationship with the recording industry, many are ambivalent towards it, recognizing its tendency to limit, control, and exploit them. New Orleans trumpeter Freddie Keppard was offered the chance to become the first recorded jazz musician in 1917, but he declined out of concerns that others would steal his techniques. (Gushee 1988) Phil Cohran often decries the repercussions from the shift from the times on the South Side of Chicago when people would primarily experience music live, in groups, in their neighborhoods, to the time when recordings became a dominant force, controlled by capitalism, and in turn controlling the musicians and the music, undermining the live music scene on the South Side. Ernest Dawkins similarly recalls growing up on the South Side when most of the great Black musicians not only performed there, but also resided in the neighborhood at least partly because their race excluded them from other parts of the city regardless of their fame and fortune. In those times, Dawkins says, there was a lot more

interchange between different kinds of Black music – gospel, blues, jazz, R&B – and everybody was called upon to play all different styles. Now, he says, people go to school to learn jazz, but the idea of jazz comes with limits, excluding other forms so that students don't learn to play styles like rock 'n' roll or soul music in school, and that has changed the music dramatically.

John D. Bakerville (1994) gives a very helpful account of the debate over racial/ethnic identity and terminology, citing objections by Archie Shepp, Max Roach and others to the word *jazz* as a divisive form of control of the dominant society over Black people. (485-6) Porter (2002) wrote of Charles Mingus that while “‘jazz’ worked for him as a symbol of Black resistance and African American affirmation, it remained a signifier of racial stereotypes and the strictures that the music industry and the broader society placed on Black musicians.” (136) George Lewis invites us to understand jazz “not as a set of musicologically codifiable ... characteristics such as ‘swing,’ but rather as a race-, gender-, and class-inflected social location within which sound and musical practice take on additional meanings.” (Lewis 2008, xlv) Thus music may have its own characteristics irrespective of its category; and *jazz*, not irrelevant, can be understood as a “social location.” I read this as an attempt to deal with the universality of the term (everybody's heard of jazz) while not becoming bound by its definitions, which are rarely controlled by the musicians themselves.

Alexandre Pierrepont is an anthropologist who has worked with, studied, and written about the AACM and many other avant-garde/experimental/creative jazz musicians. He is also an important presenter of the music in Paris and Chicago. In *Le Champ Jazzistique* (2002) Pierrepont collects statements by a sufficient number and variety of important Negro, Black, and African American instrumentalists rejecting the term *jazz*, many proposing instead something that references Black or African American identity: Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Duke

Ellington, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, Sonny Rollins, Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Lee Morgan, Charles Tolliver, Charles Tyler, Byron Allen, Lester Bowie, Henry Threadgill, Steve Coleman. (24-25) Other musicians react negatively to other terms, or more in-depth about jazz, showing that labels and terminology commonly applied to their music do not accurately represent it: Miles Davis on the blues; Charles Mingus and Jimmy Giuffre on swing; Langston Hughes and Dizzy Gillespie on bebop; and finally Don Moye advocating *Great Black Music*. (26-27)

Duke Ellington famously insisted that his music was “beyond category.” (Hass 1995) Porter reports that Ellington had an aversion to the word *jazz* and sought to make advances in *Negro music*. (Porter 2002, 36) George Lewis discusses the way that Black composers are automatically labeled *jazz* regardless of the content of their work, as opposed to white composers who were permitted affinities both with European art music and with rock, resulting in substantial financial benefits. (Lewis 2004a) Trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith (1973) has advocated and elaborated on the term *creative music*, as in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Music. Lewis also discusses the initial meeting of the AACM, during which the definition of the term *creative music* was debated intensely. (Lewis 2008)

Jones cites bebop as reflective of an important shift in Black people’s awareness of their predicament within white American society. He says that it was during the WWII era that Black people developed a certain cynicism embodied in Baraka’s statement, “It was not that a Negro was uneducated or vulgar or unfit for the society which determined why he was not accepted into it, it was the mere fact that he *was* a Negro.” (Jones 1964, 185) After having achieved, or at least understood, all the conditions that were purportedly necessary for them to be assimilated into white society – education, taste, money etc. – Black people found that regardless of these things,

they would still never be allowed complete equality with white people. Thus, Baraka articulates their epiphany: “To understand that you are black in a society where black is an extreme liability is one thing, but to understand that it is the society that is lacking and is impossibly deformed because of its lack, *and not you yourself*, isolates you even more from that society.” (Jones 1964, 185, emphasis in the original) This isolation manifested itself in the idea of Blackness as a kind of non-conformity, which was expressed by the Black musicians in the bebop revolution – Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and several others. (Jones 1964) In other words, these musicians were part of a Black community in New York that stopped believing in assimilation and therefore expressed their Black identity in acts of taunting and challenge to the established order, into which they no longer had aspiration of being included. (*ibid.*) The beboppers to Jones are rebels – the original bad boys of music – who no longer care what white people think of their music and therefore reject white aesthetic values in order to invent a new Black music.

Eric Porter identifies a shift in Black consciousness at this point in history, yet he contextualizes and articulates it slightly differently:

Rising black awareness and militancy, combined with shifting class relations, an internationalist perspective, and a dissatisfaction with the limitations of racial identities, fostered a certain kind of oppositional consciousness among African Americans from different social backgrounds. On the musical front, this often translated into critical ecumenicalism, with many artists maintaining a strong sense of identity as African Americans while embracing a cosmopolitan approach to life and art. (Porter 2002, 61)

According to Porter, the new complexity of bebop along with the adoption of the accoutrements of intellectuals – goatees and horned-rimmed glasses etc. – and the application of a wider range of Western theoretical concepts to their music were an assertion of African Americans’ non-inferiority and a response to the increasingly complex modernity of America during WWII. Both views show a Black identity in a heightened moment of redefinition, which

is reflected in a revolution in music that would completely alter what jazz was. Porter portrays this shift in terms of Black consciousness emerging in response to social, economic, political, and technological conditions. In contrast, Jones views the shift as a discovery – an uncovering of a latent truth – and a resultant willful response. The salient difference is that Jones’ Black people are depicted as *agentic* in constructing their relationship with a dominant society, while for Porter the people’s lives were shaped by larger external forces. In any case, the identity of jazz musicians changed from entertainment workers to intellectuals and artists. The rise of bop marks a shift from a time when jazz was primarily dance music to a time when jazz became a music to be contemplated with intense attention while sitting down.

The music I am chiefly concerned with is often termed free jazz or avant-garde jazz among writers. John D. Baskerville (1994) asserted: “The term *free jazz* was primarily used by jazz enthusiasts, whereas the critics called it ‘avant-garde jazz.’ The musicians, who developed the music, preferred that it be called *the New Thing* or the *New Black Music*.” (Baskerville 1994, 484). My work at the Vision Festival taught me that many musicians hated the term avant-garde, and that term isn’t used much at all in Chicago as far as I can hear.

Anecdote: I came to participate in David Boykin’s Sonic Healing Ministries one Sunday, like every Sunday during the period in 2014 of Boykin’s artist residency at the University of Chicago’s Washington Park Arts Incubator. For the first time, there was a sidewalk blackboard sign outside announcing the event. It said “Free [] Jam Session,” and there was a word that had been erased, you could see by the smudge of white chalk, between the “free” and the “jam.” I suspected it had said “Free Jazz Jam Session.” My suspicion was confirmed when I checked the other side of the sign, which did say “Free Jazz Jam Session.” So, the music we played was sort of *free [jazz]*.

The Relationship Between the Labels *Black* and *Jazz*, and the Imperative for Black Jazz Musicians to Reject All Labels.

David Boykin told me once, “Sometimes it’s just about controlling your own shit.

Because sometimes that’s all you have! Is control over your own shit.” (pers. comm. 2016) I think many Black people, whose lives are still conditioned by near absolute control by the other, are sometimes motivated by the need to assert control over Our circumstances, over Ourselves. The same goes for the music. As soon as you try and label the music anything at all, there is resistance. I’ve heard objections to the word *jazz* for many reasons: either because it conjures up “jizz” like whorehouse music from Louisiana, or because it’s not respected like classical music and it’s dismissed by certain scholars, or because the label doesn’t adequately describe the music anymore, because it’s limiting, because jazz is for old people. To the term *avant-garde*, someone objects because it’s been around for a half-century, or because to many it represents a European aesthetic. Once I tried to call it *free jazz* on a flier I was making for someone, and they said “No way! This music ain’t free. We’ve got to get paid to make this music!” If you call it experimental, creative improvised music, or some such way of avoiding *jazz*, nobody but jazz musicians and scholars could guess what you’re referring to.

The fact of the un-nameability of [~~jazz~~] is a characteristic that is derived from Black identity development. As We have been the victims of control through naming, We have also learned to elude control by eluding being categorized, and to take control by asserting power over naming Ourselves. We may think of the term *jazz* the same way people have thought of a slave name: the name given to the music in order to buy and sell it (while somehow causing profits to elude the musicians); a name bound up in the ownership of Us by others. *Jazz* can be a way of taking the music away from the people, abstracting it away from the individuals who create it or listen to it, defeating its differentiation in order to effect its commoditization. Some

believe that jazz can't become anything new as long as it's called *jazz* in the same way that Negroes couldn't become anything new, were restricted in their development of new forms of personhood, as long as they were tied to the category and labels that had been invented in order to effect their subjugation.

The Negroes who first played music we now would categorize as *jazz* did not first decide that their music should be called *jazz*. (Gushee 1994) Neither did the first beboppers decide that their music should be called *bebop* (Porter 2002), nor *avant-garde* (Baskerville 1994). They did not decide which features qualified it as jazz, versus what made it worthy to be considered anti-jazz. Those determinations were made by white writers, concert promoters, and recording concerns. In that way the term determined the music to a certain extent. And to that extent, Black musicians were compelled to exceed its boundaries. So they played *out* or *outside* (of the chord structure, of the theory, of the orthodoxy ... out of control!) So these musicians I am interested in are those who would not be contained.

Pierrepont's (2002) research points to the fact that it is widely (though very far from universally) accepted by Black jazz musicians that *jazz* is an extrinsic term which rather imperfectly refers to a subset of an indivisible field of Black (or African American or even Negro) music. My enquiry into the sustainability of this music was guided by a definition of *Black music* as that which engages concepts of Blackness, African Diaspora, African American history, Black Nationalism, and other issues surrounding Black and African American identity. My definition is narrow not because I believe Black music should be (or is generally considered to be) limited to those practices that fall within my definition, but because it is outside of the scope of my project to engage in debate about what should or should not be considered Black music. To those who would question the validity or rigor of *Black music* as an analytical term, I

can say that at the very least, music by Black people who intend their music to be Black music and which references (is about) Black culture, identity, history, Black futures, ancestry ... is Black music. Since musicians tend to exceed arbitrary boundaries drawn around jazz, my study inevitably included other avant-garde, unconventional, improvised and experimental music, religious/spiritual music, popular music, and some conscious rap music that incorporates jazz.

David Boykin's Sonic Healing ministries avows that: "Creative music, spiritual jazz, free jazz, avant garde jazz, experimental music, improvised music, etc., is a sonic representation of ... love ... " (Boykin, "Sonic Healing Ministries" website) The list of descriptors shows some of the variety with which musicians have chosen to describe their music. However, that music "is" (singular) a sonic representation of love. In other words, in this statement, they are all descriptors for a single music. Elsewhere on the website, he uses "so-called jazz," which is a common formulation which at the same time affirms the applicability of the term *jazz* while simultaneously questioning it. Leo Smith strongly advocated the term *Creative Music*. (Smith 1973) Many people I talked to in New York, such as William and Patricia Parker, just call it *the music* most of the time, which recalls the way so many Black people just say *Us* or *We*, thereby avoiding a minefield. However, Patricia Parker, presenter of the Vision Festival, uses the term *avant-jazz* in her promotional materials etc. to describe the downtown aesthetic of her festival. The word *avant-garde* means out in front, but it's been developing for 60 years. I think the label *avant-garde* also represents a fancy Frenchness that people want to reject; simply, it represents Europe.

Many ideas about Black culture and jazz proceed from a generalized notion that the experience of Black people has been one of exclusion from the dominant society, of poverty and being at the bottom of society. It's an old idea that the authentic Black people are thought to

come from the “common run of Negroes,” as Zora Neale Hurston wrote about Negro spirituals. (Hurston 1995) The idea that the essential Black experience is one of lower class struggle runs throughout the history of the music. We see this idea come into conflict with individual experiences when we look at Duke Ellington, whose middle class upbringing in Washington, D.C. led to a more symphonic kind of music, which for him represented racial uplift, but to many critics represented inauthentic Negro music. (Gennari 2006) Ellington saw no problem creating music that had sensibilities outside of a dominant view of what it is to be Negro. The fact that his music came under attack as inauthentic or as a Negro trying to move outside of his purview is instructive, as was his response, which was to vehemently rejected categories of any type. Porter discusses Ellington’s commitment to racial uplift, and he is a prominent figure in the historiography of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro movement. (Porter 2002)

Not quite a century after the Harlem Renaissance, I was at the eta Arts Theater for a jazz event presented by drummer Charles Heath. I had just moved back to Chicago from New York, and I still marveled at the fact that at that time in Chicago, any night of the week I could go out to at least one place on the South Side and hear jazz performed by Black musicians and with an audience of all Black people (or just about). It didn’t cost very much either. It was a very different experience than hearing jazz with a mostly white audience, or in a white place, because in these Black places, the audience would respond to the music. It was permissible to cheer on the musicians during their performance. There was an interaction between the audience and the musicians. After young drummer Xavier Breaker played an outstanding solo, several people got up, jumped and shouted, and one man patted him on the back while Breaker kept on playing. There was an immense feeling of joy as all of us in the room smiled genuinely, and I could feel not only the pleasure of wonderful music, but a deep sense of pride. During a break, I was

discussing issues of culture and politics with a few people I had just met there. They had just come back from D.C. having attended Obama's second inauguration. We didn't talk about Black people or African Americans. We didn't need any label at all. It was about Us, and after a while, one woman remarked that these issues were important "not just for Our People, but for everybody." And it was striking because I realized at that moment that jazz had created this space where We were the exnominated category. Choosing between Black and African American was unnecessary. It was unnecessary to represent Ourselves to anybody else, and the way We felt like acting was by definition the right way. And that's what I think people want the music to be, whether you would call it jazz or call it something else, it should be those sounds We know how to make when the time is right, and let the writers fill pages trying to describe the indescribable.

Great Black Music and Spiritual Healing

The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) was one of several musicians collectives founded in the 1960s. Ironically at that time, the integration of musicians unions meant that the Black musicians' union in Chicago, Local 208, was absorbed by the white union, which meant a stunning loss of self-determination to the Black musicians. The AACM was formed by pianist Muhal Richard Abrams, trumpeter Phil Cohran, drummer Steve McCall, and pianist Jodie Christian in response to a decline in performing conditions and a desire to control their own destiny. Though there were several similar Black musicians' collectives formed in the 1960s – the Black Artists Guild in St. Louis, the Jazz Composers Guild in New York, Union of God's Musicians and Artists Association in Los Angeles, the Detroit Creative Musicians' Association – the AACM is the only one that survived very long, and it is now in its 51st year of active existence. Lewis writes, "I see the AACM as a movement, part of the whole

Black Arts Movement, part of a movement to uplift a people, to help us to heal ourselves as a people ... that was the purpose of the music.” (Lewis 2008, 513) The AACM’s motto is “Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future,” which came from the collective’s most famous performing group, the Art Ensemble of Chicago.

It is not an insignificant choice between the term *Black music* and *African American music* (or Negro music as in LeRoi Jones’ in *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*). The term *Black music* is particularly prominent in Chicago scholarship, home not only to the Great Black Music of the AACM, Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College, with its publication Black Music Research Journal.

The term *Great Black Music* has more recently been deployed by the Great Black Music project at the Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies at Northeastern Illinois University, a project of the late Godfrey Mason. The term is also sporadically invoked by other organizations and projects, such as the eta Arts Theater in its promotional materials: “Great Black Music: An Intimate Cabaret Setting.” The director of the Great Black Music Project, Dr. Conrad Worrell, explained that the definition has expanded from whatever the original conception of the Art Ensemble was. (“What is GBMP,” Great Black Music Project website) This expansive, inclusive approach that refuses to respect genre boundaries (generated by white-controlled music business interests) is echoed by several recent projects. For instance Dee Alexander’s recent salutes to Jimi Hendrix and James Brown suggest that Hendrix and Brown should be included in the concept of Great Black Music. The Great Black Music project includes musicians/performing artists who have done work in diverse fields such as rap, performance poetry, gospel, traditional African drumming, and jazz. The Great Black Music project focuses on Chicago musicians, so that the term is of particular relevance in Chicago. For instance, in the website

AACMChicago.org, *Great Black Music* is included as part of a stylized header of the AACM logo with a picture of the Great Black Music ensemble at the top of every page, while the term is absent from aacm-newyork.com.

The term is useful because it unites music by bringing it into relation with the construction of identity, histories, and culture, rather than either markets on one hand or on the other, formal characteristics of the music – meter, form, instrumentation etc. Though some element of improvisation is usually central to Great Black Music, what matters more to many musicians is not whether the music adheres to certain patterns or formal characteristics, but that it represents a further development in the history of Black music, incorporating previous forms, but advancing them and taking them into new territory, and often that it represents something positive about Black culture and potentiality.

But there's also something about spirituality and healing involved. I asked drummer and former AACM member Sura Dupart about the word jazz:

AZ: The first part of my dissertation, I talk about the word *jazz*. Because everybody says like *jazz* in quotes. And they say so-called jazz. Or they say they don't play jazz, they play creative music, or whatever ...

SD: Well, that was the position we were taking in the AACM, like creative music. Black creative music. And then the Art Ensemble [of Chicago] they really forged that concept Black creative music. Then, you know everybody was conscious of trying to separate from the European. And the European was labeling everything, and you know well shit, you can't label Our classical music. You know like that. Because then you think it's like ... I mean a lot of people have different concepts of jazz. They think it's some slick shit, funny shit, you know, whatever. High powered stuff. But it was Their, Their words ... "cool" ... you know. But uh, them guys today you playing serious music. Like I was talking about, we trying to play music, drum-wise, to *heal* people. That's the same concept among these guys. Some of them are more earthly, want that money and fame. Some of them don't, you know, they just be into it because that's where you are. You're obligated to do what you're supposed to do. You know that you're going to go through changes, Jack! Trying to do it, or doing it, but it's a responsibility. Spirituality. And the spiritual cats have a responsibility that's totally different than somebody that's making money and just wants fame, you know. (Interview 11/7/2015)

I think the AACM's term *Great Black Music* heals people in a few ways: first by freeing people and music from any limiting boundaries that could be placed around *jazz*. Though most of the musicians' primary experience is in *jazz*, and performances usually reference their roots in the *jazz* idiom, the member composers, arrangers, and improvisers frequently combine elements of other musical traditions such as blues, funk, and gospel and range as far as Nyambingi Rastafarian liturgical music, and avant-garde improvised music that follows no recognizable pre-arranged structure whatsoever. The performing ensembles of AACM members can be characterized by a penchant for employing a great diversity in instrumentation – large and small percussion from every corner of the earth, didgeridoos, various African, Asian, or Native American wooden flutes, and some instruments built by the musicians themselves – in addition to a wide array of Western instruments. The incorporation of this diversity of musical forms and influences creates an image of Black identity involved in dynamic processes of syncretism, bending all elements to the purpose of creative achievement, community of shared experience, and above all the sacred freedom to create.

While it is important to point out that the AACM is composed of musicians who all work independently on their own projects (their arrangement is that they all help each other by performing the other artists' individual original works) and that not all AACM members think or create in the same way, AACM musicians tend to invoke a connection between Black Americans (themselves) and Africa very often. It is not unusual to see many of the AACM musicians wearing African clothes and playing African instruments. Frequently, their performances begin with, or include in their middles, rituals meant to recall the spirits of their ancestors and to honor their elders, which is a tradition that aims at invoking African traditions. Some performances begin with a moment of silence in which the musicians all stand and face the East, which I

perceive as a way of acknowledging Africa.⁶ Nicole Mitchell, master flautist and former co-president of the AACM, sings the following lyrics over reggae rhythms in her composition entitled “Peaceful Village Town” included on her Black Earth Ensemble’s *Afrika Rising* album:

...
African vision
The elders are loved for their wisdom
The children are loved for their energy
Men and women work together
To make a healthy and balanced society
...
African vision
The way it was before we were taken
Our memory is still unshaken
Self-love can be reawakened
To heal our sleeping nation.

She wants Us to envision an image of pre-colonial Africa as a model to emulate in order to heal the Black people through self-love. Mitchell commented on her approach to Black art during a lecture given at the Sonic Healing Ministries in April of 2011, which she calls *visionary* – focusing on the future as opposed to *historical* and *reflective* art having past or present focus respectively. (see discussion in Chapter 2.)

The term *Great Black Music* was first deployed by the Art Ensemble of Chicago, then adopted by the AACM in general as their motto. George Lewis reports that it was very controversial when the AACM adopted the term, but the ayes prevailed. (Lewis 2008, 394) Lewis points out that while many white writers focus on the exclusivity of the designation Black music and the conceptual problem of what to do with white musicians who play jazz, Roscoe

⁶ A less definitive explanation for this practice was offered by Ann Ward, who said it acknowledges the source of all knowledge in the East. I’ve also heard people explain that it has cosmological significance: since the sun rises in the east, it represents birth and coming into being. I believe that the gesture has multiple, concurrent meanings.

Mitchell talked about the impact of combining the words “Great” and “Black” to challenge the idea that Black people didn’t do great things. (Lewis 2008, 450) AACM member Ameen Muhammad said,

Really, Great Black Music is an aspect of the Holy Ghost, for us as a people ... It’s the music that brought us into existence. Great Black Music is one of the blessings that came with us standing up to a white world and saying, we’re going to do what we want to do, despite what you try to do to us. Great Black Music is a result of us having the courage to use our Great Blackness, and realizing that this is our only power. (Lewis, 505)

An aspect of the Holy Ghost, in this formulation Great Black Music is sacred. The idea of ancestor worship as an African cultural trait has been taken up in the construction of Black identity in Chicago. Many of the Black friends I met in the pursuit of Afrocentric spiritual jazz have an altar to the ancestors in their home. We always pour libations, give thanks and praise to the ancestors. In that way, Blackness qua African/African-Diasporic ancestry becomes the object of devotion, something sacred. Whereas politics is ultimately all about power, spirituality and devotion is all about Divine Love. As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, AACM co-founder Phil Cohran explained to me that the ancestors are an unbroken chain of love stretching all the way back to ancient Africa. Organizations and institutions that are oriented towards a struggle for power may find internal power struggles creating fractiousness, while ones oriented towards Divine Love may find more brother/sisterhood and commonality of purpose. It is perhaps therefore that a tenacity in these forms of art can be found in Chicago more so than elsewhere. Phil Cohran often observes that Chicago is an especially spiritual place. He says this comes from the Indians that had lived here before the free black pioneer Jean-Baptiste Point DuSable founded the city, a fact that Cohran learned from time he spent with the Ogalala Sioux in Wisconsin. Sura Dupart often leads the Participatory Music Coalition in a song he learned from Atu Harold Murray: “Divine Love.” The song is to sing the words “Divine Love” over and

over while clapping, and in a Black sort of way, to improvise harmony, melody, scatting, ornaments, etc. on those two words. In that song, there's no wrong thing to sing as long as it is Divine Love.

What is the purpose of music? Many would say that music needs no purpose other than itself. What they mean is that the purpose of music is aesthetic pleasure. The function of Western art music, or art music in general, involves possession by and glorification of an elite, for whom the enjoyment of aesthetic pleasures can replace the exigencies of subsistence, which they have placed themselves above. Many other purposes exist for music: dance, the coordination of action, the symbolism of group belonging, or of holidays, the soothing of children, the call to battle. Great Black Music can perhaps be characterized partly in terms of its purposes – the practice of history in a social and cultural milieu in which the organs of public record do not adequately represent Our experience. It functions to uplift the people, to bring people together, to represent higher forms of consciousness. David Boykin's Sonic Healing Ministries is built around the idea that music represents the essence of all things, which is vibration, and that jazz, improvised music, creative music, experimental music is that which expresses this essence the most. Nicole Mitchell's music does work – it helps to envision a positive future. (Mitchell *Afrika Rising*, 2002) So did Sun Ra's music. They are visions of a positive future for Black people.

Though not by everybody, not even by everybody who practices Great Black Music, Black music has sometimes been practiced as an African form of spiritual devotion to African and African Diasporic ancestors, and therefore as a form of spiritual devotion to Black being. Perhaps the biggest difference I found between The Music in New York and Chicago is that, in

the last ten years at least, in New York it is much more political than in Chicago, and the Chicago music/musicians are more overtly spiritual.

In a conference to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Vision Festival in New York, Scott Currie defined the avant-garde as “attacking the institution of art with the intention of reconstituting the relationship between art and life.” For Currie “avant-garde” means art as revolution, though he observed that in common parlance the term has come to mean merely experimental. (Currie 2016) In his specific use of avant-garde—invoking political engagement—Currie declared that the Black avant-garde was the only true American avant-garde. (*ibid.*) The New York musicians seem more oriented towards demonstrating freedom as a principal that is opposed to domination and social control in general. I remember Matana Roberts in New York performing a piece in remembrance of Sean Bell, who had been murdered by the New York Police Department. I remember one Evolving Series event in which the performers all wore hoodies in honor of Trayvon Martin. William Parker made a recording with Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, on which Avakian read communist poetry. (Avakian 2011 [sound recording]) Patricia Parker told me that the impetus for the Vision Festival largely grew out of William Parker and her Thousand Cranes Peace Opera, which was presented for the opening of the Second UN Special Sessions on Disarmament in 1982. But in general, this sense of more of a politically driven orientation comes mostly from the discourse of the musicians and organizers I encountered in each respective place. That’s not to say that spirituality is absent in the New York music. And conversely, to cite example, David Boykin last year did an avant-garde jazz hip-hOpera entitled *The Lynching of (Insert the Name of Any White Killer of an Unarmed Black Here)*. Certainly this distinction between a more politically inflected scene in New York versus a more spiritually inflected scene in Chicago is far from absolute.

In Chicago, people talk more about their music as an element of spiritual devotion. The music involves and is part of a practice of honoring Our ancestors. While I cannot claim to have found the key to the sustainability of Great Black Music in Chicago, I believe it must have to do with this spiritual dimension of the music. These forms of expression are demanding, requiring a great deal of commitment, time, sacrifice, dedication, discipline, and patience, yet they yield very little material rewards. And so the only way that these practices can have survived, the only way they can continue to survive is, by the force of Divine Love, the will to create and to represent Great Blackness as an object of spiritual devotion, a reciprocation of the eternal love from the Ancestors, and from Us, that we become the ancestors of the future.

1½. Semiotics: Representing Black Music

Chapter one and a half will be a theoretical exception to the established flow. The address of Fred Anderson's Velvet Lounge (see discussion *infra.*) was 2128½ S. Indiana Avenue in Chicago. While I worked there, the office of the Vision Festival's organization Arts for Art was Room 3.5, its door in the stairwell of a repurposed school building still bearing the sign "Teachers' Men's Room." The half-address has represented a site of seeming marginality that instead has heightened significance due to its inhabitation of a space in-between. Instead of diminished, it is emphasized, in somewhat the same way that Jean-Michel Basquiat emphasized words by crossing them out. The following short chapter on semiotics is abbreviated, but it is key to my understanding of Great Black Music insofar as it is made of the power to represent Great Blackness through improvised music exceeding a genre or tradition of jazz.

Part of the nature of this Great Black Music is its ability to represent Great Blackness as part of a concerted effort, not only to reflect it, but to create it and extend it. The ubiquity and transformative power of representation is not always apparent but has been extensively theorized in the discipline of semiotics. I am concerned with the sustainability, not of *jazz*, but of a Great Black Music with the representational potency that has been developing on the South Side for a half-century.

Therefore, this half-chapter will begin with a discussion of the *semeiotic* theory of Charles Peirce. Chapter 1½ begins with a rudimentary exposition focusing on the trichotomy of icon, index symbol. For Peirce, semiotics is the process by which all phenomenon present themselves to the mind – the crux of his phaneroscopy (phenomenology). It is more than communication, and his approach does not limit semiotics to homologies with language, as does Saussure's. For Peirce all thought, and I think all music too, is a semiotic process. The universe is a perfusion of signs. Turino deploys Peirce's paradigm in order to explain how musical signs

mean to people in the context of nationalism. He theorizes that dicent-indexical legisigns are more direct signs, and therefore they do not arouse argument and are more affectively interpreted. I then proceed to an application of that theory to prominent features in the jazz avant-garde, specifically timbre. And then finally, I discuss the Chicago music and its generative representation, attending especially to Nicole Mitchell's formulation of reflective, historical and visionary foci.

Semeiotic Not Semiology

The difference between Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology and Charles Sanders Peirce's *semeiotic* is substantial. In the former, there is a relation between two things: the signifier and the signified. The word "tree" is the signifier of a tall brown thing with green leaves on it (the signified). It gets more complicated than just that: the letters T, R, and E each stand for a distinct sound (phoneme, see Saussure 1959, pg. 15), which together stand for an oral word /trē/. This oral word signifies the tall brown leafy thing. More specifically, it stands for (and thus determines) a class of objects into which various objects fall, but which excludes others. Oaks are included, and so are elms, birches and so on. On the other hand, bamboo might be tall, a color of brown, and with leaves on top, but it is not properly a tree (even if it can form a forest.) What's important here is that there are two things – *signifier* and *signified* – that make up the sign. And also, for Saussure the idea is all about language. Other forms of signs are elaborations on the primary form, which is language.

Scott Currie gives helpful insight into what's important about semiotics to ethnomusicologists. He identifies the most influential theory of semiotics for ethnomusicologists as Jacques Nattiez's formulation, which he summarizes:

The meaning of a text – or, more precisely, the constellation of possible meaning – is not a producer's transmission of some message that can subsequently be decoded by a

“receiver.” Meaning, instead, is the constructive assignment of a web of interpretants to a particular form; i.e., meaning is constructed by that assignment. The assignment is made by a producer (in many cases), or by a “receiver” or “receivers,” or by both producer and “receiver(s),” but it is never guaranteed that the webs of interpretants will be the same for each and every person involved in the process. (Nattiez 1990, 11). (Currie 2009, 71)

Currie points out the limitations of Nattiez’s insistence on the centrality of a score – music as text – in order for there to be semiotic analysis. (Currie 2009, 76) Such insistence requires the transcription of an improvisation [somewhat marginalizing its spontaneity] and completely sweeps aside free improvisation. However, I remain unsatisfied by the grounds upon which Currie bases his conclusion that “both structuralist and pragmatist formulations of semiotics fall short in accounting for musical meaning” (Currie 2009, 80), where by “pragmatist formulations” he means the theory of Charles Peirce.

First of all, my understanding of the works of Charles Peirce and other interpreters of them suggests that the moment of individual creation would not, according to his theory, be the beginning of a musical act. If we think of music-making as a semiotic activity, music can only be music as an interpretant of some other music. It may be a continuation of it, a reaction against it, a denial of it, or something else in relation to it. But it does stand in relation to previous music; otherwise it could not be music. Nor, under Peirce’s paradigm, would semiosis terminate at “the ultimate level of semiotic consummation in consumption by the listener.” (Currie 2009, 92) Whatever other meanings the music may have for a listener, almost certainly the result of the music is an enrichment or refinement, whether subtle or dramatic, of what the listener understands music to be. And that would become part of whatever other representations that listener makes about music, any music that person makes (perhaps humming the tunes on the way home) etc. If he likes the music, it becomes part of what can be good about music; if not, what can be bad. Perhaps more consequentially, the composer/musician himself will have his

conception of what can be musical expanded by the music he himself has produced, and it will become part of his next compositions/performances, which will stand in relation to it among other previous experience.

It would seem that Nattiez has followed Umberto Eco in paying tribute to Peirce, even employing his language, while still remaining trapped in a diadic, therefore more Sausurean paradigm. For him there is a producer and a receiver. There is the music, which is a creation of the composer/musician in the stage of poiesis (hopefully represented by notation: the “trace”). And then there is the audience/listener/consumer who interprets it through esthesis. And semiosis constitutes a relation between the creator and the listener about the musical *work*, which is the transmission, translation or communication of that *work*, through various media and institutions, and ultimately its interpretation by the audience. Their tripartite model should not be confused with a Peircean triadic model, despite some references to Peirce’s term *interpretant*. The three elements for Nattiez are the producer, the receiver, and the trace – corresponding to poiesis, esthesis, and a neutral level.

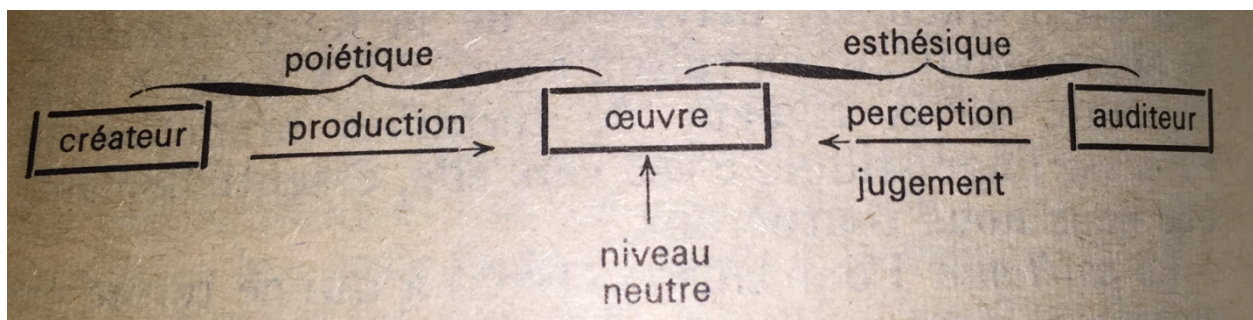


Figure 2 Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. 1975. *Fondements d'une semiology de la musique*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions. pp 52

Thomas Turino (1999) uses the theory of semiotics advanced by Charles Peirce to conceptualize music as an act of signification. In the broadest of strokes, semiotics as conceived by Peirce is a way of thinking about sign activity that is fundamentally triadic, in which there are 1. the sign, 2. the object (the thing represented) and 3. the interpretant (the person to whom the

object is represented by the sign). Furthermore, there are three types of relationships between signs and objects: 1) the *icon*, in which the relationship is founded in a resemblance between the object and sign, such as in a diagram or portrait; 2) the *index*, in which the relationship is founded in an association between the two because of common co-occurrence, such as smoke representing fire; and 3) the *symbol*, in which the relationship is arbitrary, agreed upon as a convention between a community of sign-users, such as the words and phrases in language. Part of Turino's argument is that, whereas music has been commonly understood to convey meaning through symbols (such theories positing a homology between music and language) music conveys meaning most often using indexes and icons.

The issue about semiotics and music that seems most debated among music scholars is the idea that music represents something outside of itself. An element in music can represent some external thing iconically, e.g. a kettledrum can represent thunder or cannon fire by making a sound that *resembles* those other phenomena. An element in music can represent some external thing indexically – an accordion playing in a certain way could represent Paris, say in a movie, since that's a sound that's *associated* with Paris. And/or an element in music can represent some external thing symbolically, as a national anthem represents a nation – by *convention* because people got together and agreed that this song would represent the nation. Certain qualities in music can represent many thousands of hours of dedicated practice by the musicians playing, especially if the music is very complex and difficult to play. The sweetness of a lullaby can represent a mother's love of her baby. Signs often represent their objects on multiple levels, in multiple ways. If you came to the U.S. from elsewhere and attended many baseball games, then the national anthem may represent the U.S. indexically because you associate it with an experience you had in America as well as symbolically as described above.

Turino's point is that, in contradistinction to symbolic representation, indexical and iconic representation, as less mediational forms of expression, pass from sign to interpretant without arousing argument, and therefore they are more suitable to represent emotions and more effective in eliciting physical reactions. (Turino 2008, 15)

“It is my thesis that the power of music to create emotional responses and to realize personal and social identities is based in the fact that musical signs are typically of the direct, less-mediated type. Music involves signs of feeling and experience rather than the types of meditational signs that are about something else.” (Turino 1999, 223-4)

I'd like to suggest that music and performance can be uniquely suited sign vehicles to represent Blackness for the same reasons.

Peirce's *semeiotic* is far more helpful for understanding musical representation than Saussure's semiology because the latter posits language as fundamental and primary, whereas Peirce's *semeiotic* enables an exploration of non-linguistic representations. This is much the same reason that many anthropologists have chosen Peirce's approach, beginning perhaps with Milton Singer (1978, 1985). Peirce's semiotic is part of his phenomenology (which he calls phaneroscopy) the study of or “description of the phaneron, and by the phaneron [he] mean[s] the collective total of all that is in any way or in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not.” (Peirce 1938-1956, vol. 1 pp. 284) As Martinez observes: “The comprehension of musical semiosis ... inheres in questions such as: What is the character of the musical sign? What are its objects and how is reference achieved? And more specifically, how are musical signs perceived, interpreted, generated, and theorized?” (Martinez 2001, 2)

In Peirce's *semeiotic* there are never fewer than three elements of a sign: 1) the *sign-vehicle* (a.k.a. *representamen*⁷), 2) the *object*, and 3) the *interpretant*. Without all three, there is no sign. The word tree (or the sound combo /trē/ or the concept tree) is the *sign-vehicle* (A.K.A. *representamen*). The tall leafy thing is the *object*. Thus the first two terms would seem roughly to approximate Saussure's *signifier* and *signified* respectively. However to equate them would be a serious error because they are parts of an entirely different system, especially because of the Third element (see discussion of Third *infra*). The understanding that "tree" represents the tall leafy thing – or the idea or image of that thing created in the mind – is the *interpretant*. Without this understanding/image, "tree" does not represent anything. It's not that it is an unsuccessful sign; it's not a sign at all. Simply, you can't call something a sign unless it means something to someone. (This is perhaps why Peirce struggles to find a suitable replacement for the word "sign" in his formulations; because sign means the relation of all three.) The word *interpretant* can be heard as the word *interpreter*, since in most cases this is what's meant. However the formulation also envisions non-human (non-conscious) *interpretants*. It is the understanding of the sign, the result of the signification, that is the interpretant, not an individual person. Emotional interpretants are common. Fear can be the *interpretant* of smoke as a *representamen* of the *object* fire. Here is one way Peirce says it:

A REPRESENTAMEN is a subject of a triadic relation TO a second, called its OBJECT, FOR a third, called its INTERPRETANT, this triadic relation being such that the REPRESENTAMEN determines its interpretant to stand in the same triadic relation to the same object for some interpretant. (Peirce 1938-1956, vol.1 paragraph 541)

⁷ A *sign* is the triadic relation of all three elements, and therefore to use the word "sign" for only one element is wrong, though tempting. Peirce used the word *sign-vehicle* and sometimes *representamen* for that element which Saussure would call the signifier.

The latter half of the statement – “this triadic relation being such ...” is another feature of Peirce’s *semeiotic* that differs from Saussure’s, and which enables Peirce’s model to include more than language, but indeed all thought and perhaps even natural phenomena. That the sign “determines” the interpretant to stand for the same object to some other interpretant is to say that the interpretant becomes a *representamen* of the *object* for a different *interpretant*. It means that the *interpretant* – the image that the word “tree” creates in your mind, the understanding that “tree” stands for a tall leafy thing – is *itself* then a representation of the object. If my saying the word “tree” conjures (as it’s meant to do) an image or idea of tree in your mind, is not that image of a tree in your mind a representation – a sign – of the tree? But in Peirce’s formulation, a sign cannot exist without an *interpretant*. In that case, the *interpretant* would be a further interpretant-image of tree, or your precise intention when you next speak or write “tree.” And so in Peirce’s *semeiotic*, every sign is an infinite chain of *sign-vehicles* determining *interpretants*, which themselves become *sign-vehicles* and as such determine further *interpretants*. Each invocation of the word/concept tree either reinforces or refines a person’s mental representation of tree, and then flows forth into future representations of tree.

The dynamism of this inevitable and constant process is one important reason why theorists of culture have explored Peirce’s *semeiotic* as a model for how culture can exist with some measure of stability so as to be recognizable and durable while simultaneously existing as a dynamic, evolving process. Therefore, semiotic anthropologist E. Valentine Daniel can assure us that, “Culture [is] a dense cluster of semeiotic habits.” (Daniel 1998, 67) He argues that culture isn’t a closed system. It has “absolute dynamism” and consists of “improvisational forays and strategies into the radically unknown.” (Daniel 1998, 68) Culture expands to incorporate the things it encounters.

Peirce was describing a much more powerful process than only the use of language. Peirce's *semeiotic* was part of a larger theory of phaneroscopy, his word for phenomenology. Semiosis was his conception of the process by which all things present themselves to the mind – through representation, through relation. It's the process by which all things come to be known. For Peirce, signs were not limited to language, but rather the universe is perfused with signs. This is related to his idea of mind and matter. “... Peirce argued that mind pervades all of nature in varying degrees: it is not found merely in the most advanced animal species.” (Burch 2013) For Peirce, mind was a condition of maximum freedom in the cosmos and its original state, out of which patterns and habits have evolved; the patterns and habits are matter. (Burch 2013) “Thus he tended to see the universe as the end-product-so-far of a process in which mind has acquired habits and has ‘congealed’ (this is the very word Peirce used) into matter.” (Burch 2013)

Many of us have difficulty with thinking about the universe as a perfusion of signs – with conceiving of *mind* outside of the animal kingdom. (I for one am fascinated by the idea but cannot grasp it). But it illustrates his conception of the universality of the semiotic process he describes. For Peirce, all cognition was in signs, which need not be mediated through language. The process of a thought is a semiotic chain of sign-vehicles determining interpretants, and the interpretants becoming sign-vehicles for further interpretants. Professor of semiotic anthropology E. Valentine Daniel put it this way, “Thinking is to represent something to a part of yourself that is just emerging.” (E. Valentine Daniel pers. comm. September 25, 2008)

As Martinez suggests, more or less the same can be said about music; music can be thought of as semiosis: “The study of musical reference on a Peircean basis (which encompasses intrinsic musical signification) points up the misguidedness of disputes between a view of music

as pure and ‘non-referential’ and the opposite conception of music as representational – for both are possible forms of semiosis.” (Martinez 2001, 372) The sounds you hear can represent qualities – tonality, sweetness, discord, tension and release, melody, excitement, etc. – and thus be iconic. They can represent people, as jazz or hip-hop or the blues represents Black people indexically, since Black people have been the traditional performers of those styles. The sounds can represent abstract, outside ideas; a national anthem represents a nation. But not only that. Thought of in terms of Peirce’s semiotic chains, progressions of organized or purposeful sounds recognized as music can be understood as a vivid illustration of *sign-vehicle* determining *interpretant*, becoming sign-vehicle to a further *interpretant*, the *object* being music itself.

A note is a sound that is supposed to represent music – the musician’s idea of what is music. You make a sound with an instrument, or with your voice, and it has a quality that makes it music for you. (A Tuvan throat singer may make a sound that does not sound like music to someone unfamiliar with their tradition, but that harsh gravelly sound is music to a Tuvan. It’s music to me because I’ve been taught how to hear it.) The next sound is a consequence of the first sound. It follows from the first sound. You could say it is an interpretation of the first sound. When I play a note, it might be C. If I next play an F, that gives C a meaning in relation to F. C was perhaps the fifth of F. If instead I were to follow C with a note D, or E, or E flat, maybe C was the beginning of a major scale, a major or minor arpeggio. Its relation to other notes is what makes the first note music; the *way* that it is music depends on successive notes. The second note is an *interpretant* in that it brings the first note (a *sign-vehicle*) into relation with the concept of music (the *object*). The second note is also at once a sign-vehicle for a further interpretant third note. It is in this way that music is a semiotic process.

Learning to play jazz is very illustrative in this regard, because of course, and especially while first learning to play, a player will sometimes play a wrong note. First of all, the note is wrong because it is outside of his idea of what is musical (i.e. consonant, or harmonically correct). Yet, as one gains experience, he learns various ways of making the wrong notes into right ones. A wrong note can be fixed by playing subsequent notes that bring the wrong note back into relation with the concept of music. It can be made into a passing tone – some chromatic embellishment, or even a reference to another tune if the player is quick-witted enough. Someone told me once, when you play the wrong note, play it again. Playing it the second time makes it sound like you meant it the first time, plus it gives you another moment to think about what to do with it. If you're cool, not flustered, you can come up with something that convinces a listener you never made a mistake in the first place, and that's show business.

So, according to more of a Peircean paradigm, the music itself – what Nattiez could call *poiesis* – is a process of semiosis just as much as its experience by an audience. The act of creating music is the act of representing to one's self, and to others if they are present, what one knows to be musical.

Do you know what music is?

How do you know?

“Music is a system of organized sounds ...”

No no, that's a rationalization of what you've always known. You knew what music was long before you learned to think like that. So ...

Do you know what music is? Of course; everybody does.

How do you know? Well, you know it when you hear it.

What is this sound? Oh, that's music.

What is music? Why, it's something that sounds like that.

I know what music is because I know what is music.

This process is the core of Peirce's phenomenology, which he calls *phaneroscopy*. The infinite chains of semiosis that gives Peirce's *semeiotic* its explanatory power, however also

result in an apparent circularity. The circularity is not necessarily resolved, but it is addressed by T.L. Short (2007) who finds some clarity in Peirce's theory of the ultimate versus the final object. My understanding of music in general before I hear a particular instance of music determines my perception of the sound as music, and my experience of that particular instance of music refines my understanding of what music is. At some point in my childhood, my mother told me what music is by saying "this is music." She told me from her own lifetime of experience, having refined what the term music included and excluded, but my experience was limited to that particular song by Earth Wind and Fire. When the next song came on, my experience doubled. And when I connected Earth Wind and Fire to the composition by Handel that she was singing in the car, practicing the difficult parts over and over (to my annoyance) my understanding of what music is was further developed – my, how *different* sounds can be and still be music!

I remember when rap music was new (around the same time), and it was not at all clear that rap music was indeed music. Are we sure it's not poetry? Well, there's music in the background, but is the rapping music? Are the DJs (or turntablists) "musicians?" In fact I would say the concept of music was forced to expand in order to encompass rap. The concept of music did not include rap before hip-hop came into existence. It was brought into relation with music through association – indexically – by its presence in musical/dance contexts, by its ascent into currency in the recording industry.

The point I'm making here is that we know what music is because of what we have heard as music before. In the event of sound we have never heard before, it becomes music if and only if it can be related to that which we have heard before – in other words, the attainment of Peirce's quality of Thirdness.

All of Peirce's theory of signs, indeed all of his phaneroscopy, is triadic: Sign-object-interpretant. Iconic, indexical, symbolic. Rheme, dicent, argument. In its most basic form, he names three qualities of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness (quality, reaction, representation).

All phenomenon that present themselves to the mind have these three modes:

Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else.

Secondness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third.

Thirdness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other. (Martinez 2001, 56; Collected Papers of Charles Peirce 8.328)

During the time I was engaged in lively discussion about Peirce's theory of signs on a weekly basis in a class led by E. Valentine Daniel, I was grappling with Peirce's concept of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. They are not intuitive. I wrote this illustrative example, which I think might be helpful if my own experience of dreaming is not unique (I don't think it could be.)

There are some nights and mornings when I am dreaming. In dreaming I am immersed, thinking nothing outside of my dream, not thinking about the dream as a dream but thinking as though the dream were reality.

Then, rowdy boys start shouting outside my window, or a car alarm, my neighbor's television set, or (horror of sonic horrors) my electronic alarm clock sounds. And this sound, whichever, for one second penetrates into my dream, and at once I am aware of it and also of whatever stimuli my mind had been generating inside the dream. There is a moment of comparison between the dream and the sound – an understanding that the sound is something different than the dream. This is a moment of Secondness in which the Firstness of before is revealed.

Third, there is a familiar flash of understanding: unpleasant understanding, usually, that I had been dreaming and that the sound is the outside penetrating. I am not able to continue to dream a dream once I know that it is a dream. The innocence of the make believe is shattered. The dream dissolves, and, annoyed, I awaken in cold knowledge.

E. Valentine Daniel (1998) describes an incident during an interview he conducted with someone who had witnessed unspeakable violence during the conflict between Tamils and

Singhalese in Sri Lanka. His interlocutor had just finished describing how a mob had burned alive a young boy from the opposing faction; the boy had just happened to be walking down the road when the mob approached. The description was thorough and completely horrifying. Daniel says that, uncomfortable with the weight of this story hanging in the air (what do you say after someone tells you about the time they burned a child alive), he wanted to change the subject. So he asked what the man's goal in life was, now. He said the reply shot back, "I want a VCR." Daniel describes his own reaction to the response as shock, disbelief. "I want a VCR" is unsettling, terrifying because it cannot pass into thirdness. Daniel is frozen in the shock of the incommensurability between the expectation of perception and the perception, so that a concept cannot form from percept.

So again, according to Peirce, everything that comes into the mind has these three qualities of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. As it happens, jazz can be somewhat of a good illustration of these qualities as well. In the most popular forms of jazz, you have the melody, which often you know since you've heard it many times, but in any case it is stated at the beginning of a piece. And you're expecting to hear that. But the improvisation is the break with it. The improvisation is the Second. Something other than the melody, which you've never heard before (you couldn't have since it's improvised, and thus has never existed before). And then finally, you have the relationship between the melody and the variation/improvisation. Maybe you can perceive that they're following the same chord changes, or that the variation sounds somehow like the first melody. That's the thirdness – the explanation, or the relationship between what you expected and what you perceived. This is reinforced when they play the melody again before the end.

My experience of music before the avant-garde in jazz was in some ways typical of someone who grew up in the U.S. in the 1980s and 90s. My musical experience was 1) popular music recordings through the radio and also through MTV and VH1 television stations; 2) European art music, through radio and television but mostly through my mother, grandmother, and aunt, who all sang choral music such as was written by Handel for instance; 3) instrumental band music I learned to play on a saxophone in elementary school and junior high school, and 4) jazz recordings, which I discovered in my teens. The jazz recordings were from a time some would call the “Golden Age,” including Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Dizzy Gillespie. I probably came into possession of those recordings rather than later ones because of the discourse that exalted 1959 as the height of jazz’s development, and that later styles were some sort of degradation.

My experience of the avant-garde in jazz was like this: I thought I understood what jazz was supposed to be. Its features had been represented to me on television, on recordings. When I encountered the free/avant-garde/creative/experimental jazz in Chicago in 1998, I was appalled, terrified, dismayed. I heard Ken Vandermark, and I heard Roscoe Mitchell on the big stage at the Chicago Jazz Festival. I heard Ari Brown and Avreeayl Ra at the Velvet Lounge. This was not how jazz was supposed to be! Jazz gives you tunes, then the musicians mess with them a little, but it’s OK because they’re such incredible musicians that they can bend the tune unrecognizable but it still sounds good. Then at the end they play the tune again, and you realize how (surprisingly) they’ve been playing variations on that tune all the while! Wow, magic. NOT in free jazz. The word “jazz” gives you expectations. The “tradition” gives expectations. The past gives expectations. These people purposefully defy those expectations, and smack you in the face with something you didn’t expect, and they laugh if you can’t stand it! (actually, it hurts

them a little too, but they have to laugh and reason your way through it – they’re just not ready for futuristic, advanced concepts in music, or something.) To them, *that* is the tradition; it’s not an option to play the same old kind of thing – what you’d expect.

It seems to me now that, out of that format of stating a tune, improvising variations on it, then restating the tune, thus demonstrating the *relationship* of the first to the second (the third), those relationships went further afield. In other words, the musicians were performing Secondness. But in order to maintain the surprise, the difference, the break with the tune, they had to go further away from it in order to make it unexpected. When you play a tune, the melody is what it is (a First). But if you expect improvised variations on it and can anticipate what those variations might sound like, those expected variations become part of the tune too. In effect, you have boring jazz (which I wish were a contradiction in terms). What might have been a Second becomes a First to those who know too well what to expect. So in order to break with the tune, you have to play unexpected variations. And as the expectations develop, the variations develop. This was happening all the way from the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and so forth, continuing and going further and further all the time. It drove people to explore and challenge all assumptions in music, to remove or hyperextend every fundamental concept in music from melody to harmony, rhythm, texture, and especially timbre. As Albert Ayler put it, the avant-garde style was “just a different kind of blues. It’s the real blues, it’s the new blues, and the people must listen to this music, because they’ll be hearing it all the time. Because if it’s not me, it’ll be somebody else that’s playing it. Because this is the only way that’s left for the musicians to play. All the other ways have been explored.” (Ayler 1964).

Meanwhile, oblivious I was listening to jazz recordings forever frozen in 1959, over and over again, memorizing the solos that were recorded thirty or forty years prior. Those recordings

became something like the recordings of popular music I was used to, in which there is often an instrumental solo. In the popular music I knew and loved, in which the recording was primary, you can expect the solo to be performed exactly the same in a live concert as it is in the recording, and if it's not, you're disappointed by any variation whatsoever. For me, the surprise about jazz was that people could have invented such intricate, difficult solos to play. I was an instrumentalist in high school, and I could play the solos from pop music if I practiced them over and over. But I could never play jazz solos no matter how long I practiced them. The idea that they were improvised was beyond comprehension, even though I knew it was a fact.

When I got to Chicago, I encountered the current state of the Secondness that had been developing there since the 1920s. They had broken with the tunes so radically, they didn't even play the tune anymore. They had exploded the format. They had exploded the concept. They played continuously for an hour or more, not broken up into 5-7 minute segments like recordings were (as was dictated by traditions established when record grooves were only so long). They all improvised at the same time, instead of taking turns, so it often sounded like disorganized noise. They played tons of dissonance, which I thought was to be avoided. They purposefully played squeaks and squawks that filled me with shame whenever they came out of my horn. They didn't follow any specific key that I could pick out, or they all played in their own key. They played weird instruments. I couldn't follow the path back to the jazz I understood, which had something to do with the music I understood from pop radio, from Handel, and from marching band.

The incomprehensibility, the inability to reconcile these sounds with what I knew of music, what I knew of the world, was the missing Thirdness. And for the next 15 years, I have been looking for a Thirdness to give this – how to integrate these sounds and images into a

concept of music and society that I can command. But what I discovered is that with experimental or avant-garde jazz, Thirdness is often elusive because the music is made to emphasize Secondness! That's what they're playing. They've worked very hard to elude Thirdness. If it's too easy to arrive at a relationship with other forms of music you know, or with your expectations, they've failed, or that's some other music. It is supposed to represent a heterodox view of what music is and can be. It is supposed to imagine into being states of being not yet realized, to open doors to the development of higher (unfamiliar) forms of consciousness. Secondness is a principle that brings together standard jazz, avant-jazz, spiritual jazz, and even hip-hop. The element of the scary, the uncomfortable, the unsettling, the unpleasant is part of what defines it.

What I'd like to suggest is that this process has gone even further, and musicians have undertaken to abide in Firstness – in the pure quality of the sound, or its timbre, which is the domain of concentration of saxophone players like Coltrane, Ayler, Pharaoh Sanders, and others from Chicago and elsewhere. Here is a quote from Charles Pierce on Firstness:

THE MANIFESTATION OF FIRSTNESS

The idea of First is predominant in the ideas of freshness, life, freedom. The free is that which has not another behind it, determining its actions; but so far as the idea of the negation of another enters, the idea of another enters; and such negative idea must be put in the background, or else we cannot say that the Firstness is predominant. Freedom can only manifest itself in unlimited and uncontrolled variety and multiplicity; and thus the first becomes predominant in the ideas of measureless variety and multiplicity. (Peirce 1958-1966, Book 3, Chapter 2 [Peirce: CP 1.302])

The pure quality of the sound is a First, a *qualisign*⁸, and Firstness is freedom. Some of the free jazz performances become endeavors purely to create a sound – that is shaping the quality of a sound – that is constructing a whole piece, or segment of music, which is perhaps a 1-minute or 5-minute or 30-minute envelope. The tones (frequencies) that are involved are not, in this way, distinct elements of a tonal system, but they become more like partials and harmonics within a sound. The change in the sound is like the way, if you strike a piano key, there's the attack, and then the main tone, and then that gradually dies away at a characteristic rate. All of them go together to determine the quality, the character, the “suchness” of the sound.

The Firstness of Timbre

In music, frequency is the most commonly discussed attribute of sound because it determines pitch. Duration of sound corresponds to rhythm. Amplitude corresponds to loudness (volume). But there's this other quality to sound, the waveform. A simple sine wave form is a pure tone, such as warning beep or tone that would be generated from an early computer, or the tone of the emergency broadcast system. Among Western musical instruments, the flute has perhaps the simplest waveform, most closely resembling a perfect sine wave. The human voice has a very irregular waveform, and it's in the complexities of this waveform that humans can recognize a familiar (or famous) person's voice. With computers, now it's easy to examine the waveform of a digital sound recording, and doing so reveals that most common sounds display a

⁸ In another of Peirce's trichotomies – qualisign, sinsign, legisign – a *qualisign* is a sign-vehicle that is a quality – say the idea of redness (idealized, not attached to any specific object). A *sinsign* is a sign-vehicle that is an object – a red barn specifically, in its physical reality. A *legisign* is a law, or rule – a conventional “sign” like a stop sign, the redness of which – along with its shape and text – we understand to mean stop any time we see it.

very jagged (complex) waveform. Variations in waveforms are perceived and experienced as timbre.

Murray Campbell defines *timbre* in Grove Music Online:

A term describing the tonal quality of a sound; a clarinet and an oboe sounding the same note at the same loudness are said to produce different timbres. Timbre is a more complex attribute than pitch or loudness, which can each be represented by a one-dimensional scale (high–low for pitch, loud–soft for loudness); the perception of timbre is a synthesis of several factors, and in computer-generated music considerable effort has been devoted to the creation and exploration of multi-dimensional timbral spaces. The frequency spectrum of a sound, and in particular the ways in which different partials grow in amplitude during the starting transient, are of great importance in determining the timbre. *See also* SOUND, §6. (Campbell)

The sound frequency spectrum is the fundamental frequency plus the upper partials and harmonics (together, *overtones*) that make up a sound.

Sethares (2005) explores the relationship of timbre and tonality – that certain tonalities or scales work with different timbres and not with others. He thinks about timbre in terms of spectrum: “[T]he perception of ‘timbre’ is closely related to (but also distinct from) the physical notion of the *spectrum* of a sound.” (Sethares 2005, vi) Identical sounds can present different waveforms because of differing (imperceptible) differences in the *phase* of the component frequencies. Using a mathematical device called *Fourier transform*, sound can be broken down into component frequencies in the same way that light can be broken down into its component frequencies using a prism. (Sethares 2005, 13) He shows how a similar function is performed by the oval window, the intersection of the middle and inner ear. (16) Sethares seeks to demonstrate that, “consonance and dissonance are not inherent qualities of intervals, but they are dependent on the spectrum, timbre, or tonal quality of the sound.” (Sethares 2005, vi) His theory is interesting in that he postulates that the scales of different musical traditions (he compares

Western music/instruments with Indonesian gamelan and Thai *renat* (idiophone) music traditions) are calibrated to the timbral qualities of their instruments.

Sethares points out that certain instruments have generally harmonic partials – ones that correspond to integer multiples of the fundamental tone – because the oscillations of a string or the air inside a tube must fit evenly within the tube or length of string. But other instruments have inharmonic partials – most percussion instruments, for instance, including drums, idiophones, and lamellophones – because their oscillations are not so constrained.

Timbre is not synonymous with spectrum, which does not describe the attack (the sound of the pick hitting the strings, the mallet hitting the vibes) or about the envelope (the change in the sound over time; the way it changes as it dies). Thus, Sethares points out, timbre is multidimensional:

“Some proposed subjective rating scales for timbre include:

dull \longleftrightarrow sharp
cold \longleftrightarrow warm
soft \longleftrightarrow hard
pure \longleftrightarrow rich
compact \longleftrightarrow scattered
full \longleftrightarrow empty
static \longleftrightarrow dynamic
colorful \longleftrightarrow colorless” (Sethares 2005, 28)

Despite the immeasurable aspects to timbre, in the end, Sethares does focus on spectrum to make his empirical analysis, while still acknowledging that there is more to timbre than this.

However, in order to focus on timbre and its relationship to semiotic processes in music, particularly through a Peircean lens, what really matters is the perception, the quality – the Firstness – of the sound, and that is a result of the distribution of the partial frequencies, the relative strength of each of them, the envelope, the “noise” created by the attack, and possibly other factors which cannot all be summarized numerically. In short, the phenomenology of

timbre is what we're after – the way timbre presents itself to the mind.

Timbre is largely what people are talking about when they talk about “sound” in jazz. Saxophonists are particularly concerned developing their SOUND (said with emphasis). I think this focus on timbre may be one of the reasons that pianos are less common in the forms of jazz that developed later – because pianos are relatively timbrally inflexible. Techniques have emerged for altering the timbre of the piano, such as the prepared piano, and “inside” playing (reaching inside the piano to grab, pluck, dampen, or otherwise manually affect the vibration of the strings). Denman Maroney is one pianist whose approach has overcome this limitation of the instrument. Other instruments lend themselves more to timbral innovation. Bassist William Parker has developed scores of different techniques for producing different sounds with his bass. Not to mention the fact that most players who play “out” jazz explore several often non-Western instruments, seeking to diversify the timbres at their disposal. William Parker plays a very wide range of instruments including the gambrel, the kora and ‘ngoni, several double reed instruments, and flutes. The musicians of the AACM are noted to employ “little instruments” at the beginning of performances, but many of the musicians engage in a broad exploration of timbre. (Lewis 2008) The dijeridoos of Douglas Ewart and Mwata Bowden are important examples. Nicole Mitchell employs a wide range of sound production techniques, which alter the sound of her flute, including interspersing very high-pitched vocalizations in consonance with the notes she is playing. Coltrane used a technique where he played alternate fingerings of the same pitch successively, emphasizing their different overtones (“false fingerings”). Sun Ra’s explorations of timbre with electronic instruments were pioneering.

David Boykin’s saxophone technique seems focused on sound. More than others in Chicago, he abides in the upper partials available on tenor and soprano saxophones, as well as

clarinets. And sometimes his solos seem to focus on the sound qualities created by the different tones more than the construction of melodies. This would be consistent with the spiritual/philosophical position he has expressed, and which forms the foundation for his Sonic Healing Ministries:

Everything in existence on the physical plane, all energy/matter, **vibrates** at a particular frequency that defines it.

Love is the force that harmonizes this myriad of frequencies and binds everything together into a functioning whole.

Creative music, spiritual jazz, free jazz, avant garde jazz, experimental music, improvised music, etc., is a sonic representation of this love. It is a unified expression and celebration of each individuated experience of creation simultaneously. It is a reverberation of the macrocosmic sound. (Sonic Healing Ministries website: <http://sonichealingministries.com/Welcome.html> (accessed March 20, 2014))

Wadada Leo Smith is an important example of someone who has exited the domain of harmony, melody, and rhythm in favor of the domain of SOUND. He has stated that he plays sound, not really dealing with harmony. Smith has expressed admiration for Don Cherry, who he said was playing sound, not chords. My idea is that an entire piece of free jazz can sometimes be seen as an extended SOUND. A SOUND is vibration covering a certain period of time. A sound has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Within the sound, there are multiple frequencies – harmonics and partials. There may be beats, as different frequencies constructively or destructively interfere with each other. I think that sometimes, within a free jazz performance, an entire section or an entire piece of music can be heard as a single, extended SOUND, so that the harmonies created are analogous to the harmonics and partials within a sound.

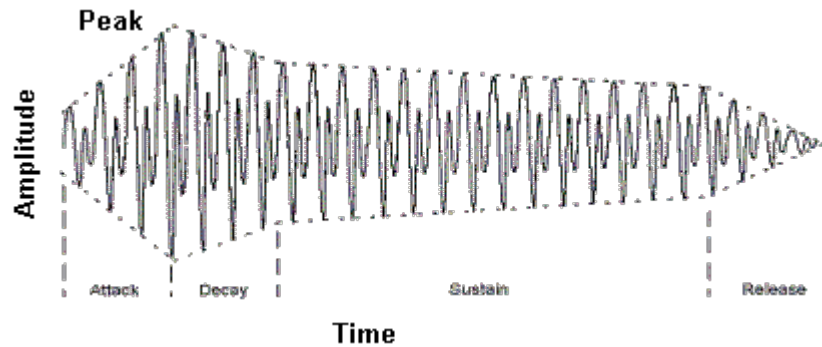


Figure 3 (“Zytrax Audio Visual Glossary,” accessed September 14, 2016, <http://www.zytrax.com/tech/audio/glossary.html>.)

Fales (2002) discusses the distinction between the phenomenal versus reflective consciousness, where “phenomenal consciousness is often sensory or emotive, reflective consciousness is often verbal or representative – that is, one who is reflectively conscious can usually express the nature of the experience.” (60) In this model, one may be phenomenally conscious without being reflectively conscious –aware of something, perhaps perceptually or emotionally – without being able to verbalize it or represent it. Fales illustrates: “Without the vividness of phenomenal consciousness, we must trust a less convincing reflective consciousness or our experience; without reflective consciousness, we may be phenomenally conscious of an experience that is richly sentient, but at the same time, hazy, ill-defined, and inexpressible.” The latter belongs to the same domain as what some researchers address as “pre-attentive processing,” where subliminal messages go, and so does much of the perception of timbre, so that even though such perceptions inform concepts of the physical world and influence decisions, they are not available to our systems representation/expression/reflection. (*ibid.*)

Saxophone techniques in the so-called avant-garde are oriented towards timbral variety. Albert Ayler, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Joseph Jarman, Frank Lowe, Marshall Allen are a very few of the players who pushed the limits of the saxophone’s timbral range. On Joseph Jarman’s “As If It Were the Seasons” the saxophonist’s myriad of timbral resources is hardly equaled even by

the myriad of other, mostly “little” instruments that pepper the recording. Jarman’s full entrance at around 15:00 is an amazing explosion of complex timbre. Saxophones are capable of playing more than one tone at once – a technique employed by John Coltrane on “Harmonique.” The effect, however, can only be produced by creating the most complex wave form possible, and then creating interference which then amplifies certain of the upper partials while cancelling out others. The technique must be similar to Mongolian Tuvan throat singing, which sounds similarly harsh until you know what you’re listening to. The high squeaks are part of the altissimo register, which can be controlled in order to extend the instrument’s range, but which requires a great deal of control. New Orleans avant-garde master Kidd Jordan abides in this register perhaps most of all.

The gravelliness or certain harshness (complexity) of timbre is something which is desirable in certain musical cultures, notably African ones. For instance, mbiras are constructed with metal pieces added – bottle caps and fragments of soda cans – in order to make a buzzing sound to complicate the purer tone of the plucking of the tines. This buzziness sounds yucky to Westerners, for whom purity of tone – emphasis on the fundamental frequency on the sound – is more often the goal. Therefore, when Europeans would record the mbira dzavadzimu, they asked the musicians to remove the buzzers. However, a fondness for distortion (or a complexity of timbre) is something that is deeply African, as shown perhaps by the Congotronics records, or by the Burundi Whispered Song *Inanga Chuchotée*. Even more demonstrative of the conflict between European and African/African-Diasporic timbral aesthetics is the blues vocal quality of gravelliness.

A certain harshness to the timbres present in many of the SOUNDS cultivated by the avant-garde players may represent this African sensibility, and/or it may represent a break with

European aesthetics focused on sweetness, and purity of tone. Where there is unbridled ugliness, it may represent an understanding that the European concept of black as ugliness is an alien destructive and evil perspective which lives within our consciousness, which obscures the true beauty that Black is and causes us to destroy ourselves, so that in order to fully overcome our captivity we must embrace many things that at first will seem or sound ugly. In other words, it represents a recognition that the ugly-beauty continuum on which our perception rests is part of the power-relation we seek to overturn.

The timbral dimension of music has enormous representational potential, perhaps more than the other dimensions of sound. Whereas for instance a minor key has come to represent sadness or melancholy, that is by convention – a symbolic representation – and certain rhythms, for instance polyrhythms might represent Africa, through association with it – indexical representation – timbre is the aspect of sound that represents iconically. Timbre is the dimension of music which is tied to recognition of the source of the sound. The cognitive effects of different sounds are perhaps more important than their formal qualities, but they are hard to describe objectively because those effects are multivariate and depend very much on the recipient.

The Art Ensemble of Chicago and other musicians of the AACM represent Africa with African instruments. They represent other worldly dimensions of thought, spirituality, and nature with a myriad of instruments. Joseph Jarman's "As If It Were the Seasons" (1968) begins with soft unmetered lamellophone, a gong, a very high bamboo flute playing without much tonal organization, rather the highness of the pitch and breathiness emphasized, and several chimes. Finger cymbals enter. Then small cymbals, and the chimes continue. The texture is very sparse at first, providing ample space between the sounds, which themselves are very thin. A koto enters, its strings being bent as they vibrate so as to make them slide in pitch; the bending koto provides

a remarkable timbre throughout the entirety of the piece that go a long way to establishing its overall character, although its importance might be below the level of consciousness. Then there's a low flute, with a few sporadic sounds from aforementioned percussion. After two minutes, a bowed bass enters with the melody, and new percussion enters – clave, single drum – as the chimes, small cymbals, lamellophone, and koto continue.

The chimes can iconically represent the wind, especially because the texture of the piece is so sparse, it is airy. As can breathy flutes. The bells and chimes can represent the wind in a sense iconically or indexically: they could represent wind indexically because the sound of a wind chime is associated with the wind. It could also resemble the sonic experience of being on a porch in the summertime, perhaps even a specific porch that a listener remembers.

A less-breathy flute and a double reed playing somewhat melodic material lead up to the entrance of the saxophone, repeating the melody the bass had already stated, minimally accompanied by a beating drum and much less of the other percussion instruments. The melody is accented by deviations on the saxophone that explode into squeals that are surprising given the gentleness of the melody. After which Jarman journey's through the range of his saxophone's timbral possibilities, and the trap drums enter, and the koto plays. The texture remains sparse. It sounds like a natural landscape, where nature mostly presents quiet phenomena such as blowing leaves, or trickling water, punctuated occasionally with animal life – squirrel, chipmunk – and only occasionally a deer, bear or person – as opposed to an urban landscape, jammed with activity. The title of the piece also suggests that it represents natural phenomena.

In this piece, there is a strong, clear, lovely melody. But melody is only a part of the piece, and I would say not the most important part. The melody's embeddedness within a terrain

of diverse timbres, creating an overall quality to the piece, is what gives the piece its essential character.

The essence of the perception of timbre is the recognition of sounds in the environment (Fales 2002) – what can be seen as the evolutionarily primary function of the auditory sense. Presumably, the quality of the sound, its timbre, is the perception of the way in which it can be distinguished from other sounds. And therefore, perhaps it does not make sense to analyze the timbre of a sound in isolation. What matters is that it is more an oboe-like sound than a flute-like sound.

Unlike Sethares’ analysis, which ultimately devolves from acknowledging the subtlety of human interpretation into a positivist analysis of the measurable frequencies, I propose an analysis of even the frequencies, form, and rhythm of free jazz/avant-(garde) jazz/creative music/new thing/spiritual jazz in terms of timbre. Fales observes in relation to the inanga whispered song of Burundi:

A performance of Inanga is judged incorrect if the expected timbral effect is imprecisely executed, whereas wide deviations in pitch are considered ornamental, expressive, or if unsuccessful, in bad taste or inappropriate. Especially where the whispering voice is pitchless, and where the meter changes according to the patterns of long and short syllables in the text, timbre is the single element that it is a fairly stable and predictable standard of correctness. (Fales, 57)

As Fales points out, the essence of timbre is the ability for the human auditory apparatus to distinguish the source of sounds, or in other words for the sounds to represent their sources. The sound of a clarinet represents a clarinet in the mind of a listener indexically, and in some sense iconically, as distinct from the sound of a violin. The Art Ensemble’s use of innumerable “little instruments” from Africa, Asia, and elsewhere sounds like a present-future global community in which the presence of Europe is far more proportionate to its real size. We can also hear the sound of a community of Black people in Chicago who were interested in incorporating all of

those sounds. They are modern, worldly Black people with a global consciousness that sets them apart from people forced into darkness by slavery and evil. They represent the truth that Black people are not simple rural, not even only local, but complex global humans. Sun Ra's use of electronic instruments sounds like a vision of an electronic future. But also the music of Sun Ra sounds like the group of musicians he surrounded himself with, which was something like cult as much as a band and included virtuosic musicians with high levels of training as well as untrained enthusiasts. His music therefore has a participatory character, which could sound somewhat congregational while at the same time Sun Ra was deeply questioning the tenets of Christianity.

Rough, jarring, complex timbres are suitable to represent humans living in complex conditions, at the boundary of ancient culture and future technology, in full view of both the highest prosperity and the most smarting poverty, engaged in volcanic constructions of personhood and identity with epic political, spiritual, and physical consequences. The sounds of the AACM represent forms of being that they were in the process of constructing, partly through representing them. And it was therefore that timbre became foremost in their palette, since no prior referents existed, no community agreement on how to represent it symbolically, no association between it and anything else to represent it indexically. The iconic capacity of timbre was what was required. Joseph Jarman was a member of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. The AEC is also notable for the theatricality of their performances.

The development of the music into the timbral domain, then, could perhaps be seen as a consequence of the shift in emphasis of music – the deep need for musicians to represent identity, ways of being, a positive future in which Black people are full subjects and are no longer subjugated but rather are agentic in constructing society according to the African ways of thinking and systems of thought – indexically and iconically.

The harsh-sounding, jarring timbres that are characteristic of the avant-garde/free jazz style are iconic of freedom. For instance, in the 1970s in New York, artist spaces opened up in downtown Manhattan when zoning laws failed to adapt as quickly as industry evacuated the urban space, and landlords, unable to find tenants for their industrial properties, rented them for next-to nothing to artists just in order to keep out the junkies, who would have started fires and burned them down. (Heller 2012, 51-52) The artist loft scene gave the musicians freedom to play music that didn't have to sell drinks or draw large crowds as they had to do in the clubs. So, their ability to play challenging music sounded like people who were free from certain constraints – they were free not to please a drink-buying audience whose presence may otherwise have been more about socializing than about their sonic experience. They were free to play distracting, intense music. And in that way their music sounded like freedom. Also, in doing so, they played without the constraints of meter, form, and tonality, and they were free in that way. Thus theirs was the sound of freedom.

Or consider a different tradition which was much more Afrocentric: “Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen to the sound of freedom talking to you. Alkebulan.” (Mtume 1972) The iconicity of the music is emphasized by the practitioners as they embody what they wish to represent – a positive Black identity through self-awareness, self-love, exploration of forms of thought outside the domination of white people. Chicago musicians like Phil Cohran, Maia, David Boykin, Dr. Siddha C. Webber, Fanta Celah, Avreeayl Ra, Ari Brown, Eliel Sherman Storey, Soji Adebayo, Atu Harold Murray, have undertaken to make music that represents their individual relation to the cosmos/creator and society. Their music carries this tradition with evident roots in the 1960s into the 21st Century.

Generative Representation – Creating Black culture

Symbolic representation has been a very important part of the music throughout its history. Certainly Sun Ra's fantastical album titles, song titles, lyrics and oral prose integrated into his music (“Space is the place ... There's no limit to the things that you can be”) function symbolically and crucially assign meaning to his sounds by framing them so as to locate them within his expansive rhetorical Afro-futurist discourse. The foregoing discussion of the particular capacities of iconic and indexical sign action to represent identity, belonging, and other cultural things should not be construed to mean that icons and indices are somehow superior or more important aspects of semiotic action. The music I focus on here, particularly because of its relation to the term jazz, is primarily instrumental, but symbolic representations such as language and also visual symbols are quite central to this history of the music in Chicago. And the discourse surrounding the music is actually integral to it, determining to a significant extent its content and context.

“[A] constitutive rhetoric operates with the understanding that rhetoric is ontological in that it does not merely represent and describe human ideas and empirical data but instead generates such ideas and data.” (Gordon 2003, 31) Black music not only reflects Black culture through semeiotic action but also constitutes it. Stuart Hall pointed out “Cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’.” (Hall 1990, 225) As we’ve seen, Peirce also allowed for more kinds of semeiotic action than language. The semiotic work of some of these examples of Black music is to create new forms of being through their representation. Part of what is being sustained in Chicago among the spirit musicians is the ability to represent new forms of Black being through free, community-based, participatory expression. Great Black music in one sense is that which has the potential to make Black great through representations of great Blackness.

While speaking about Afro-futurism and African American science fiction writer Octavia Butler, Nicole Mitchell (2011) identified three categories of African American art in terms of its focus:

Reflective focus underlying films, novels, fiction etc., is based on reality, based on what's happening right now, with an emphasis on reality, especially to hold up a mirror of everything that's wrong in Black communities. Mitchell sees that this mode tends not to offer any new ideas about how we can do things differently, but it is valuable because difficult issues that affect Black communities are often ignored by the society at large.

Historical focus yields art that reflects on some of our great heroes, or great things that we've done in the past, which we can use now that can transform our reality. Works based on the Civil Rights movement and Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, help explain where we've been, and show the issues that have been negotiated by Black people in the past so that actions in the future can learn from them.

Visionary focus, Mitchell says, is rarer, and it is the focus that she herself chooses to emphasize most often. Instead of focusing on the past and the present, she focuses on the future. She asks, "What's in your imagination? What can we dream up?" What kind of different technologies can we dream up? What kind of social interactions can we dream up that's better than what we have now? And so she drew an implicit parallel between her own work, the work of Octavia Butler, and the work of Sun Ra, whom she quoted:

The civilizations of the past have been used as the foundation of civilizations today. Because of this, the world keeps looking to the past for guidance. Too many people are following the past. In this new space age, this is dangerous. The past is dead. And those who are following the past are doomed to die and be like the past. It is no accident that those who die are said to have passed. Because those who have passed are past. (from the liner notes to Sun Ra's album *Atlantis*).

Mitchell points out this feature of Sun Ra's music, which epitomizes Afro-futurism and in that way has a visionary purpose. Graham Lock points out something similar. (Lock 2004) Sun Ra was trying to imagine into being a future in which Black people are empowered. Outer space was the epitome of the future during Sun Ra's ascendancy – the space-age. He therefore argued for and embodied – iconically, indexically, and symbolically represented – an Afrocentric vision of the future.

Mitchell herself depicts a Great Black future in many of her works. The title of her album *Hope Future and Destiny* and several of the songs therein are indications of this intention. The lyrics to "Time for a change" say to "Put in your mind what you want to change, put in your soul what you want to change, put in your words what you want to change, put into motion what you want to change." Her album *Afrika Rising* is even more explicit. She sings the following lyrics over reggae rhythms in her composition entitled "Peaceful Village Town" included on her Black Earth Ensemble's *Afrika Rising* album:

...
African vision
The elders are loved for their wisdom
The children are loved for their energy
Men and women work together
To make a healthy and balanced society
...
African vision
The way it was before we were taken
Our memory is still unshaken
Self-love can be reawakened
To heal our sleeping nation.

About her Octavia Butler project, Mitchell (2011) said that it was a challenge to sonically represent the experience of being in one of Butler's stories. She played an excerpt from her *Xenogenesis Suite* which she said was meant to elicit the feelings of disorientation, terror, anxiety and desperation of awaking to find that you have been abducted and were aboard an alien

spaceship. It's clear from her discourse, from her albums, and from her public performances that much of Nicole Mitchell's work attempts to represent ideas and even experiences of future states.

Phil Cohran's cosmological music philosophy involves a visionary focus as well, but one very different from Sun Ra's and Nicole Mitchell's. Phil Cohran's extends beyond the semiotic and into the practical domain. Cohran's efforts have been to lay the ideological, cultural, musical foundation for a new civilization of Black people in America. Western European culture was founded upon the Renaissance, which was founded upon an archaeology of classical civilization (which, Afrocentrists argue, was founded upon African civilization). Chicago has been an important home for the development of Black Nationalist ideology, and Phil Cohran has been near the center of discussion on many of its expressions.

Besides visionary representation, Cohran's music generates sacred space. Cohran has been extremely influential among Afrocentric spiritual musicians in Chicago, and most of the musicians I have met who approach improvised, creative Black music from a spiritual perspective have taken some lessons from him. They include David Boykin, Kahil El Zabar, Eliel Sherman Storey, and Robert Irving III. The teachings of Cohran and Sun Ra depend on a cyclical concept of time, in which the present and the past are one, so that prophecy is salient, and by which knowledge of the past becomes knowledge of the future. For Cohran, I think the ultimate goal is unity among Black people first, among all people later, and the realization of the eternal, divine unity of the cosmos.

2. Ideologies: Afrocentricity and the Black Spirit of Chicago

“We are Black people. Our essence, our science, our destiny is music” – Phil Cohran

In this chapter, I will discuss movements of thought in conceptualizing Blackness that have been concretized into institutions, and those that bear strongly on the subject of Great Black Music in Chicago. First I will discuss Afrocentricity, a specific paradigm asserted by Molefi Asante at Temple University, which has developed into an intellectual movement in many Black studies departments around the United States. It focuses largely on understanding ancient civilizations and undoing misperceptions about Black people’s place in history, which is a mission many Black musicians have taken up. Though they do not use the term Afrocentricity explicitly, many of the ideas that give the discourse surrounding the music in Chicago its Black character come from doctrines developed by Afrocentric scholars such as Walter Williams, Jacob Caruthers, and Ivan van Sertima. I will then discuss three of what I call religio-political institutions that have powerfully shaped discourse about Black identity in Chicago. They are the Nation of Islam, the Moorish Science Temple, and the Black Hebrews. This focus on religious and spiritual formations will then lead into a discussion of spiritual jazz.

Afrocentricity

“Art without integrity is worthless.” – Phil Cohran

Many musicians in Chicago might be characterized as Afrocentric thinkers, though few ever espouse the term. Afrocentricity is the name of the theory developed by Molefi Kete Asante in association with the development of the first Black Studies Ph.D. program at Temple University. (Asante 1980) It is a paradigm designed to combat the white supremacy that dominates Western scholarship. Undertaking an African-centered [A.K.A. Afrocentric] analysis of white supremacy, Mark Christian distills the conceptualization of it by African-centered scholars John Henrik Clarke and Anthony Browder: “White supremacy is not something merely

to be associated with White hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan of North America and the British National Party of the United Kingdom. On the contrary, White supremacy manifests in the social, economic, political, and cultural history of European expansion and the development of the New World. It is a history and experience that has a life span of more than five centuries. At the dawn of a new millennium, it can be confidently stated that the world continues to be largely maintained by various forms of White supremacy.” (Christian 2002, 180) Nowhere is this more prevalent than in departments of music, where many scholars believe that the only tradition worth any serious study is Western European art music. This leads to the absurd condition in which most academic music departments devote nearly all of their resources to the study of that relatively small tradition while devoting a meager fraction to the vast majority of the human musical universe.

Student uprisings in the 1960s led to the establishment of Black studies and African American studies departments in many colleges and universities across the United States. African American studies began as a kind of hand-me-down discipline: one that borrowed its theoretical grounding from other disciplines (not unlike ethnomusicology). But beginning in 1980, Molefi Kete Asante developed Afrocentricity: the first, theoretical paradigm for the conduct of scholarship endemic to African American Studies. (Asante 1980)

Afrocentricity flows from the ideas of Cheikh Anta Diop. Diop’s work exposed ways that Western history has eliminated the contributions or the character of the people of the Nile Valley Civilization, and suggests that this was done purposefully to promote the values that underlie white supremacy. His work invites us to interrogate the moments in which history chose to support the basis for the economies that were founded upon the moral or historical justification of slavery. Inasmuch as the Western academy is the ideological engine that continues to enable

white supremacy by the privileging of its own position, Afrocentricity seeks to provide an alternative position in order to gain perspective on the knowledge produced therein as well as to produce new forms of knowledge impossible from within Western traditions.

Moreover, the Afrocentric paradigm includes a functional aspect. Ama Mazama explains: “From an Afrocentric perspective, where knowledge can never be produced for the sake of it, but always for the sake of our liberation, a paradigm must activate our consciousness to be of any use to us.” (Mazama 2003, 8) Afrocentric knowledge and discourse, therefore, is that which does work for the benefit of Black people.

The term Afrocentricity raises many objections because people assume that it is the Black version of Eurocentrism. However, Afrocentricity begins with the premise that all thought is culturally rooted. There is no objective view; all is subjective, and all subjectivity is rooted in culture.⁹ In Western Europe and the U.S., and increasingly around the world, that cultural base is what has been the culture of Western Europe. However, the dominance of that Eurocentric view is a distortion because it presents itself as objective, when in reality it is but one of many multiple perspectives. Before Afrocentricity, no discipline had been designed specifically to challenge the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms. African-centered scholarship is necessary in order to demonstrate the subjectivity of Western scholarship, which masquerades as objective not because it is not subjective, but because European power has reached a global scale.

Eric Porter (2002) discusses Black jazz musicians as intellectuals. For many, to be a Black musician is also to be a scholar, a cultural worker with an obligation to make serious

⁹ Althusser’s concept of *interpellation* – the way ideology forms the basis of individual subjects, quite beyond their control, and even before they are born – is a helpful model of this usage of culture. (Althusser 1971)

contributions to the Afrocentric project. Part of my ongoing objective is to bridge the divide between Afrocentric scholarship within the academy and the important theoretical and semiotic work being performed by musicians. I contend that a truly Afrikan perspective must not privilege textual forms of knowledge over the oral, the spiritual, the performative/ritual, or the musical forms in which, as Gilroy observed, much of our knowledge is preserved.

The term Afrofuturism is now discussed at least as frequently as Afrocentricity. There have been several Afrofuturism conferences at major universities recently, among them one that was partly planned by David Boykin at the University of Chicago, and another at the New School in New York City, where the MB Collective gave a presentation. Whereas Afrocentricity focuses greatly on Kemet (ancient Egypt) and other traditional or past civilizations/societies, Afrofuturism, while also looking at the legacies of those civilizations, focuses more on the contemporary Black peoples of the world, and on contemporary forms of decolonization and resistance for Black and brown bodies. There is a strong alignment with feminism and queer/trans politics in Afrofuturism, as well as a technologically enabled transnational awareness. In that way, in these conferences, the auspices of Afrofuturism seem to be a successor or more contemporary evolution of Afrocentricity in which Black perspectives are exalted for their superior capacity to identify and destroy hegemonic structures of thought, be they white supremacist, sexist, or heteronormative.

On the other hand, the more prevalent understanding of Afrofuturism is as a kind of futuristic, science-fiction aesthetic for which Sun Ra is often given a great deal of credit, along with Octavia Butler and others. In this way it means visions of a future in which Black people are agentic and prominent, contrary to popular science fiction and futuristic portrayals that have been imagined by white authors. I will return to Afrofuturism in Chapter 4.

Black Nationalism and Religio-political Formations

“Chicago is the Mecca of Blackness” – Phil Cohran

Though it is not homogenous or static, Black identity in Chicago is often engaged with ideas that flowed out of the Black Power movement. This form of *Black* as an identity means subsequent to a historical moment of identity development. Black music is another of the discourses that are unified by their efforts to consciously, purposefully, urgently, and transformatively (re)define Black identity. As Phil Cohran said, “at this point, if you’re not proud to be Black, you’re sick.” (pers. comm.) To be able to say proudly that you are Black is to have a certain level of knowledge and perspective about relations of power and justice in a globalizing world where the United States has unequalled power. In this sense, Black musicians are Conscious, as in Conscious rap music. It’s akin to the moment LeRoi Jones describes in *Blues People* (which bears repeating): “To understand that you are black in a society where black is an extreme liability is one thing, but to understand that it is the society that is lacking and is impossibly deformed because of this lack, *and not you yourself*, isolates you even more from that society.” (Jones [1964] 1999, 185) Black is an identity marker from a time in which Black people have developed this knowledge; the identity carries with it this understanding. It is not an automatic result of certain parentage, certain physical attributes. By some meanings, it is an undertaking of awareness. Phil Cohran explained that it is a job to be Black. It is to be isolated because the general public punishes Blackness. It would be far less strenuous to accept the subordinate position and the mantle of inferiority offered by the dominant society – in essence to stay a slave. Cohran said he’d been trying to be Black for 50 years and is still working at it. That was not to say that he was not yet Black; quite the contrary, but that being Black was an ongoing process of development and discovery. For him and others I met, the process entails rooting out

and undoing the European/Euro-American attitudes and practices that are harmful to the descendants of Africa but by which We are nearly all overwhelmingly beset.

Chicago has been the site of the development of many of the most important movements in Black thought. The Moorish Science Temple was founded in Chicago in 1925 by the Noble Drew Ali. Chicago was the headquarters of the Nation of Islam. Chicago was the site of the African Hebrew Israelites group of Black Hebrews. It has also been a center of Kemetic thought, home to Professor Jacob Carruthers and the Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies; the home of Dr. Walter Williams and his Ancient Egyptian Museum and Institute; the birthplace of the Earth Center of Kemetic culture which now has centers on both coasts of the U.S., one in London, and one in Burkina Faso.

What's common to most of them is an orientation towards a reconsideration of history. Some of these movements emphasize that humanity began in Africa, and therefore all people are descended from Africa. So, what becomes relevant is where to begin the story of origins and what's important enough to be included – what is significant. The French may claim the Greeks as their classical civilization, regardless of any special physical link between French bodies and those of ancient Greece. It is the intellectual heritage, the cultural heritage, that is important. The Greeks certainly learned (some would say “stole” or “inherited”) many of their ideas from the peoples of the Nile Valley Civilization, while Kemet (or Egypt) is left out of their history. (James 1954; Diop 1967)

There are many competing versions of history that come to light during the study of Black culture in the twentieth century. The Nation of Islam taught that Black people were from Asia. The Black Hebrews recount a history in which they are descendants of the tribe of Judah. This idea is reflected in the leaflets that Sun Ra produced and distributed around Chicago in the

1950s: “Jew is a short form of the word JUDAH. Outside of the nation, JUDAH, there is no other true JEW. Only a person of Ethiopic descent can claim the name JUDAH. Any person who is not of Ethiopic origin is not the Jew spoken of In the Bible.” (Sun Ra 2006, 132) The African Hebrew Israelites state their history succinctly:

In 70 C.E. the remnants of The African Hebrew Israelites were driven from Jerusalem by the Romans into different parts of the world, including Africa. Many Hebrew Israelites migrated to West Africa where they, once again, were carried away captive – this time by Europeans on slave ships – to the Americas along with other African tribes people. (“The African Hebrew Israelites: Our Philosophy.”)

The works collected by Corbett into *The Wisdom of Sun Ra* represent a moment in the development of Sun Ra’s philosophy which corresponds to a moment in his life, when he lived in Chicago. (Sun Ra 2006) Later on, Sun Ra’s interrogation of history matured into such a distrust for history that he developed not only a revised history, but a radical alternative to history: a mythos. Brent Hayes Edwards states perspicaciously: “[Sun Ra] roots his sense of *myth* and the *impossible* precisely in the history of US racism and segregation.” (Edwards 2005, 31) Sun Ra adopted into his mythical persona symbols and icons representing his revisions to historical and Christian narratives and a future conditional upon that altered understanding, and along the way he built a small community of followers to help him create his vision. Their performances were rituals filled with iconic rhemes representing future states of free, empowered Blackness possible outside of the discursive structures forged as technologies of confinement, inherited from slavery times. He was a philosopher, a radical (anti-)historian, a living myth.

Nation of Islam

Much of Sun Ra’s philosophy was a very unique interpretation of ideas formed on the south side of Chicago, in the intellectual shadow cast by University of Chicago and alongside Nation of Islam’s leader Elijah Muhammad. It was largely in Chicago in the 1950’s that Sun Ra formulated his reinterpretation of Africa’s, and hence African Americans’, place in the history of

civilization, and it was there that he embarked on his interplanetary mission to heal Black consciousness with knowledge of Our true history (and of Our celestial future). Szwed (1997) shows us this period of Sun Ra's life and his relationship with Nation of Islam. Sun Ra and his intellectual collaborators at that time, Pat Patrick and Alton Abraham, would meet in Washington Park, just outside the walls of the University of Chicago, and have debates with whomever they met there, including the Black Muslims. Their views coincided in many ways – their mutual disdain for Christianity, distrust of the European version of history, and desire to correct the damage inflicted on the Black man's psyche by white oppression – and I would surmise that the Muslims' emphasis on discipline inspired Ra in his strict reign over the Arkestra, which was an important part of the group's longevity.

Essien-Udom, a Nigerian, gained access to the insular Black Muslims in a way that many other outsiders could not because of his African nationality. His work *Black Nationalism* (1971) treats the Black Muslims with understanding and friendliness, though it is not uncritical. He discusses the Nation of Islam in relation to the prior Black Nationalist movements, including movements to emigrate to Africa and those to settle in Canada. He gives a clear analysis of the crisis of Black identity – that whiteness had been successful in making black inferior and ugly – and argues that therein lay the motivation for joining the Black Muslim movement: it provided a positive identity, a sense of community, and a feeling of self-improvement. He describes their core values: “properly conceived, [the movement] is uncompromisingly anti-lower-class Negro values, anti-Negro middle-class complacency and opportunism, and anti-white paternalism and injustice.”

Essien-Udom defines nationalism in this context as,

“the belief of a group that it possesses, or ought to possess, a country; that it shares, or ought to share, a common heritage of language, culture, and religion and that its heritage,

way of life, and ethnic identity are distinct from those of other groups. Nationalists believe that they ought to rule themselves and shape their own destinies, and that they should therefore be in control of their social, economic, and political institutions.” (6)

But when thinking about the Black Muslims, who serve as a sort of model for the Black Power movement in its nationalism and also has this ambiguity, how do they express that aspect of nationalism that has to do with acquiring an area of land? Do they really want land? What kind of nation could you have with no land? But, they don’t seem focused on land; rather on a state of unity and self-determination.¹⁰ Essien-Udom comments that the nationalism of the NOI involved not an area of land where the Black people are, and not even an area of land where the people imagine themselves to have come from, rather choosing an Arabian civilization. Instead of a political program for the establishment of a homeland, Essien-Udom says that a land of their own “is guaranteed solely through eschatological beliefs taken from the Old Testament prophecies.” (7)

Contrast this work with that of C. Eric Lincoln (1973), who in *The Black Muslims in America* studied this movement ambivalent to America from the perspective of a somewhat suspicious American. Economic and social frustrations faced by Black people in the interwar years are the crucial impetus for the rise of the movement. Lincoln describes the Black Muslims’ program and gives an account of their often-acrimonious interactions with the outside

¹⁰ Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert’s *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea* (2007) proceeds from a definition of *nation* from the 15th and 16th century which is markedly different than what one might think of in the age of the ubiquitous nation state. He writes:

The Portuguese Nation was but one of the many maritime trading nations that composed the sinews of late medieval and early modern commerce ... The term “nation,” in this context, was simply a means of identifying a community of outsiders seen to share a common place of birth, the Latin nation at the root of the word ... ” (Studnicki-Gizbert 2007, 9)

world. On the issue of land, Lincoln offers a collection of statements made about the physical separation between Black and white which range from taking over nine or ten U.S. states, to leaving the U.S. for Africa, to the ultimate in unviable and inflammatory suggestions that the white people go back to Europe. By juxtaposing disparate, probably unworkable ideas on land without any theorization or attempt at explanation, Lincoln points suggestively to the Nation of Islam's radicalism and ambivalence on this issue, and at the same time shows his skepticism. In contrast to Essien-Udom's socio-psychological analysis, he does not, for instance, discuss the sense of positive Black identity that the Black Muslims achieved. This work shows us the antipathetic stance that many Americans took toward Black Nationalism – for many, it was the evil twin of the very respected Civil Rights Movement – and reminds us that works about these subjects, especially written or published by Americans during such heated times, must always be scrupulously examined for the biases that fear and racism create.

A more recent work is Claude Andrew Clegg III's (1998) biographical work on the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, which also covers the formation and evolution of the Nation of Islam. Clegg shows us the difficulties that the movement had with the government, especially in Chicago. Besides describing the often stormy relationship between the spiritual leader and his adoring Nation, Clegg also gives a detailed version of their cosmology, which is entirely different from that of the rest of Islam. Of particular interest here are 1) an origin story tracing civilization back to ancient Asiatic civilization inhabiting Egypt, which then spread to Arabia and Sub-Saharan Africa; and 2) the fact that, in the 1930's, the cosmology referred to life on Mars and other worlds. Clegg suggests that, while scientifically unsound, this outer-space reference attracted adherents by appealing to the American popular imagination, which had been profoundly affected by H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1898. London: William Heinemann),

which was adapted to a radio broadcast in 1938. Clegg argued that the Nation used this reference to outer space to suggest that there were other worlds that were not subject to white domination. The similarities to Sun Ra's astro-Black mythology are striking, and this cosmology often surfaces in Afrocentric discussions of history.

Phil Cohran was a lieutenant in the Nation of Islam in 1963. (See discussion in Cohran's biographical section in Chapter 3) Many of Cohran's ideas are consonant with those of the Nation of Islam, but he left the organization rather than become a minister because music was too important to him, and the organization would not allow a minister to also be an entertainer. Cohran's was the opposite of the choice made by Louis Farrakhan, previously a notable Calypso singer (performing under the name "Calypso Gene" and also "The Charmer"). As Louis X, the man later known as Farrakhan recorded "White Man's Heaven is a Black Man's Hell" in order to disseminate the ideology of the Nation. (See Siegel 2015 *Trials of Muhammad Ali* film, in which an interviewee credits the song with introducing him to Islam.)

Moorish Science Temple

Identification with the Moors of Spain led to Phil Cohran's 1968 album *Spanish Suite*. In the liner notes he says:

The Spanish Suite was written to magnify the contribution that Moorish Spain made on the European Renaissance. The relationship of music to cosmic rhythms and harmony was altered from the original state of Spanish music and eventually distorted down to the 12 tone equi-temperment system of tuning. The Artistic Heritage Ensemble was taught to play outside of the 12-tone system and to recognize natural tone relationships. The musicians had to be dedicated to music for life in order to reach the level they obtained. The Spanish Suite represents the median effort in returning to our original music. It was written and first performed in December of 1965 at an AACM performance at the St. John Grand Lodge located at 7349 S. Ingleside in Chicago. This particular performance was at the Afro Arts Theatre at 3900 S. Drexel in February of 1968. (Liner notes from *Spanish Suite*)

Therefore, Cohran suggests that the Moors had access to the original, natural music, and that it is *Our* original music. [I think you can pretty much go with just his last name, as there is little

confusion, unless you have a reason] Cohran recognizes the Moors as fellow Africans and ancestors, as well as their civilization, which brought light into the European dark ages, especially in the domain of music. Afrocentric musicologist Karlton E. Hester suggests that “Moorish theoretical tendencies perhaps influenced the gradual abandoning of quartal harmony (used in Medieval harmony) in favor of North African tertian harmony (harmony in thirds), eventually contributing to the development of French fauxbourdon and English gymell styles in later periods of European music.” (Hester 2004, 5)

Nation of Islam founder Wallace Fard Muhammad and early leader Honorable Elijah Muhammad were reportedly members of the Moorish Science Temple, founded by the Noble Drew Ali. The doctrines of the Moorish Science Temple are based on a narrative of displacement. The homeland it chooses is Moorish Spain before the Reconquista. They speak of the knowledge that Western Europe owes to the Moors, and then of their dispersal after the Reconquista – that some went to Africa, some went to Italy and carried out the Renaissance, some went to Northern Europe and became known as the Danes. They posit a relationship with Native American tribes in North America, by virtue of which they claim land rights against the United States government and a degree of autonomy. The Moorish identity/culture/historical society is therefore based on a historical narrative which results in their claims of belonging somewhere else. They do not, it seems, wish to return to Spain.

The Moorish Science Temple teaches that after their dispersal from Spain during the Reconquista, the Moors spread throughout Europe, Africa and America. Different groups of Moors have emerged, such as the Nuwaubian Moors led by Malachi Z. York (currently imprisoned) who created an extensive Kemetic culture compound in Georgia (now defunct) with large pyramids in it. These people also claim heritage as part of the Creek Indians. Another

group, the Washitaw Moors, are engaged in a legal battle with the United States Government, over claims of land – that their ancestors were given a land grant by Spain before the Louisiana Purchase, and therefore they are owed many acres of land in and around Louisiana.

The modern day Moors have developed various alternative histories that seek to position them with relative advantage vis-à-vis the U.S. government. Their approach seems to be as much a political maneuver as a discursive empowerment strategy. The Nuwaubians led by Malachi Z. York have constructed a narrative of history in which the ancient Olmecs were descendants of Africa, who then migrated to the areas later to become the Southern United States, constituting the Yamassee Nation, a native American group. This thesis could be related to the work of Dr. Ivan Van Sertima (1976). They therefore claim autonomy based on their status as indigenous people. The Black Seminoles are another group who has argued for African American integration with American Indian societies in order to claim rights and levels of autonomy from the U.S. government. Their court cases are rarely, if ever, successful. Like the Five-Percent Nation, the Nuwaubians have used a mashup of Black music with spiritual/political speech to carry their message. While the Nuwaubians are based mostly in New York and Atlanta, they maintain presence in Chicago, and I heard Phil Cohran speak at their bookstore.

Black Hebrews

Black Hebrews from Chicago have some of the most interesting developments of diasporic discourse among Black people. They believe that they are descended from the tribe of Judah. The African Hebrew Israelites led by Ben Ammi, one of several groups of Black Hebrews, made a stunning return to Israel as their homeland. The state of Israel denies their belonging there yet has been forced to accept them after intervention by the U.S. Black Caucus. (Beit-Hallahmi 1989)

Ben Ammi, born Ben Carter in Chicago in 1940, is still leader of the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem. He had worked as a metallurgist before he started preaching at the Abeita Culture Center. (Dunlap 2008) He and other Black Hebrews interpreted parts of the Bible which described Israel as being in the Northeast Corner of Africa and passages that foretold of a second Hebrew slavery subsequent to that in Egypt, one involving ships, to say that they were indeed these Hebrews. (Markowitz 2003) In 1967, Ben Ammi led a group of some 350 followers to Liberia, with the intention of remaining there for a time to purge slave thinking before moving on to settle in Israel. After a difficult time in Liberia, the group did manage to successfully settle in the cities of Dimona, Mitzpe Ramon, and Arad in southern Israel, where today their settlements claim around 2,500 people.

Black music has been very important to the African Hebrew Israelites. After settling in places where they did not have permission to work, music was one of their major sources of income. As one commentator observed, “This Hebrew community is perhaps best known outside Israel for the accomplishments of its performing artists – including Eddie Butler, who represented Israel in the international singing competition Eurovision in 1999 and 2006.” (Esensten 2009) It’s not surprising then that jazz musician Abshalom Ben Shlomo has served as the African Hebrew Israelites’ Community Leader of External Affairs. (May 2002)

Abshalom Ben Shlomo was introduced to the Black Hebrew movement in Chicago. He’d grown up in Chicago and had graduated from Englewood High School in 1961. While most accounts of the Black Hebrews focus on Ben Ammi Carter A.K.A. Ben Ammi Ben Israel and his group because they are the ones who made the extraordinary journey from Chicago to Liberia to Israel, there seem to have been multiple Black Hebrew groups in Chicago at this time. Abshalom Ben Shlomo reports that he did not have much to do with the Abeita Culture Center

on 47th Street and Cottage Grove , where Ben Ami Carter preached. (Shlomo 2009; Beit-Hallahmi 1989) Rather, the Ethiopian Congregation of Hebrews on 61st St., east of South Park (King Drive) was where he first came to the movement. Two rabbis there found references in the Bible to the blackness of Jews such as Solomon saying that he was black and comely. (Shlomo 2009) Shlomo says, “That was the beginning of the pursuit in terms of identity.” (*ibid.*)

Bassist Charles Blackwell, who would later rename himself Hezekiah, was among Ben Ammi’s followers. He introduced his bandmates from the studio recording group The Metrotones, Thomas “Yehudah” Whitfield and John “Shevat” Boyd, to the movement. The three of them emigrated to Liberia with the other Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem in 1967. (Dunlap 2008) Ben Ammi had planned for the Hebrews to farm in Guryea, Liberia, but (much like the original American settlers in Liberia) they failed when the weather was unsuitable. (Sanneh 1999) This threw the group into desperation, and many quit and went back to the U.S. over the next year. But the three musicians, Yehudah (Whitfield), Shevat (Boyd), and Hezekiah (Blackwell), travelled to the capital Monrovia and played music, calling themselves the Soul Messengers. “The Soul Messengers reportedly played a killer version of James Brown’s ‘Cold Sweat,’ and they added free-jazz and Afrobeat influences to their repertoire.” (Dunlap 2008) They played not only in Liberia but also in Côte D’Ivoire and Ghana, and they earned enough money to support their families and also to contribute significantly to the greater Hebrew community remaining in Liberia. Ben Ammi sent Hezekiah (Blackwell) to work on a Kibbutz as an ambassador, while Yehudah (Whitfield) and Shevat (Boyd) stayed and worked with other musicians, playing music to pay the bills. (*ibid.*) The two musicians ran into trouble in Côte D’Ivoire where some locals mistook them for enemy Lebanese and held them at knifepoint. (*ibid.*) They were rescued by bandmates, but they were beat up by the police later that same

night. (*ibid.*) After that, they both went back to Chicago, where Yehudah played guitar and sang with The Pharaohs, which was comprised of members from Phil Cohran's Artistic Heritage Ensemble. The Pharaohs recorded the great Afrocentric funk album *Awakening* in 1972.

The African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem's website today features a map showing various routes their ancestors took from ancient Israel to West Africa, and from there the middle passage. (African Hebrew Israelites Website) Ben Ammi's evidence that the Hebrew Israelites had traveled into West Africa is importantly etymological, very much like Sun Ra's logic in many of his leaflets:

"We know that many West Africans, especially the Ashantis, are direct descendants of the ancient Hebrews because of the strong Hebrewisms that have been identified in Ashanti tribal customs, observance of the Sabbath (Saturday) as well as the name Ashanti from the words 'ti,' which in the west African tongue means 'race of' and Ashan, a town in the domain of Judah (see Joshua 15:42)."(*ibid.*)

The idea that African Americans were descended from Middle Eastern migrants was also an important part of the early teachings of Elijah Muhammad, who called the original people "Asiatics." (Clegg 1998) Sun Ra also refers to "Asiatics" in his polemical leaflets: "The American negro is of ASIATIC Judaen-Eyhiopic [sic] descent. ..." (Sun Ra 2006)

In 1968, perhaps a decade after Sun Ra typed his broadsheets in Chicago, the Arkestra had come to reside in Philadelphia. Absholom Ben Shlomo brought his wife and first child to join them. (Shlomo 2009) The Arkestra made two tours of Europe and several recordings with Shlomo among them. He played and toured with them for more than two years. In 1970, Shlomo met a group of Black Hebrews who were bound to join Ben Ammi in Israel. Upon returning to Chicago in 1970, he made contact with people in Chicago who could put him on the path to emigration. He, his child, and his wife who was pregnant with their second child, left the U.S. in 1971 for Israel. They landed in the South East of Israel, near Beersheba, before being

moved to Mitzpe Ramon. Life was difficult, and since he didn't have permission to work in Israel, he started off sweeping people's steps for money. Shlomo reports racist labeling – that people applied epithets used against Ethiopians to them. (*ibid.*) The people who had established Mitzpe Ramon and Dimona were mostly from Morocco, some from India, and some from Romania, and Shlomo reports that the Black Hebrews did not make many efforts to integrate into those other traditions. (*ibid.*)

Yehudah and Shevat came from Chicago to rejoin the group once Ben Ammi had led the group to Israel, and they again won bread for the Hebrews as the Soul Messengers. Shlomo reports that he toured for years with the Soul Messengers. Other funky soul groups were formed – Spirit of Israel, the Tonistics, and Sons of the Kingdom – and they made recordings, some of which are collected in *Soul Messages from Dimona*, under a recording contract with CBS. (Dunlap 2008)

In the 1990s, Abshalom Ben Shlomo played in several jazz festivals in Israel. Since 1999 he has divided his time between Ghana and Israel. (Shlomo 2009) The Soul Messengers is still a Black Hebrew performance group, which performs at high-level functions and is still an important source of income and notoriety for the community. In addition, the community is home to at least one Gospel Choir, the New Jerusalem Fire Choir, which advertises themselves as “a thirty-five member choir composed of professional male and female vocalists and a five-piece band, specializing in traditional and contemporary gospel, reggae, popular music, classical compositions and upbeat originals.” Abshalom Ben Shlomo returned to Chicago to take part in the AACM's 50th Anniversary concert at the University of Chicago.

Spiritual Jazz

“Music is not material. Music is spiritual. Music is a living soul force.” (Sun Ra 1967)

Music spreads knowledge. Music represents culture. But music also mediates a psychic and emotional relationship between the individual and things greater than himself – God, the Universe, Truth, Nature, Earth, Society, Each Other ... It may be the rule rather than the exception among humans in general that music is spiritual/religious in nature. Histories of African American music show the division between the sacred and secular to be strained. The advent of the gospel blues (See Harris 1992 on Thomas A. Dorsey) and soul music (e.g. Ray Charles), both of which were contentious, show that there is a tendency for the sacred and secular to merge.

Perhaps the most famous recorded example of spiritual jazz is John Coltrane's 1964 suite *A Love Supreme*, inspired by a spiritual awakening he had experienced the previous decade. Mary Lou Williams' *Black Christ of the Andes* (1964) blurs boundaries between sacred choral music and jazz as she takes up scriptural topics and pays homage to St. Martin de Porres, a Black Catholic saint. Alice Coltrane's *Journey in Satchidananda* (1970a) was inspired by her explorations into Hindu religion, which eventually led to her becoming a Swamini and establishing a Vedantic center in California. Pharaoh Sanders' and Leon Thomas' "The Creator Has a Master Plan" is another pivotal example of spiritual jazz, which achieved a considerable popularity when it was released in 1969. These and other such works are beloved among many members of Chicago's Great Black Music community, suggesting that the idea of musical freedom as a form of spiritual freedom may lie at the center of the community's longevity. Other good examples include Albert Ayler's *Spiritual Unity* (1965), Kalaparusha Maurice McIntyre's *Humility in the Light of the Creator* (1965), and Joseph Jarman's *Lifetime Visions for the Magnificent Human* (2000). Among the musicians I've encountered in Chicago, I have found the idea that Black music shouldn't be entirely secular, and Black sacred music need not be only

Christian. There is a drive to reverse the secularism in Black music, secularism which has led to the music being commercialized and sold. For many musicians in Chicago, their music is about a relationship with God, the Universe, or the Creator, however an individual conceives Him/Her/It. Many of the musicians see themselves as serving their community, their culture, and their heritage, with developing their relationship with the divine more important than achieving career goals.

Richard Brent Turner argues that jazz has its roots in Haitian Voodoo and Rara music. “The African spiritual energy and power of jazz street parades, Vodou ceremonies in domestic spaces, Mardi Gras Indian masking, and jazz funerals – which all belong to the second-line culture – demonstrate that black New Orleanians have an African diasporic spiritual life that interacts with Christianity but is largely unknown by the mainstream order because its communal rituals are performed by jazz musicians and initiates of secret societies and social pleasure clubs.” (Turner 2009, 5) Elizabeth McAllister’s *Rara* (2002) describes an annual musical practice of promenading musicians playing homemade valveless trumpets, called *banbou* or *vaksins*, and drums with a wide variety of homemade percussion. The *banbou/vaskin* players improvise until they find a groove. To keep the rhythm precise, they also beat a *kata* part on the banbou itself with a stick. (McAllister 2002, 46) The ostinato of the banbous is a symbol of the group, representing it like a flag. Each group has its own ostinato, which distinguishes it from others and which announces its presence as it moves around. Sometimes funny words are put to the patterns to make them more memorable, perhaps an antecedent to scat singing. There are several elements that remind us of second line and early jazz: 1) collective improvisation, 2) promenading horns and drums, 3) interlocking syncopation among the horns, 4) something that could be related to scat singing. These common elements make Turner’s contention of a relation

between *rara* and jazz seem at least plausible. “Rara is concerned with performing religious work in the unseen Afro-Creole spirit world,” but this work is largely secret and hidden.

(McAllister 2002, 7)

Several musicians have likened saxophonic screaming and atonal, timbral explorations to states of spiritual ecstasy and speaking in tongues that they have experienced in church. Chicago keyboardist and clarinetist Angel Elmore often refers to catching the spirit during performances. Many other musicians relate similar experiences during musical performances that liken them to spirit possession. For instance a drummer told me about a time his group constructed such an intense rhythm that a spirit manifested to dance. Perhaps we can resolve the incommensurability between Louis Armstrong and Sun Ra in terms of ecstatic worship.

While spiritually oriented jazz music referencing primarily Christian traditions is very important, a great deal of this music references other African or African Diasporic forms of spirituality as well. The spirit musicians I encountered were much more likely to eschew the Christian Church than to embrace it, although Gira Dahnee and others emphasize the ways that Christianity, ancestor worship and other African/African Diasporic spiritual practices are practiced simultaneously in many communities in the South. Most musicians recognized the distinction between religion and spirituality.

In fact the word *spiritual* is an imperfect label because to many it connotes religion. Religion is separate and related to spirituality. But the musicians I met made music about developing a passionate relationship between their consciousness and the universal power of creation to which music gives them emotional access. Religions are structures of thought and institutions that also develop that relationship but which also have other purposes, such as the

exercise of power and social control. In fact, it is to religion in general, rather than to Christianity in particular, that the musicians object most frequently.

Many of the Afrocentric spiritual musicians were deeply invested in non-Christian religious and spiritual traditions, but they were recently actively trying to re-incorporate Christian traditions into their spiritual practice. It is largely because Afrocentric concepts of spirituality all commonly deal with ancestor worship or at least veneration of elders and ancestors. Most of these Black musicians' grandparents or great grandparents were fervently Christian, and so completely abandoning the Church was incompatible with honoring their ancestors. Also, they recognize the African survivals within African American Christian practices, disputing the idea that it was the white man's religion imposed on Africans, and embracing it insofar as it is a repository of Negro culture.

Also, what at first I understood as spirituality in my study revealed itself sometimes to be an alternative science – a disciplined practice of thinking through the universe. The spiritual musicians create their own systems for organizing sound – for navigating the perceptual and rational relationships between frequencies that define discrete tones, embodying the physics of vibration with or without regard to rational relationships, and especially stimulating the unmediated interaction between vibration and human consciousness. These practices have an affinity with African and American Indian animist spiritual practices because they aim at individual or collective relationships with the natural, physical, or mathematical universe which resonate with the musicians and audiences emotionally and aesthetically. But they are often intended as scientific, and they are approached with systematic inquiry. Many of these musicians have been affiliated with the AACM, co-founded by Muhal Richard Abrams, who was influenced by teachings of the Rosicrucians (Phil Cohran pers. comm.; Lewis 2008, 57). In *Tri-*

Axiom Writings (1985) Anthony Braxton discusses spirit in terms of *vibrational* nature – a term which encapsulates both culture and “higher forces.” (Frederic 2007, 131)

Oluyemi Thomas describes each of his pieces as a different musical system. Describing his works, musical pieces with graphic scores, he says, “This one is entitled – they both are the same – there’s part one and part two. This is entitled ‘*Make Me Ready Abha Beauty*.’ The composition “*make me ready ...*” is about people preparing themselves to live inside of themselves so that they can live outside themselves, which is manifested in our actions. And then “... *abha beauty*” means, Baha’u’llah. He’s the promised one of the Baha’i faith. And “... *beauty*” represents his teachings. His teachings give us a beautiful way to look at everything. Yeah, so that’s the name of this score. It has different cities of the heart that we visit.” (Thomas interview with Deterville, 2012)

Franya Berkman’s account of John and Alice Coltrane describes how the two underwent a process of spiritual development together, which Alice continued after John’s death, going on to explore an ever widening field of traditions. This development was an orientation towards and exploration of a true and authentic self through music. Berkman connects this new expression of the authentic self with the emergence of new subjectivities: the throwing off of the shackles of colonization in the Third World, of marginalization in the First World, with Black people, women and natives becoming full subjects: “In this comprehensive reorganization of authority, individual and cultural expression could constitute, symbolically, a form of revolutionary praxis.” (Berkman 2003, 105) So, synecdochal of exploding the structures of colonialism, including the colonized mind, the sonic explosion of musical structures was revolutionary and liberating amidst this field of eruption in symbolic, indexical, and iconic counter-hegemonic expression. The most apparent feature of these consciousness events is the very personal,

internal nature of these explosions, which I consider to be reflections of the intimate nature of slavery's legacy, domination, colonialism, and the resultant shame and inferiority they were trying to shed. Coltrane's movement beyond the strictures of his and other jazz icons' past boundaries was imbricated with an enlargement of his spiritual horizons and a maturation of spiritual knowledge, during which he grew into a figure whose greatness was to open a door onto an unbounded musico-spiritual terrain. That terrain was not political territory; it was a re-creation, a re-imagination of the self.

Berkman reports that John Coltrane tried to include Elvin Jones and McCoy Tyner in his new spiritually oriented concept, but they just couldn't go there: "Neither McCoy Tyner nor Elvin Jones felt at home in his new, densely textured, loosely tonal, free-form projects." (Berkman 2003, 120) So the quartet disbanded, much to the disappointment of his large fan base. This break is important and symbolic. In one sense it represents the new purpose; not primarily entertaining fans, but exploring spirituality, identity, and exploding the boundaries around what a Black jazz musician can be.

Jazz critics are often hostile to any music with a purpose other than to entertain them. Ira Gitler called Abby Lincoln a "professional Negro" for her racial politics after *Freedom Now Suite* came out. He said, "the African Negro doesn't give a fig for the American Negro, especially if they are not blackly authentic ... Pride in one's heritage is one thing, but we don't need the Elijah Muhammad type thinking in jazz." (Gennari 2006, 256) Critic Gary Giddins dismissively disapproves of Alice Coltrane's inclusion of spirituality in jazz: "I don't much love the multicultural spiritualism and unilateral modes of Alice Coltrane's recordings." (Giddins 2008) But as George Lewis has pointed out, maybe the point is not to make something pretty that will soothe and satisfy an audience. (pers. comm. Sept. 10, 2009) On the contrary, maybe the

point is to jar them, scare them. As Sun Ra said, “There are other worlds they have not told you of; they wish to speak to you” – possibilities of change. (Sun Ra 1978 [LP])

After John Coltrane died in 1967, Alice Coltrane continued creating devotional music. (Berkman 2003, 171-72) In 1970 she became friends with Swami Satchidananda, recorded *Journey in Satchidanda*, and went to India. (*ibid.*) Upon returning from India, she recorded *Universal Consciousness* and started exploring the organ. (*ibid.*) She said that if John hadn’t died, she would have stayed on the piano because it was nice quiet accompaniment to what he was doing; he didn’t need anybody because his thing was interior and complete in himself. (*ibid.*) Having emerged from the state where the exploration of her self was subordinated to supporting John’s, she moved into a completeness in herself, and she discovered that with the organ, with its foot pedals to complete the bass, she didn’t need anyone else either. (*ibid.*)

“In 1976, [A. Coltrane] had a revelation in which she was instructed to become a Hindu swami.” (Berkman 2010, 7) Berkman argues that even though Alice Coltrane’s spiritual direction went towards Hinduism, her “creative impulse was firmly rooted in time-honored forms of African American religious expression.”(10) Indian devotional music is antiphonal (call and response) and ecstatic in the same way as gospel and jazz, and on that point of commonality, Alice Coltrane developed her musical practice for years to come. (Berkman 2010, 79) The idea that Alice Coltrane’s Hinduism was related to African American Christianity might seem strange, until one more carefully considers the more familiar syncretisms in African Diasporic Christian practices. Hand-clapping, foot stomping, ring shouts, catching the spirit and other forms of evidently African-derived ecstatic worship show the African substructure onto which Christianity has been grafted in the United States. So then, Alice Coltrane-Turiyasangitananda’s

Infinite Chants (1990) can be seen as another brilliant illustration of African Diasporic ingenuity merging with Others' spiritual practices.

“In the secular academy, spirituality has taken a back seat to the so-called important stories of political history. This is particularly evident in jazz studies.” (Berkman 2003, 14) In her statement “Nevertheless, this study is predicated on an exploration of the crucial role of spirituality in avant-garde jazz improvisation,” Berkman is grappling with the question of how to write academically about spirituality when scholars only care about politics and materiality. (*ibid.*) Ultimately, though, she demurs and decides to talk about the politics of spirituality. In the section “The Spiritual as Political” she says that Alice Coltrane’s work should not be overlooked on the basis of its spiritual ethos *because* its spirituality is actually political. (Berkman 2010, 14) She does not find a way to say that its spirituality is itself important. (15)

Obviously “the Black Church” **have** never **not** been politically crucial institutions. And it’s interesting for political reasons why Black people were searching for alternatives to Christianity. Christianity was at once the center of Black cultural creation, community, discourses of freedom and yet also an instrument of European domination. After centuries in which Negro slaves were forbidden to practice any religion at all, the Great Awakening gave Negroes the opportunity to worship, develop some sense of higher knowledge and literacy, and certain degrees of freedom. It was through the language of morality based in Christian ideology that Negroes were able to ally with whites to argue for abolition. And Black churches have developed into the center of many African American communities, providing moral guidance, social and economic support structures, and myriad other enormous benefits. On the other hand, in retrospect, the blessings of Christianity came at the cost of the devaluation of African spiritual practices. And it meant acceding to the premise that the goal was for the Negro was to approach

the level of civility of the white man when, as Diop and George G.M. James have shown, the very concept of “civilization” had involved a deliberate excision all traces of Africa in order to support the ideology of white supremacy.

The Nation of Islam and the Black Hebrew Israelites can be seen as at least partly a response to the European domination inherent in the ideologies and structures of Christianity. Still others found that spirituality and religion were distinct: religion being the institutions and the dogma/ideologies/structures of power that supported them, while the spirituality was the devotion to God, which can be practiced in a number of contexts. And so for some, moving beyond Christianity was a way of freeing spirituality from religion – an emancipation of African spirituality that had been captured by Christianity – while in doing so revealing the truth of their spirituality. The discovery of spirituality itself was what was transformative and motivational. The spirituality is what resulted in the music. Berkman does not contend that Alice Coltrane was making political statements with her music; quite the contrary. Alice Coltrane was exploring her relationship with the Divine through music, and perhaps she was touched by the depth of passionate devotion – Bhakti – that the Indian people have developed over millennia. Perhaps she realized that music was a medium of relationship between the human and the divine. This is the same relationship being explored by the Chicago musicians I’ve met during the course of this project.

Many musicians have contributed to my understanding of this musical tradition in Chicago. In an appendix, I have included a list of many musicians whom I’ve seen and spoken with over the past few years who’ve been active in sustaining Great Black Music in Chicago, New York, and elsewhere. What follows is a discussion of three musicians with whom I’ve spoken in depth and whom I see as central to the sustainability of this Afrocentric spiritual

current in Chicago music. These Chicago Black musicians perform unconventional, largely instrumental music, but while they each have important ties to the AACM, none are current members.

3. Figures: Black Spirit Musicians of Chicago

Elders and Ancestors

On September 1, 2012 Lester Lashley, Kidd Jordan, and Ari Brown were presented with the Malachi Favors Maghostut award for Forthrightness in Music and the Arts by Douglas Ewart and Mwata Bowden, representing the AACM. It was announced that those three advanced musicians were thereby formally inducted into the circle of elders of the organization. Ancestors according to many African cultures are people who, while dead, still play a role in society. As Meyer Fortes put it, “An ancestor is a named, dead forbear who has living descendants of a designated genealogical class representing his continued structural relevance.” (Fortes 1960. These older, classic Anthropological and other ethnographic accounts are important because they are the basis of many of these scholar/musicians’ understandings of African cultural principles.)

The concepts of ancestors and elders are related; they are both venerated, recognized as the ones who have come before. They are the figures around which the community coalesces, even more so than around any particular style of playing since a diversity of styles of music is at the center of the creative music community in Chicago. The veneration of elders and ancestors is good for you; it’s good for your music, and it’s good for the community. Part of why it’s good is that it’s African. Also it is an important source of recognition in a society in which official, visible recognition has largely been controlled by white people. And so it is remedial of the shortage of equality for Black people in America, while also being remedial of the violence done to African culture by the Middle Passage.

Ancestors are important in more than one sense. The veneration of ancestors is the recognition that those who are departed still affect our everyday lives. It is also an identification with African ways of thinking, part of the construction of a diasporic identity.

At the beginning of performances and rehearsals, the MB collective performs rituals to propitiate the ancestors including the pouring of libations as we call out the names of ancestors. The artists and musicians invoke the African concept of veneration for ancestors and elders. This is embodied by Nicole Mitchell's song referenced earlier, as well as much discourse about this music. Co-Organizer of the Universal Alley Jazz Jam outdoor jazz series is Dr. C. Siddha Webber, whose Ancestral Resurrection Ensemble performs spiritual jazz behind Dr. Webber's spiritual poems. The most celebrated elders in Chicago jazz are teachers and organizers. They assume this role to in order to pass cultural knowledge to young people whose education often does not include many important African concepts.

Phil Cohran – Original Afrocentric Musicologist

Writing about the roots of Afrocentric thinking and Cheikh Anta Diop, Cheikh M'Backé Diop describes part of Anta Diop's effort as "reinsert[ing] Africa ... into the historic movement of humanity from which it had been excluded as an essential element of understanding the evolution of the world." (Diop 2003, 150) This effort – to undo the severe distortions that had been done by European history in order to justify slavery and other consequences of white supremacist thought – lies at the core of Phil Cohran's work as well. Cohran operationalizes these ideas, putting them into practice musically, philosophically and socially. He leads us away from the path that Europe would have for us, building brick by brick a new road back to the light that represents a continuity between the ancestors and our destiny.

Phil Cohran was trained as a musicologist but abandoned the field because of its ridiculous Eurocentrism long before the advent of Asante's *Afrocentricity*. Instead, operating entirely outside of the white-controlled/conceived institutions of the academy, Cohran developed an architectonic cosmology, which integrates *corrected* history, music, astronomy, and Archaeo-

astronomy (Egyptology, science, art and mathematics) for the purpose of healing and inspiring Black minds. For him, music is much more than entertainment. At the very least, it is a means by which to enlighten the unenlightened. In its highest forms, it is the means by which to hear the ancestors and to reach eternity.

Cohran has used his knowledge of musical cultures and his skills as a musician to perpetuate and develop these ideas within the Black Community. His work in primary education, his development of musical programs in Chicago, the Affro Arts Theater, post-secondary education, and many other efforts have all contributed to the development of positive Black identity.

Several years prior to the start of my research in 2012, he had convened a retinue of committed investigators composed of his most dedicated students, which I joined in 2013. We met regularly, and he led us to develop and deepen our understanding of the world and the events we witnessed in terms of his cosmology, which includes the following basic concepts:

- The African origin of all human beings and civilization
- The cyclical nature of time, life, nature
- The Divine Order underlying all things, expressed in music, nature, and the cosmos
- Ancestors who play a pivotal role in the present
- The current condition of society is out of tune with the Divine Order, e.g.:
 - o Relationships between men and women
 - o Unhealthy diet
 - o The decline of music
- The way to get back in tune involves:
 - o Seeking the knowledge and wisdom of ancestors
 - o Understanding the cosmos
 - o The practice of music, discipline, and sincerity

Cohran does not advocate or subscribe to Asante's theory of Afrocentricity. However, his teachings share much with those of Diop and Asante, applying many of the principles of Afrocentricity to the study of the stars and the practice of music. Cohran advocates the pursuit of truth through spirituality more than through the structures of a dominant society that have been

shown by Diop, Asante, and others to be implicitly corrupted by the ideological apparatus of white supremacy. Perhaps most importantly, Cohran's work has effects consonant with the goals and requirements of Afrocentric thought as articulated by Mazama (2003). Phil Cohran is recognized throughout the Chicago musician community for his uncommon wisdom, and most of the spiritual jazz musicians I've met in Chicago have had some connection with him.

Biography

Cohran was born in Oxford, Mississippi on May 8, 1927. His musical journey began when he won a city-wide talent competition at five years old. (Ridgeway 2007) That led to piano lessons, and eventually a high school teacher recommended he be enrolled in a rigorous music program at the Laboratory High School at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. (*ibid.*) There he studied mathematics, harmony, chemistry, and the spirituals. (*ibid.*) He studied under Dr. O. Anderson Fuller, the first American Negro to receive a Ph.D. in music. (Semmes 1995) After high school, he attended Lincoln University for one year. (Semmes 1995) However, his parents' divorce led to financial constraints, and Phil decided not to ask for tuition to continue his studies there. He began working in juke joints in East St. Louis. His musical training from Lincoln had taught him how to rehearse a band, and soon he formed a group called the Rajahs of Swing, which operated from 1947 to 1950. That group split up when some members wanted to accept an offer by Louis Armstrong's manager, Joe Glazer, for a national tour and recording contract, but Cohran declined, suspicious because Glazer hadn't offered an advance. (Ridgeway 2007). As Cohran points out, this sort of decision would come to characterize his career: "[it] was a matter of principle, and that's been my problem all my life!" (Ridgeway 2007)

In early 1950, Cohran began playing trumpet with Jay McShann, touring on the Chitlin' Circuit. This was a formative and exciting time in his career. "We got to see America ... from the bottom." (Ridgeway 2007) He played with Charlie Parker and Walter Brown and with

popular singers Al Hibbler and Jimmy Witherspoon. (“The History Makers” biography of Phil Cohran; Cohran interview with Litweiler 1984) To his disappointment, this part of his career was cut short when he was drafted in October 1950. After training with a demolition unit, he was transferred to the 315th army band and became a bandleader. In 1951, Cohran went to the Naval School of Music and joined the Naval Academy Band in Maryland.

In 1952 Cohran was discharged and returned to St. Louis. The city had been stricken by a drug epidemic. (Ridgeway 2007) He and his mother moved into the infamous Pruitt-Igo housing project to care for four recently orphaned family members. There, they joined a committee to organize and teach new residents life skills and to coordinate with social service agencies to improve conditions. (Ridgeway 2007) Further organization efforts eventually led to a rent strike for better living conditions years later.

In 1955 Cohran moved to Chicago. At first he worked a nine-to-five job as a clerk, but he soon quit to pursue music full time after John Gilmore introduced him to Sun Ra in 1959, beginning a crucial collaboration that introduced Cohran to a higher level of discipline than he ever had before. He says that Sun Ra taught him to dedicate himself entirely to one thing, which was music. (Cohran 2013b) His collaboration with Sun Ra ended when Cohran decided not to follow Sun Ra’s Arkestra to New York. Instead Cohran began to redefine music for himself, acting as a leader in his own right, indeed more like Sun Ra himself than his follower.

Cohran plays trumpet, harp, and French horn, but he also plays several unusual instruments. The violin uke is a sort of zither, but played with a bow. He tells the story of finding the instrument in the window of a South Side music store at 76th and Cottage Grove, dusty from having sat in the window for 9 years. He remembered that he bought it for \$15 in 1961 after eyeing it for some time. Only a few days later (March 4, 1961), a tornado destroyed

the store, but in the remains of the front window, he could still see the faded impression of the violin uke where it had sat gathering dust for nearly a decade. (Cohran 2013c) The destruction of the store was a sign that his ancestors intended for him to play the instrument, and so he continues to play it to this day. Cohran can be heard playing the violin uke on his own recording “Unity” and on Sun Ra’s piece “Music From The World Tomorrow.” (Cohran [1967?]; Sun Ra 1965) Cohran also plays several an amplified lamellophones of his own design with pentatonic tuning, an instrument which he named the Frankiphone after his mother.

The South Side of Chicago in the middle of the 20th century was alive with groups of thinkers espousing new ideas, each responding to the others. Among the groups on the scene were the members of the Moorish Science Temple, Elijah Muhammad and his Nation of Islam, the Black Hebrew Israelites led by Ben Ami, and Sun Ra’s Arkestra (see discussion *supra*). Out of this cauldron of philosophies and practices came the principles that Cohran would develop over the next fifty years and integrate into his architectonic cosmology.

After an acquaintance introduced him to the principles of the Nation of Islam, Phil Cohran started trying to coordinate with the Nation of Islam to organize an orchestra and choir as part of the NOI’s war against drugs and prostitution in the Black communities. (Ridgeway 2007) But the Nation of Islam generally did not sanction music. They approached him to be an orator instead, and by 1963 Cohran had become a lieutenant in the organization. He was in charge of security at NOI events and also in charge of performances. Eventually he was chosen to become a minister. However, in summer of 1963 Cohran left the organization before actually becoming a minister because he would not have been able to practice music in that role. (Ridgeway 2007) But even after leaving the Temple, Cohran maintained contact with Malcolm X/El Hajj Malik el

Shabazz, eventually recording a tribute in music to him after his assassination. (Ridgeway 2007; Cohran 1968)

In 1965, Cohran was one of the co-founders of the AACM along with Jodie Christian, Steve McCall and Muhal Richard Abrams. (Lewis 2008) However, he left the organization relatively quickly when a difference of philosophy developed between him and the rest of the members.

In 1966, Cohran met Oscar Brown, Jr., who commissioned him to set Paul Laurence Dunbar's poetry to music for an educational program in the Chicago Public Schools. (Cohran interview with Zorach 2012) In January of 1967 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) program hired Phil and Oscar Brown, Jr. for their Dunbar show entitled *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadows*. After travelling to many schools presenting the show, it became so popular that they produced it in the theater at the Museum of Science and Industry, and several schools at a time would travel there to see it. Phil Cohran considered this a very important work because Dunbar was one of the few poets that used African American dialect, which has always been forcefully driven out of the school system. Cohran teaches that musical qualities in African American speech are divine properties and are therefore elements of the pathway to live and think in tune with African ancestors. Even today, Cohran usually incorporates Dunbar's poetry into his public performances, reciting such works as "Angelina" and "Possum Trot," the latter with musical settings.

The work in Chicago's schools led to a grant through Betty Montgomery to head up the music component of a larger "arts panorama" at the 63rd Street Beach House in the summer of 1967. Music became the most popular part of that program, and soon a major event was produced every week and attended by thousands. The beach house was along Chicago's

Lakeshore Drive, and drivers passing by could hear the music from the road and see the crowds. They were attracted by the new sounds and the energy there, and the event built momentum. Cohran talks about these events as the beginning of overtly visible Black consciousness on the South Side, illustrated by the wearing of African clothes, wearing natural hairstyles, ladies getting rid of their wigs, and even people taking new names. (Semmes 1995, 237) They advocated healthy food and a vegetarian diet, which Cohran had learned from writings about Gandhi. This educational content came largely from Phil's wife at that time, Dolores Cohran.

When the summer ended, there was so much interest in the programming that Cohran decided to open a theater. At the last Beach concert, he invited supporters to a meeting the following day at the St. John Grand Lodge, where eighty people gathered. He gave them signed pieces of paper endorsing them to solicit funds for a Black theater. (Semmes 1995, 238) His supporters managed to raise \$1,300 just walking up and down the streets with a statement written and signed by Phil Cohran. (Ridgeway 2007) Cohran contributed some of the revenues from his record sales, and they had enough to open the theater. Securing a space at the former Oakland Square Theater at 3947 Drexel Boulevard they named it the Affro-Arts Theater. The two "f"s in the name were intentional – "Af" for Africa, and "fro" for "from out of." (Lewis 2008) Cohran was dedicated to making it a Community organization, careful to consult local leaders, even including the Blackstone Rangers, a powerful local gang. (Cohran interview with Zorach 2012) The first concert at the Affro-Arts Theater took place on December 2, 1967 at 8pm. (Lewis 2008, 166). Phil Cohran described the breadth of the programming there, which expanded on what had taken place at the 63rd Street beach: "We trained music, history; we had Hebrew, Arabic and Swahili taught free; civilisation [sic] classes, forums. We also held conferences there, one conference of Third World countries." (Phil Cohran, quoted by Shapiro 2001)

Many leading Black orators and performers appeared at the Affro-Arts Theater including LeRoi Jones, Rev. Albert Cleage, Oscar Brown, Jr., Olatunji, Syl Johnson, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Don L. Lee (later known as Haki Madhubuti). (Semmes 1995, 239) The Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) made presentations there, as did the Spencer Jackson family gospel singers. (*ibid.*) “The people came in there and felt like one person every weekend. It was one feeling in the house. Black. That’s all it was. And we didn’t have to make excuses for it. People discovered that they can be Black.” (Cohran 2006). Pharaoh Charles (Keyahoo) Handy explained:

We are trying to sell Africa to our people ... We know that only in Africa will black people build a strong nation that will gain the respect of other nations around the world. We are trying to bring about a psychological metamorphosis of black people. That is why we need places like the Affro-Arts Theater where the change can take place, where you can take the conked-head Negro off the street and show him his strong, black beautiful hair and the fact that his forefathers were once kings and queens and the builders of great civilizations. (Staff. 1970. “Mecca for Blackness: Chicago’s Affro-Arts Theater celebrates African culture,” *Ebony Magazine*, pp. 96-100)

In March of 1968, an appearance by Stokely Carmichael at the Affro-Arts Theater drew the ire of the Chicago city government, which then forced the theater to close for building code violations. Even once those had been addressed, the city refused to issue a valid permit despite the fact that the Theater had paid the fee and fulfilled all the requirements. (*ibid.*) The Affro Arts Theater was reopened in July and presented Carmichael again soon thereafter, purposefully demonstrating that they would not capitulate to strong-arm tactics. However, before long the group of people who led the theater was infiltrated by operatives of the FBI’s COINTELPRO counter intelligence program, who sowed dissent among them. (Lewis 2008) Since it was mostly an organization founded on good will and community service, distrust proved extremely damaging. The theater was further weakened by aggressive acts by the El Rukns, a faction of the powerful Blackstone Rangers street gang. (Zorach 2012) All this turmoil led Cohran to leave his

band, the Artistic Heritage Ensemble, and the theater by the end of 1968, and the theater soon closed permanently.

Members of Cohran's Artistic Heritage Ensemble went on to form the Afrocentric funk group the Pharaohs, a former member of which, Maurice White, eventually formed Earth Wind and Fire. White is often cited to have learned the lamellophone from Phil Cohran, which he would incorporate into many of Earth Wind and Fire's most celebrated recordings. Cohran went on to teach at Malcolm X College and at Northeastern Illinois University. From 1975 to 1977, Cohran operated Transitions East at 6236 S. Cottage Grove Avenue, a music venue that was also devoted to healthy diet and nutrition. ("The History Makers" biography of Phil Cohran).

In the 1980s, Cohran twice co-chaired the organization Artists for Harold Washington, in support of Chicago's first and only Black mayor. (*ibid.*) In 1987, Cohran composed the music for the sky show at the Adler Planetarium. (*ibid.*) He continued researching, teaching, and developing his understanding of the cosmos, Black culture and history, influencing many other musicians working in Chicago today. In 1991, he was invited to China to lecture on ancient tuning systems. While he was there, he was given the honorary name Kelan, meaning "holy scripture," by a Chinese Muslim Imam. In 1993 Cohran put together the music for *African Skies* in a tribute to Sun Ra, who had just died, commissioned by the Adler Planetarium, where he was volunteering. (Casper 2011) He was also asked to deliver a large Sun Ra tribute concert at Chicago's Millennium Park in 2008. Cohran has come to be recognized as one of the most important cultural figures in Chicago's history. Until recently, he has performed somewhat frequently in Chicago despite his advancing age, and he has toured with the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, a group comprised of eight of his thirteen sons. Cohran has collected numerous

awards and honors, including the Englewood Jazz Festival's Spirit of Jazz Award, and he was honored by the City of Chicago on October 31, 2013.

Astronomy

Unlike many other Afrocentric thinkers, Phil Cohran bases his teaching on knowledge of the stars. Since he is a musician, one might expect him to begin with the principles of music or with the rich history of Black music of which he is surely one of the world's most foremost experts. However, knowledge of the stars is important and primary for several reasons. First, he proceeds according to the premise that Africans were the first people and that African systems of knowledge are the most ancient. (see Wells 2002) Therefore Black culture and Black people are the most ancient. Knowledge of the stars is a domain of knowledge that was common amongst ancient people. There is well-documented evidence of highly advanced astronomical knowledge by ancient Africans, e.g. the Nile Valley Civilizations, and more recently among the Dogon People. (See Beatty 1998; Griaule 1965; c.f. Apter 2005) And therefore astronomy is universal ancestral knowledge, since Africa is all humans' ancestral homeland. Furthermore, the understanding of the stars as the abode of our ancestors, our origins and our future, is the patrimony of Kemet (ancient Egypt). These truths need not be mediated through the concepts of Western science.

Mario Beatty points out, "The ancient Egyptians used symbolic language ... to show the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence between their lives and the motion and behavior of the universe." (Beatty 1998, 4) Cohran's is an investigation of mysteries similar to what Beatty describes in his enquiry into astronomical knowledge symbolically represented in the Book of Coming Forth by Day (a.k.a. the Book of the Dead). (Beatty 1998, 5) The idea that everyday, visible phenomena symbolize the essence of all things and can be interpreted by applying the proper perspective/methodology, thus revealing all secrets (including the secret of

eternal life) is essential to Phil Cohran's teaching. Beatty demonstrates that not only spiritual/religious thinking was contained in the Book of the Dead, but also astronomical knowledge which only [white supremacist] convention would exclude from the history of science based on observation. For instance, Beatty talks about the goddess Nut, goddess of the sky, the symbol for whom was a pictorial representation of the Milky Way combined with the symbol for goddess. He says that the myth of the sun god Ra was that each night he passed through the body of Nut, his mother, and was born anew in the morning. This mythos, Beatty suggests, shows that the ancient Egyptians understood that the Milky Way Galaxy was a collection of stars and that the sun was part of it. (Beatty 1998, 27) The knowledge was contained in their mythology, spirituality, and language/writing, but it was only available to those with knowledge of the method to interpret it.

Cohran applies a hermeneutics somewhat similar to Beatty's, approaching traditional knowledge of the stars as the repository of ancient, eternal knowledge. He relates observable celestial phenomena to everyday life because, after all, we are all celestial phenomena. Life on earth proceeds according to the complex cycles of the solar system; it exists because of the complex cycles of the universe as a whole. Moreover, all of the long-lasting, great ancient civilizations (which we ought to admire since ours is in its infancy) concerned themselves with the cosmos, found meaning in it, and lived according to its rhythms. The better we are able to relate to those people, our ancestors, the better we will be able to project ourselves into a balanced and harmonious future. Cohran admires Benjamin Banneker, a Negro astronomer who worked as a surveyor and planner of Washington, DC, and who also published a series of almanacs. I would add that slaves used astronomy as a guide to freedom. The wisdom "follow the drinking gourd" was used by escaping slaves to find their way north by going towards the big

dipper. For Cohran, knowledge of astronomy is the foundation of civilization itself. His cultivation of this knowledge is an expression of his Black Nationalist position, so that Black people might found a new civilization. As he says “You have to have a *foundation*.” The most durable foundation is the cosmos. There’s nothing that can happen on earth that isn’t part of the cosmos ... nothing that doesn’t happen according to that divine order.

One of the most important tasks of Afrocentric thought is the correction of corruptions of truth which have been perpetrated and perpetuated in order justify the domination and exploitation of African people. Traditional knowledge of the stars is a domain which has been corrupted, and exposure of this corruption is essential to understanding the methods by which historical processes of destruction, conquest, colonization, and theft have resulted in an estrangement from that knowledge.

One important example is the way that the Zodiac is divided into 12 equal parts. The Zodiac is the name for the stars along the apparent path through the sky of the sun, the moon, and all the planets in our solar system. These stars are grouped into constellations whose names are familiar to most people – Aries, Pisces, Taurus, etc. – from western astrology. However, there are thirteen constellations along the Zodiac path. Ophiuchus has been omitted. Furthermore, the actual constellations are not the same size, and therefore in reality the zodiacal path is made of unequal segments, not equal segments of 30 degrees each. Thirdly, the European astrological tradition failed to account for the precession of the Earth’s axis. That is why the traditional Western astrological ephemeris (the set of tables which predicts the positions of the stars and planets through time) is incorrect. Many people are surprised to learn that whatever sign they’re used to saying they were born under is probably not where the sun actually was when they were born.

Phil Cohran works hard to dispel such distortions by applying a close and careful observation to the stars and planets. Afrocentricity is largely about “locat[ing] the *phenoms* in space and time.” (Asante 2009). Cohran’s approach effectively locates its subjects and objects within a framework of cyclical time and in three-dimensional space according to the knowledge-world of ancient ancestors.

Music Theory

Music is a domain of knowledge where corruption must also be dispelled. For one thing, the system of equal temperament has corrupted the natural relationships between the tones in music. The most important thing about music is that it is the ability for the human to perceive the naturally occurring order in sound. This order can also be expressed mathematically.

An octave is the 8th note of a scale (oct = 8). The relationship between a note and its octave can be expressed as a ratio of 1 to 2, so that the frequency of the octave is exactly twice that of the original note. E.g. an octave above C at 256 Hz is exactly 512 Hz. In music, any note is considered equal to one of twice or half its frequency. In other words, in “do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti do”, the two do’s are considered equivalent because the ratio of 1 to 2 is so simple, basic and fundamental. This is also expressed in the length of strings. If you pluck a string, then cut it in half and pluck it again, the second pluck will sound exactly one octave higher because it will vibrate twice as fast. Similarly, the relationship between the first and the fifth note of a scale (do, re, mi, fa, sol) can be expressed by the ratio 3:2, so that the frequency of the fifth is the exactly 3/2 or 150% that of the original note, which corresponds to a string of 2/3rds the length of the original. 3:4 = the fourth (fa). 4:5 = the third (mi). And so on, and such ratios can yield all the notes in a scale (C, D, E, F, G, A and B). I will not elaborate the mathematical details here; what’s important is that, while the ratios between C and the other notes are simple, rational ratios, the ratios between the notes yielded are not consistent. The difference between a C and a

D is different than (not proportional to) the difference between D and E. (Rossing et al. 2001)

This inconsistency is very troublesome for instrument makers, particularly for the piano. And therefore they smoothed out the differences, creating equal temperament, which is what we hear in music today. Equal temperament meant that C was to D as D was to E, but it replaced simple ratios with monstrous ones with large integers (e.g. a ratio of 11000 to 12347) which do not correspond with natural harmonics.

Cohran has worked extensively as a jazz musician, and he loves jazz. But he emphasizes that jazz has limitations, especially when the purpose is to create a music that at once signifies and realizes unification of Black people according to African principles. Jazz has come to incorporate European ideas of harmony, often emphasizing “vertical” organization, in which synchronic relationships between notes – chords – are primary. (Cohran 2012) This focus on harmony can restrict the free creation of melody, which Cohran sees as more primary for African and African American music. Cohran has been a pioneer in a modal approach to music that does not rely on harmonic progressions but rather on *modes* – groups of notes akin to scales – which are at least as ancient as the Greeks, but likely much older. Modal playing frees the musician from the constraints of numerous chords and the burden of keeping track of shifting tonal centers, enabling more focus on creating stronger melodies. Miles Davis also famously recognized the restriction of chord changes and the increased melodic possibilities of a modal approach to jazz, which was embodied in his classic *Kind of Blue* album. While Cohran expresses deep respect for Miles Davis’s musical achievements and abilities, Cohran’s approach sounds very little like Davis’s. I would postulate that it is because Cohran had even less compunction than Davis against leaving the genre of jazz entirely behind, as Cohran has repeatedly emphasized “jazz is dead.” Cohran plays modal music because in all the ancient

cultures he studied, including African but also Indian, the Greek, et al., none of them jump around different chords, shifting tonal centers. They stay on one set of five, six, or seven notes. Cohran therefore sees the focus on shifting chords to be a European characteristic, and therefore something to be avoided.

In music practice, Phil Cohran has been very influential in advocating the use of long-tone exercises in his teaching. Many of the musicians I've worked with attribute this practice to Cohran's influence. That influence can also be seen in his sons who've formed The Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. Reuben Atlas's film *Brothers Hypnotic* (2013) about this group opens with the brothers practicing their long tones in a gritty New York setting. Cohran also teaches the theories of Gioseffo Zarlino regarding the Greek modes and counterpoint. (Zarlino (1558) 1983; Zarlino (1558) 1968)

The Spiritual Dimension

Spirituality can be defined as a relationship between a person's most intimate self and the greatest of all possible things/beings. Music is a mediator of that relationship which does not require any training, any symbolic representation, any language. Phil Cohran teaches that language is a derivative of music. Music is a means of communi(cati)on with others of your kind, with others of a different kind, with our ancestors, with the divine order of the universe.

Certain forms of Black music are known to induce states of trance, during which communion can take place. There are numerous examples of spiritual/religious traditions in the African Diaspora in which music is used to bring about a state of trance. Gilbert Rouget documented this widespread phenomenon in *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations Between Music and Possession*, though his conclusion, contrary to many emic accounts, was that music does not strictly *cause* trance. (1985) Music is central to the rituals of Haitian Vodou. Certain songs (e.g. "Yanvalou") are used to invite and to welcome the *lwa* (spirits) to a

gathering; others (e.g. “Zepol”) are used to send the *lwa* away. (Fleurant 1996) Trance and spirit possession are central to Vodou, and I have already touched upon the relationship between jazz and Vodou. (see discussion of Turner 2009 *supra*.)

Cohran teaches that in the United States, Black music has largely lost the capacity to induce trance, though there are still instances in which music can cause Black people to catch the spirit". Several musicians I know have likened the ecstatic horn screaming in avant-garde jazz to speaking in tongues in an African American religious context. Phil Cohran has undertaken to recover and activate this capacity of the music to induce trance in order to revive Black people's relationship with their ancestors. Some of his music is designed to affect this state of trance, and when playing and singing, the breath control necessary to blow a horn or sing is likened to that necessary to achieve a state of meditation. (Cohran 1968; Cohran 1996).

Cohran was moved to undertake new directions in music when he heard his ancestors speaking to him from the cosmos when he looked into the sky and saw the stars there. (Cohran public lecture, April 13, 2013) He abandoned European music in all its forms and dedicated himself to the cultivation of the musical forms bequeathed to him by his ancestors. (*ibid.*) “Music is the cosmic language. It's the divine language.” (Cohran 2013a)

Phil Cohran and Afrocentricity

What I think has yet to be done with academic rigor is to think about the music of Sun Ra, Phil Cohran, Kahil El Zabar and David Boykin (and other Black music of many genres) through the Afrocentric theoretical framework. African centered scholars tend to focus so much on writing (and politics) that they are reluctant to approach music, even if they declare its importance as a form of *orature*. Musicological writers, even ethnomusicologists, approach this music with European assumptions about the purpose of music, what about it has value, and what's important about it to discuss. But the aforementioned musicians are Great Black

intellectuals for whom the truest mode of expression is not writing, or even oratory, but music. And through that expression they are able to reach many people. Their contributions to Black knowledge and their approaches to teaching it – for better or worse – must be appreciated and understood, theorized, analyzed and utilized(!) by Afrocentric theorists and writers. The great power of music is to bring people together. In this, it is much more effective than theoretical or historical writing, more powerful than political discourse, perhaps even more significant than oratory or even religion, which, as Cohran points out, often relies on music to draw in congregants and keep them coming back.

I think from the standpoint of Afrocentricity, the important questions become: how does this music relate to the ancestors? What can it teach the people about their position in history? In the future? How does this music bring the people together in order to overcome the traumas of slavery that are still – even 150 years after Emancipation, even fifty years after the Civil Rights Act, even after the election of Obama – wreaking havoc on Black people, both from without and also, more insidiously, from within? Cohran is fully engaged in trying to solve a very serious problem: how do we engage Black people with music that is rich with culture without being either hindered or co-opted by the dominant society, and without becoming complicit in the structures of exploitation that we must oppose in order to realize the greatness intended by our ancestors?

Phil Cohran, the Spiritual Musician

I first learned of Phil Cohran through recordings when a friend told me she'd seen him on television. Years later, I saw him perform live with Hypnotic Brass Ensemble in New York the day before I left to come back to Chicago in June of 2012. I made a point to seek him out right away. He appeared several times in Chicago fairly soon after my re-arrival – once at the Hideout along with Baabe Irving and Fanta Celah – and once at the Washington Park Arts

Incubator. Finally he appeared at Hyde Park Records, where Fanta Celah introduced me to him. From there, I embarked on a fascinating journey of discovery in his teachings, which a group of us would gather at his house weekly to receive. He so generously explains everything to anybody willing to dedicate himself to knowledge, that it was easy to learn from him. First of all, I learned that Chicago is an especially spiritual place. It has been so since the Indians lived here. He tells the story of traveling to meet the Ogalala Sioux in Minnesota, where they told him about the special spiritual significance of what they called “The Spirit Lake” (Lake Michigan) and the dangerous energy that lives around the Chicago area. Phil also points out there are numerous theological seminaries here, many clustered around the University of Chicago on the South Side.

Some time later, I was standing on the shore of Lake Michigan with Phil Cohran and a group of his students on the autumnal equinox. At the moment of the sunrise, he struck his tuning fork to give us the right precise pitch, and we all sang this pitch in unison. We all tuned up to each other, as we had practiced doing in his living room a few weeks before. But at the same time, on this significant, cardinal date, we were tuning up our minds to the eternal cycles of the earth. And in doing so, we were tuning up our beings to rhythms and the thoughts of our ancestors, the founders of civilization. We were aligning ourselves to the precise rhythms of the planet that we’re riding around the sun. We were adjusting our frequency, *tuning in* to our ancestors, who all – in every ancient civilization – commemorated this moment – the sunrise on the equinox – with a gathering and a ceremony. We therefore symbolically vibrated ourselves at the same rational frequency, with each other, with eternity. No matter what shape humanity takes in the future, there will still be two equinoxes, and two solstices. There will be sound and music. There will be sunrise and sunset, and the moon will have four main phases, which each

last one 7-day week. The sun will move in cycles, and the moon will move in its own cycle, and the planets will move in their own cycles, and the people will live with the cycles too.

Lessons From Phil Cohran on the Practice of Music and Astronomy

What follows is an interpretive distillation of what Phil Cohran has taught me on the practice of music and astronomy. This is not what Cohran teaches verbatim. It is the way I make sense of his teachings; the impression he has made on my mind, integrated (to a small extent) with ideas that I have from my own experience. In some ways, it is a rationalization of spiritual thought, which ought not to be rationalized. It is limited to what I am able to write down in spite of the fact that his teachings are such that they should not be written, so that even in doing this, I risk violating them. I am only permitted to have this knowledge to the extent that I have determined to use it for the benefit of the people:

The practice of music is beneficial for your spirit. It matters less *what* music you make than *that* you make music, but certain kinds of music are more beneficial than other kinds. Command over your instrument, even your voice, comes from discipline. The practice of discipline is beneficial for your mind; and this is one way that the practice of music is beneficial. Mainly though, music is a direct relationship between consciousness and the Divine Order, which is the sum total of all fundamental principles underlying all features of the cosmos. Moreover, the practice of music is a connection with your ancestors. Your ancestors represent an unbroken chain of love stretching all the way back to ancient Africa, through millions of years. And every last one of them practiced music somehow. We are in a queer age – this tiny fragment of time, the last hundred years, among tens of thousands of years, or then again maybe millions of years of human existence – when music is reserved almost exclusively for specialists, especially because mechanical recordings have come to dominate our musical experience. One wo/man

sings for a hundred million people, and the rest are slowly forgetting how to sing. In some ways these mechanical devices have spread positive music around the world, which is good, but in many ways they have disrupted our relationship with the cosmos, with our ancestors, with each other, and with ourselves. That is why the spirit musicians now have a greater responsibility than ever. We have the ability to help other people feel the power of their individual and collective connection to the cosmos as a whole, through music. And in that way, spirit musicians can lead our whole people into a new age: the spirit age, when trade wars end, and the duty of all men and women is realized – to re-harmonize humanity with the natural spirit of the earth, among the planets and among the stars.

In order to understand the significance of music, it helps to understand the cosmos. The tones in music are similar to the bodies of the solar system. They represent frequencies of motion (periods of revolution, rotation) on a grand scale, while music represents frequencies of motion (vibration) on a tiny scale. When two tones are too close in music, they fight each other, and there is dissonance, angry beating. When two celestial bodies are too close to each other, they collide and one is destroyed or absorbed by the other. But when they are just the right distance apart, they are in balance with each other, in harmony with each other, and can co-exist, circling each other for eternity. So the planets that we can see circuiting the sky represent frequencies co-existing in balance, which is harmony. The ancients could perceive this orderliness as most important. The perfect precision was the primary inspiration in the development of systems of people that could co-exist in balance with each other, in harmony – community, society, civilization. The same is represented by music. Music demonstrates that the utmost orderliness can also exist inside consciousness. It is also a representation of

cosmic/divine order that people can create through cooperation with each other, which thus actually realizes the cosmic harmony among people.

The ancients projected earthly characteristics into the sky just as they incorporated the celestial characteristics of balance and order among themselves. And so Venus and Mars and Jupiter, Mercury and Saturn, the sun and the moon all have characters. And the terrain they roam through, the zodiac stars, has its features and characteristics. Their systematization of qualities and attributes in balance and motion in the sky was correlated with their development of society below. The foundation of all civilization is this unification of the celestial and the social domains, establishing the cultural domain. We can experience this development of culture as mythology.

The ancients' mythology was their science, their philosophy, their history written in celestial terms so that they might approach the eternal balance and harmony visible in the cosmos. Books and the written word are extremely valuable, but they are imperfect. Language changes and evolves constantly just as thought does. If you read the language of two thousand years ago, it cannot possibly mean the same thing now as it meant then. And so, even while preserving knowledge, the act of writing thought changes it – causes it to change more and more as time marches away from the moment it was written. With text, there is knowledge, but what fades is the significance of that knowledge, or its truth – its place within a field of knowledge. Which is one reason why oral transmission of knowledge is crucial. But civilizations have limited lifespans, and so do languages and oral traditions. However, the stars are eternal. And so the ancients inscribed their knowledge on patterns in the stars in the form of myths and cosmologies. One of the

great acts of violence done to knowledge is the confusion of myth with falsehood. Myth is more often knowledge, the truth of which is no longer available to us. As human civilization has developed to the point of having the power to disrupt the very balance and harmony that is its foundation – the disruption of nature, the climate, mass extinctions, the destruction of trees, nuclear weapons, the rearrangement of whole mountains and rivers, the destruction of eco-systems ... – and most people are recognizing that our survival is threatened by that, it is incumbent upon us to reawaken this sleeping knowledge through an understanding of myth and cosmology.

Now is the time when we must inevitably re-establish balance and harmony on earth. In this, the relationship between the practice of music and the practice of astronomy is crucial. The practice of music helps to orient the mind and spirit to the Divine Order. The practice of astronomy helps to relate to the ancestors and also to interpret the knowledge they left for us. These practices enable us to understand how the founders of civilizations translated the Divine Order into culture, into harmony and balance among people, and with nature.

Phil Cohran – Deep Knowledge

Phil Cohran professes what I call an Afrocentric architectonic cosmology, in which all available oppositional positions are concentrated and condensed, ramified and also interpolated in order to undermine the rational and emotional fundament to Euro-American psychosocial structures that normalize deception and atrocity. He teaches the interpretation of signs. Rainbows are signs. The sounds of insects are signs. Weather patterns are all signs. Music and the motion of the stars are both signs of the Divine Order. They all represent the order and balance of the cosmos. For Cohran, as for Peirce, the cosmos, nature, and we humans are all perfused with

signs. All are representations of the divine order, the balance and harmony that underlie all things in the universe. What is music? It's a representation of the cosmic/divine order and balance. What is good music? It's music that represents it well, or which helps people to achieve a balanced and harmonious state of being.

Cohran represents the order of the cosmos in the music he plays. He reflects this Divine Order by his consciousness, which he has conditioned through study, discipline, and the observation of nature. He seeks to think beyond the culture that has sought to vanquish nature, or to drown it out, and since that culture is pervasive, his undertaking has required a rethinking of even the most basic premises. Music is a sign of the Divine Order of all things just as the motions of the moon, planets, and stars. It is not an accident that music plays an integral part in spiritual and religious affairs in nearly all cultural contexts. It is because music is the human capacity to experience the divine order – the natural order of the cosmos – without mediation (of words, of symbols, of mathematics).

These ideas form a substrate of *deep knowledge* upon which Cohran's music is based, and which he embodies and communicates by and along with his music. His development and mastery of it qualifies him to act as a leader and an elder in a way that draws upon African cultural grammatical models. Anthropologist Andrew Apter writes about deep knowledge among the Yoruba. Re-reading the work of Marcel Griaule in light of its critics reveals "that esoteric levels of African philosophical systems are actually indeterminate and unstable, and that this capacity to contradict or subvert official or exoteric knowledge renders secret knowledge transformative and thus powerful." (Apter 2005, 96). Griaule was initiated into the most secret levels of Dogon knowledge – their cosmology – which were revealed to him by the blind sage Ogotomêli. This work has been challenged by scholars who have gone around to Dogon people

of today, and nobody has ever heard of all the stuff that Ogotomêli told Griaule. (Van Beek 1991) And so it has been attacked, held up as colonialist mystification and all sorts of negative characterizations like that. But Apter says that there is value in the work notwithstanding – that Griaule didn't find a big bunch of nothing. What Griaule discovered was a domain of secrecy, in language and symbols, the content of which is shifting and unstable, but which, by its very indeterminacy, embodies the potential to disrupt the established structures of thought and power by means of symbolic discourse. "Whatever fictions he deployed or illusions he held in his quest for the secrets of Dogon cosmology, Griaule clearly demonstrated the importance of language as its central organizing principle." (Apter 2005, 97-98)

This domain of deep knowledge can be found among the Bambara, Bozo, and Mande people. (Apter 2005, 100) Apter ran into a wall of secrecy when he inquired into the meanings of sacred symbols among the Yoruba. "While invoking their orisha during sacrifices and festivals, devotees often pray not to leak any secrets, requesting ritual assistance in sealing their lips. An elder devotee is much like a vessel, filled with the *omi* or 'water' of the orisha's power which must not leak, spill, or fall ... "(Apter 2005, 100) "The deeper one goes, in a sense, the less fixed and determinate the character of the secret, and the more formal the mechanisms of reversal and inversion ... The secret behind the secret is that deep knowledge has no content at all but derives its power from context-specific opposition to the authoritative discourses that it implicitly challenges." (Apter 2005, 103) "*If the ideology of deep knowledge asserts a fixed corpus of secrets, then this should not be taken at face value, but as a screen that allows its pragmatic functions to masquerade as sanctified wisdom and learning.*" (103, emphasis original). Apter finds that deep knowledge works "not as a fixed corpus of meanings and myths but as an interpretive space of reconfiguration." (103)

My course of study with Phil Cohran suggests yet another explanation, which is simply that anthropological researchers may not be qualified to receive this deep knowledge. Cohran would say they are not eligible for it. So while they may hear it, they cannot make sense of it. They cannot incorporate it with the world they have known up to that point. It cannot pass into Thirdness. They cannot see the truth that allows seemingly contradictory facts to coexist in a coherent system. Cohran presents ideas in ways that have this purpose. At first many references make no sense. Over time, they fall into place within his cosmology as the elements necessary to link them in are revealed. And a person's ability to receive the teachings, to realize them for themselves, is determined by their own levels of discipline and integrity as well as by the ancestors.

In the instances I have observed, the content of the knowledge is often definite, though also malleable. However, as Apter indicates, the content of the knowledge matters independently from the importance of the practice of its development independent of, and in opposition to, the dominant ideologies of the society in which Black people are dominated.

This domain of esoteric, secret knowledge is not confined to Phil Cohran, though he is among the most important professors of it. New York bassist William Parker said:

Each culture has its own mystery music, played by certain specific musicians, and this music is not taught in schools. It's a sacred music which is not contrary to life. There is a Black mystery music, which we inappropriately call "jazz," an African mystery music, or Chinese, Indian, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian, Turkish, a Cuban mystery music, etc. The musicians that play this music generally don't leave their country. Because there is a mystery music for every culture in the world." (Pierrepont 2002, 121; Parker, William. 2004. *Sound Journal*. Vitry-sur-Seine: Sons d'hiver.)

Ari Brown, prominent Chicago saxophonist, has revealed deep knowledge in public at least once when I was in attendance. On February 7, 2014 Ari Brown felt it was appropriate to break down some deep knowledge for the crowd gathered to hear his band performing at the

House of Bing Chinese restaurant in the South Shore neighborhood of Chicago. He related music to the stars. There are twelve notes in the scale, and there are twelve signs in the zodiac. So each note has a corresponding sign. You start with the black notes, since the Black people were the first people. You start on C#. The first constellation in the Zodiac is Aries. So C# corresponds to Aries, E flat corresponds to Taurus. F# Gemini. G# Cancer. B flat Leo. Then it goes to C Virgo. D Libra. E Scorpio. F Sagittarius. G Capricorn. A Aquarius. B Pisces.

It is notable that Ari Brown revealed this knowledge when the audience included not one single white person. I have seen Ari Brown perform no fewer than 50 times; this was the first time I heard him reveal this sort of knowledge; and it was a rare occasion on which there were no white people present. So, similarly to what Apter is describing, there is a level of deep knowledge of cosmology, an interpretation of signs, and a relationship between music and the cosmos (also language) that underlies some of the Chicago music. But this knowledge is preserved as deep, secret Black knowledge.

Here is some of the text of Joseph Jarman's "Illistrum"

[~3:25] ... Odwalla came through the people of the sun
To warn them of the vanished legions
And to teach them how they may increase their bounty
Through the practice of the drum and silent gong
As taught by Odwalla

[4:00] Was realized
On seeing one another
They transformed themselves into one the hand, the other the left big toe of Kwazupum
The one who creates the door through the passage on the hill of Kwambuka
Their purpose(?)
To guide the people of the sun as they sought knowledge of the door through the grey haze.

[4:37] When Syka saw the sound of the silent gong
Syka sought to transform itself into the right hand of Odwalla
Where Kobysu rested while waiting to move into the right big toe of Kwazupum
The one who creates the door through the passage on the hill of Kwambuka.

Their purpose(?)
To guide of the people of the sun as they seek to lead
Seek to lead
Seek to lead
Seek to lead ...

(The Art Ensemble of Chicago. 1974. "Illistrum" in *Fanfare for the Warriors*. Atlantic LP SD 1651)

The record notes designate this as a "myth poem," and it is clearly cosmological in nature.

The fact that they are "seek[ing] to lead" is important. Phil Cohran talks about leadership as the purpose of Black people in America – that we should look past the suffering and atrocity of the past, our history and present, because those conditions are preparing us for leadership in the future, and our time is now just arriving. Furthermore, it's important that they are the people of the sun, which is a designation for Black people. Black people are characterized by their dark skin, the result of high amounts of melanin, which is brought on by a reaction to sunlight.¹¹ I therefore believe that this is an origin myth for the liberation of Black people, to find the way out (the door) of the grey haze of their condition.

I find a resemblance to the cosmology of Ogotomêli that Griaule reported, which is summarized succinctly by van Beek (1991, 140 – the work to which Apter (2005) is responding): Amma creates the earth out of clay, with an ant's nest for a sexual organ, but which is guarded by a termite hill clitoris. The termite hill prevents Amma from intercourse with the earth, so he excises it, and it becomes a fox ... In both Ogotomêli's and Jarman's stories, there are beings

¹¹ Afrocentric discourse has developed concerning the importance of melanin in biological systems, resulting in the annual Melanin Conferences, organized by Carol Barnes, and which Phil Cohran attended. For an introduction this melanin theory, see Barnes 2001

transformed into and out of body parts – the idea of large features being body parts of some enormous being.

The fact that accepted science does not corroborate the ideas they express does not deter these Black thinkers. On the contrary, that is sometimes an asset. That's what makes it a secret, and furthermore it leads white folks to exclude themselves. It can therefore remain a domain of sacred Black knowledge. Its truth inheres partly in the efficacy with which it performs its function, as a domain of secret knowledge.

One of the things that's interesting about this resonance between Dogon and Yoruba deep secret knowledge and that which Cohran reveals is that some of what he teaches concerns the Dogons themselves. Dogon cosmology is a subject of Afrocentric thought, and Cohran's cosmology, because the Dogon people are another example of ancient people who had higher knowledge of the stars than Western scholars would have expected.

But the content of his exegesis is often less important than its spirit, his method, or his paradigm, which says that if it's what *they* do, you should challenge it by thinking contrary to it with as much vigor as possible and that the truths you find through that method is the key to finding our way into a Great Black future. As a musician, Cohran comes to the attention, and gains the respect, of a great number of people. And he uses that position to communicate his knowledge, to inhabit the role of the elder, the scholar, the teacher, and sometimes the wizard. However, the things he says are not secrets in the same sense as what Apter found guarded. His knowledge is available to those who are willing to work to learn it. When he withholds certain things, he says it's not because it's secret and one must be initiated, but because if you don't work to gain the knowledge, you won't be able to hold it; it won't have meaning like it does for him. In fact, much of the time, the knowledge is not what's key, but an understanding of its

significance. For example, everybody knows that there are seven colors in the rainbow. But few of us understand the significance of that: the natural world drawing our attention to the importance of the number seven, which is also the number of days in a week, and the number of tones in a diatonic scale, the number of continents on Earth, and the number that represents neutral PH (neither acid nor base). The enlightened mind would give special attention to this and develop an understanding of the relationship between those seemingly disparate phenomena.

Thinking about Marcel Griaule, and Andrew Apter for that matter, vis-à-vis the Chicago jazz musicians I've been listening to: on one hand many African Diasporic people are descendants of West Africa that share common cultural roots with the contemporary Yoruba and Dogon and other nearby societies. On the other hand, on the South Side of Chicago we have people who have lived in the shadow of the University of Chicago, whose icy stone walls may have kept out their dark and dangerous bodies, but which could scarcely contain the anthropological knowledge resounding from within. These musicians have been dealing with the idea that language is full of secrets, and dealing with ideas using secret language. The language of secrets, the mysteries, the esoteric knowledge that contradicts and challenges the orthodoxy – what everyone knows – is the subject of their discussions. We see this in the writings of Sun Ra from the 1950s that Corbett published. (Sun Ra 2006) The works are largely etymological, dissecting words to find their hidden, secret meaning.¹² Like much of Sun Ra's work, these etymologies may seem strange or even silly to those ignorant of where they come from and what

¹² Is it related to the University of Chicago, where in the 1940s, they harnessed the power of the atom for the first time? Hiding within normal matter is inconceivable amounts of energy?

they're designed to do. However, they suggest that Sun Ra may have had a sophisticated understanding of Kemetic *medu netr* (A.K.A. ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics) as he applied methods of the interpretation of hieroglyphic representations of Kemetic myth to the language in his own world. Geraldine Pinch (2004) explains a little of how hieroglyphics determined myths in Kemet:

Words spelled out with phonetic signs usually end with a non-phonetic sign which clarifies the meaning of a word of the category it belongs in. For example, the eye hieroglyph ... is placed at the end of words for sight or blindness. Such signs are known as determinatives or classifiers. When the eye hieroglyph is found at the beginning of a word, it may be writing the sound *ir* from *irt*, the Egyptian word for an eye. The *t* on the end makes *irt* a female noun, so when the eye of the creator is personified it becomes a goddess rather than a god. Word-play could generate myths. As the word for people sounded like the word for tears, humanity was said to be born from the tears of the eye goddess. (Pinch 2004, 23)

Compare these passages from Sun Ra's Polemical Broadsheets and Streetcorner Leaflets (2006)

The "HOLY SMOKE" IS "THE NIGGER IN THE WOODPILE" WHICH THE BEING CALLED JESUS SET ON FIRE, THAT IS WHY NEGROES ARE NICKNAMED SMOKE ... SMOKEY JO IS SMOKEY IO ... SYMBOLICAL OF THE IO LOS TRIBES OF ISRAEL ... IO IS JO.....(Sun Ra 2006, 78)

Sun Ra used etymology and also rhyming and even visual similarity to create complex word equation myths:

WEASEL IS SLICK ... SLICK IS SLY ... SLY IS SNEAKY ... SNEAKY IS PETE ... SNEAKYPETE ... PETE IS PETER ... PETER DENIED JESUS

PETER PAN **PETER RABBIT ...

PETER RABBIT LAID EASTER EGGS

RAGGED AS PETE ... RIGHTEOUS PETE

NEGROES CALL EACH OTHER RIGHTEOUS ... THAT'S RIGHTEOUS, MAN ...

GOD SAID.. "Your righteousness is AS FILTHY RAGS ...

RAGGED PETE IS RIGHTEOUS PETE ... RIGHTEOUS PETE IS CLOTHED IN FILTHY RAGS

SAY ..PETE YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AS FILTHY RAGS

FOR PETE'S SAKE ... WAKE UP!! FOR PETE'S SAKE ... WAKE UP!! ...

YOU'VE GOT ON YOUR RIGHTEOUS RAGS

THE RABBIT LAID AN EGG. HE LAID AN EGG. HE MADE A MISTAKE ...

PETER RABBIT LAID AN EGG ... IT'S AN EASTER, EGG...

THE EASTER EGG IS A MISTAKE ... FOR PETE'S SAKE IS FOR YOUR OWN SAKE ...

YOU'VE GOT YOUR HABITS ON ... TAKE THEM OFF.

YOUR HABITS ARE "TRADITIONS": YOU NEED TO CHANGE YOUR HABITS ...
(Sun Ra 2006, 68)

Ari Brown echoes the idea that there's something about this music that's more than entertainment. There's something in this music that represents the cosmos; Phil Cohran would say which represents the eternal; David Boykin might say which represents the fundamental vibration of all things. But music that exceeds the listener's capacity to incorporate it into their every-day experience (resisting Thirdness) is a representation of spiritual thought, deep secret knowledge, which exceeds orthodoxy, including accepted science and philosophy. In some ways, perhaps, it represents the indestructible will to have something and be something that *they* don't have and will never be able to strip from *Us*. That will is the soul. And when the idea of soul is too close to the Christian tradition, which is *His*, it is *Our* eternity.

Jazz music, as we learned from Brent Turner, has a spiritual background. (Turner 2009) But Turner also uncovers the historical events that caused it to go underground along with the persecution of voodoo. Secrecy can be seen as an original element of the antecedents to jazz. There is the evident meaning, and then again the secret meaning of the music. The music has the power to resurrect the ancestors. And it has the power to entertain people who will pay. With that latter purpose, the power to communicate with the ancestors remains hidden. It allows us to ask, what is the purpose of music? The purposes of the music I have heard were to achieve a meditative, trance state, which is perceived as a beneficial and natural state, similar to a state of

meditation, and also variously related to the states of trance and possession by which West African, Caribbean, and Brazilian people have communed with their ancestors. Another purpose is to represent an ancient, African state of consciousness, embodying harmony and balance with nature. Another purpose is to summon benevolent spirits and to drive away malevolent ones. Recently, Ernest Dawkins re-affirmed that this was the purpose of playing “little instruments.” He told the audience “bad spirits don’t like these” (at Jennifer Norback Fine Art, fundraiser, 2/28/2014).

One of the purposes of the music is the creation and maintenance of a Black spiritual domain. I believe the number of musicians who practice Black music as a form of esoteric African knowledge is considerable, yet an orientation to a spiritual practice of music leads some to exclude themselves from the entertainment and recording industries, and therefore they are much less visible. Trumpeter Ben Lamar Gay helped me to understand the music as self-love music. He told me that this is the music we make, and we have to love it to love ourselves. In this way and others, many see it as a healing music, against the forces that continually teach us to hate ourselves. Its healing capacity is discussed fervently among the MB collective, as well as at David Boykin’s Sonic Healing Ministries. One of the levels of meaning operating in this music is its secret meaning – its esoteric meaning, which is only hinted at in language at public performances, but which nonetheless underlies many of the performances. Avreeayl Ra plays this way. He evokes the ancestors. David Boykin plays this way, talking about the vibration of all things. Phil Cohran has this idea in his music. I think Nicole Mitchell used to play this way; now she’s moved away from Chicago, her spiritual orientation has become less overt. Therefore I do think, as Phil Cohran says, that there’s something especially spiritual about this place – Chicago.

I am prohibited from divulging most of what I learned from Phil Cohran, not so much because the knowledge is secret, but because its specific purpose would not be served by my doing so in the written form, and I was given the knowledge on condition that it be used only for the advancement of the people. The written form can be co-opted by the forces of the opposition, who could use the knowledge against the people. The oral form is superior and safer because it requires an interpersonal relationship, a physical presence, and it permits a sort of initiation into the knowledge so that holders of it would not reveal too much to the uninitiated. Timbre and esoteric deep knowledge are domains which elude capture by dominant structures of thought. I say dominant not only to mean prevailing, but to refer to structures of thought designed to dominate – structures of thought and language that assert power. They are thus the domains where ideologies of resistance to white supremacy can take refuge. Black thought and Black expression come to reside in these domains in order to elude capture by the rationalities that power white domination over Others, rationalities that grew from slavery into more recent forms of exploitation and social control which, while less formalized, are scarcely less visible.

Sun Ra Tribute Concert 2008

On August 16, 2008, The Jazz Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs presented “A Tribute to Sun Ra” “conceived, composed and directed by Kelan Phil Cohran” at the Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park, a large concert venue in the center of downtown Chicago which among other things hosts the main acts of the Chicago Jazz Festival. The Kelan Rainbow Ensemble was comprised of 14 instrumentalists, 9 dancers, 9 vocalists, the 9-member Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, and the 8-member Spiritual Journey Ensemble (percussion and dance) for a total of 49 performers. The instrumentalists were mostly men, except a pedal harpist and two violists. The vocalists were all women except one man. The dancers were all women, except that one of the saxophonists, Rahpre Newberry, performed a dance. The core

performers were dressed all in white, which represented a spiritual purpose. I was not able to attend this performance, but I read several accounts of it, saw several video clips of it, and Phil Cohran gave me a video of the entirety of the final rehearsal during which the entire program was performed.

The performance began with a long-tone on C. The long-tone is fundamental to Phil Cohran's practice and teaching, and all the musicians who've studied with him, including his sons who form the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, speak of Cohran's emphasis on the playing of long tones. (see Atlas film 2013) During the long-tone, the harps entered, playing his fast-plucking harp technique.

Then the choir entered singing in harmony, and the first piece began. "Eternal Fire" was in $\frac{3}{4}$. The strength of this piece was in the vocal harmony and in the lyrics. The lyrics were in three verses, the first verse repeated once at the end to make a fourth. Here is the first (and last) verse:

There's a fire in my soul from long ago,
there's a fire in my soul from long ago.
We have all that we need, in our blood and our seed
There is a fire in my soul from long ago.

Each verse had this AABA structure. Upon the start of the fourth verse, the drums, bass, guitar and harps entered and played a groove on the tonic chord, over which two vocalists (Senebelle Gill and Aquilla Sadalla) sang improvised solos, using some of the words from the verses ("there's a fire in my soul" particularly). A dancer in red performed an improvised solo dance with ribbons. The lyrics to "Eternal Fire" reference the eternal nature of the spirit and the idea that Africans are the most ancient people, the original people, the origin of culture and humanity. It means that We should look to the eternal within Us, which can never be created or destroyed, and that we don't need anything more than what we have, if only we learn how to see

it and use it. “We have all that we need, in our blood and our seed.” It also includes an implicit exhortation to stop seeking help, satisfaction, meaning, guidance, justice, or anything else from the white man. It resonates with the idea that it had been misguided for Negroes to seek approval or acceptance by whites to begin with. We don’t need anything from them. We have all that we need if we only realize it. Part of the problem is that some of Us keep running to him to solve our problems; waiting for him to give us justice, pleading for him to treat us right when we should be focused on what we can do for ourselves.

The second piece was another composition by Cohran entitled “Zincali” after the 1841 book about the Gypsies of Spain by George Borrow. (Borrow 1908) In “Zincali,” Cohran composed counterpoint according to the theories of Zarlino, whom Cohran extolls. The piece is written in 7/4 time. In Cohran’s teachings, the number seven is an important number because it represents divinity. This was one of two pieces in this performance in a seven beat meter (the other in 7/8). In a different recording of this piece done with the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, the tempo of the piece is at 77bpm. The piece is built around a 7-note ostinato in the bass. There is a seven-measure melodic line, which is repeated three times. It was presented with Cohran’s French horn and the two violas in unison. The second and third time through, the violas diverged from the horn, adding counterpoint. Then Cohran improvised using his Frankiphone and then on the violin uke. (See *Kelan Phil Cohran and the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble* CD; a transcription excerpt of the studio recording is included in appendix.)

After Hypnotic Brass Ensemble performed, Cohran’s group played his composition “Anubis.” It opened with a free drum solo and then became a 7/8 time blues progression in F. As the horn section played the melody, seven dancers processed onto the stage holding and variously displaying large disks and performing a coordinated dance in a circle while stepping in time to

the 7/8 rhythm. The melody was composed of an ascending then descending run on a minor scale on each of the chords I – I – IV – I – V – IV – I. Phil soloed on trumpet before a tenor saxophone, piano, and guitar each took one chorus each. Finally, the horns repeated the melody once before the end.

Next a Reverend led the chorus in responsorial singing. He lined the hymn “I Love the Lord; He Heard My Cry.” This presentation was particularly interesting because lined-out hymnody is a quintessential form of participatory music. The fact that the leader sings the words and the chorus repeats them enables even people unfamiliar with the texts to sing. It is by its nature heterophonic. In repeating the words, the chorus did not sing in unison, and it did not emulate the melody initiated by the leader. In contrast to familiar arranged spiritual presentations in the tradition of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, in which a participatory form of music is adapted for a presentational setting, here the idiom remained unaltered in its heterophony.

The band played “The African Look,” a Phil Cohran composition from the 1960s in 6/8 time with strong polyrhythmic drumming (traps, congas, djembe). The lyrics are as follows:

The African look is wholesome
The African look is beautiful
The African look is all things good to you
Get yourself a robe and golden braided slippers too.

The piece featured a strong djembe solo with Spiritual Journey Ensemble women playing *shekere* and cowbell while performing a coordinated dance. The song ended with the voices *a cappella* repeating “get yourself a robe and golden braided slippers too” in a round style (one half of the chorus beginning the phrase just as the other half was ending it; back and forth).

After a rendition of one of Sun Ra’s compositions, they performed a composition by Phil Cohran in 11/4. Again, the seven dancers performed a circle dance; like a ring shout from the

Georgia Sea Islands, they moved in a counter-clockwise direction. The Spiritual Journey (percussion) ensemble joined in playing *shekeres* and bells, but they did not dance.

They next performed the South African national anthem “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika.” After an introduction by the horns, the entire ensemble sang the song *a capella*, in harmony with some call and response in sections. At the end of the song Phil shouted “Amandla!” (which means power in Zulu and Xhosa) and everybody else responded “Awethu!” (which means “to us”).¹³ I am unaware of specific connections Phil Cohran has with South Africa. I believe the inclusion of this piece in the program was simply because the title means God bless Africa and because it’s a powerful composition.

Finally, they performed Cohran’s song “The Minstrel” from his *On the Beach* album featuring the composer improvising on Frankiphone. The dancing on this piece was collective, but improvised. After the highly structured program, this was a release, and everybody seemed to have a great deal of fun just dancing naturally to a highly danceable tune in common time.

The lyrics to the song are:

Gotta get myself away from here
Gotta get myself away from here
Gotta get myself away from here
I got to make it right away.

Overall, the presentation stood out for its integration of diverse forms and for features characteristic of Cohran’s oeuvre. Of all of Cohran’s pieces presented, only one was in common time, and it was played at the very end. The other pieces were in 3/4, 7/8, 7/4, 11/4, and 6/8.

¹³ When Cohran was honored by the City of Chicago on October 31, 2013, he gave a concert with Hypnotic Brass and a smaller ensemble at the Chicago Cultural Center, during which the group performed this piece as well.

The more exotic meters – 7/4, 7/8, and 11/4 – were anchored by ostinatos in the rhythm section. Everything about the program emphasizes an Afrocentric Otherness: the singing of the South African National Anthem. The pieces’ titles – “Anubis,” “The Minstrel,” “The African Look” – are all references to Afrocentric themes. The prevalence of the numbers seven and nine are indications of Phil’s numerological orientation, similar to what Lewis observed about the formational meeting and the naming of the AACM in this explanation by Muhal Richard Abrams:

[t]he AACM, as with most African American organizations, did not eschew the spiritual as part of its organizational philosophy. ‘What initials would that give?’ Abrams asked. ‘AACM, That would put a Nine on us, initial-wise.’ ... ‘Numerology,’ Abrams [said]. ‘A’ represents ‘1,’ ‘M’ represents ‘4,’ ‘C’ represents ‘3,’ M and C would be 7, and the two ‘A’s are one apiece. That’s nine ... So we’ll be referred to as the A.A.C.M. most of the time, which would signify that this is a Number Nine organization,’ Abrams observed. (Lewis 2008, 110)

The name of his ensemble, the Kelan Rainbow Ensemble is significant. To Cohran, rainbows are strong signs of the Divine Order, and in fact one of the first things he ever said to me was about the rainbow and its significance. The beginning of the piece with a long tone is significant. The long tone is an enlightened practice which is a sort of yogic meditation to focus the mind and bring it together with the body. It also serves to tune up the band to each other, to the cosmos. “Anubis” is the Greek name for the Kemetic god Anpu, the jackal-headed god of the afterlife.

Though it was a Tribute to Sun Ra, there was only one Sun Ra composition performed. While Cohran is often introduced as a collaborator with Sun Ra, until recently it was rarer that his own work was recognized and extolled in its own right. This show was a robust representation of the rich tapestry of practices and ideas Cohran has developed over the past half-century, which has had a strong influence on many Chicago musicians.

One of those musicians is saxophonist David Boykin, who has also done considerable research into the life, work, and philosophy of Sun Ra. I will now turn to a discussion of David Boykin as the second of the three spirit musicians I will discuss.

David Boykin

One of the more influential spirit musicians working in Chicago right now is saxophonist and multi-instrumentalist David Boykin. Once a member of the AACM, Boykin left the organization, but he works with some of the AACM musicians regularly. He was a fixture in flautist Nicole Mitchell's Black Earth Ensemble for many years. Boykin's own groups include his Microcosmic Sound Orchestra and the David Boykin Expanse. The former is his all improvised group, and the latter plays his compositions. Boykin is the founder and leader of the spiritual free [jazz] jam session called the Sonic Healing Ministries that recently resided at the University of Chicago's Washington Park Arts Incubator.

Boykin was one of the first musicians I heard playing this music. I first encountered him in 2004 or '05 at the Café Mestizo in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, where he, Nicole Mitchell, and drummer Mike Reed ran a weekly jam session on Sundays. They performed in many different venues throughout the city, some of which are now gone. Boykin seems to be a pioneer in opening new spaces for the music. He runs one of the after-fests during the Chicago Jazz Festival, called the Hearer Festival.

David's music focuses on the control of sound, on timbre. He has been developing a mastery over extended saxophone techniques. On the title track from *Ultra Sheen* he raps:

Exhibit
expressing extreme, deemed explicit
by prosthetically hip jazz professors who prohibit.

Bends, scoops,
and circular breathe loops

and other extended saxophone techniques I execute

with ease.

Split tones, kill bones below degrees,

while metaphors and similes annihilate my enemies. (Boykin 2010)

Boykin uses long, uninterrupted spans of sound by virtue of circular breathing. (see “Elonice” on Boykin CD 2001) In 2015, I undertook a course of study with Boykin on saxophone technique. I found that, while his study with Phil Cohran was brief, Boykin’s approach was greatly influenced by Cohran.

Biography

David Boykin listened mainly to hip-hop as he was growing up – KRS One, Tribe Called Quest, et al. (Interview with Mitchell, 2014) He was introduced to jazz by his college roommate, who came back from break with some jazz records. He advocates a merger of jazz and hip-hop, but he has said that in most attempts to fuse the two, both of those genres suffer. (*ibid.*) The jazz, which is usually very rhythmically complex – the swing by the drummer is constantly in flux – is “diluted” and simplified to match what they think of as a hip-hop beat, which is commonly produced by a drum machine or a loop. And the hip-hop suffers because, for some reason, when they start including jazz music and sampling it, the rappers feel they have to rap about jazz, which most of them don’t know too much about. Instead of rapping about consciousness, or gansterism, or just general “braggadocio,” they start talking about jazz without much authority. (interview with Mitchell, 2014) Boykin’s *Ultrasheen* album was an effort to overcome those shortcomings. (Boykin 2010)

Boykin had studied engineering at Illinois Institute of Technology and economics at Florida A&M, before finishing his economics degree in Chicago at Northeastern Illinois University. (Boykin interview with Mitchell, 2014) Other education included a master’s degree, for which David wrote a thesis Sun Ra entitled “Spaceman or Raceman.” His research confirmed

that Sun Ra was listening to the Noble Drew Ali, Elijah Muhammad and others in Washington Park.

Boykin talks about his relationship with Walter Williams, who wrote *The Historical Origins of Christianity* (1998) and who founded the Ancient Egyptian Museum and Institute on the South Side of Chicago. It was Walter Williams who told Boykin about Sun Ra, and he referred Boykin to Jimmy Ellis for lessons. (interview with Mitchell, 2014) Williams also gave Boykin the opportunity to produce his first show at the Ancient Egyptian Musician and Institute. David had taken some private lessons in college, but he emphasizes the importance of lessons with Phil Cohran who taught him long tones and how to breathe properly. (Boykin Interview with Toale; Boykin 2014)

Initially Boykin was interested in Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong, Cannonball Adderley, Art Blakey, John Coltrane, et al., but soon he discovered Fred Anderson's Velvet Lounge. After that, he gravitated more towards the freer, more experimental, more original. "The music [at the Velvet] had a whole other level of urgency to it that I didn't find at the other clubs like in Chicago. Then I was seeing that that seemed to be the case with most other musicians who were playing original music." (Boykin interview with Toale)

Boykin was forced to create his own events when other opportunities did not present themselves, because unlike drummers or bass players, he said, saxophonists don't get called for gigs. (interview with Mitchell, 2014) It's the horn player's responsibility to put that together. Some of his early gigs were at Geri's Palm Tavern, with Nicole Mitchell, bassist Karl E.H. Siegfried, with drummer Isaiah Spencer, bassist Josh Abrahams, and keyboardist Jim Baker around 2001 when he had a regular Wednesday set there. (interview with Mitchell, 2014)

David Boykin has also been an educator, teaching at the DuSable Leadership Academy for four years, and also a leader of an important jam session/participatory spiritual music gathering called the Sonic Healing Ministries.

Sonic Healing

I've always had that perspective about music and my religion and spirituality. I play the music with that type of pursuit, as opposed to any economic pursuit or as a hobby ... I see playing creative music as a spiritual discipline. I believe in learning your instrument, mastering your instrument, and then trying to achieve this expression. That's what this is about. (Hall 2010, quoting David Boykin)

David Boykin developed the Sonic Healing Ministries in order to carve out a space for free creation of music, from which he found himself being pulled away in favor of composed music. While his compositional endeavors were central to his creative vision, he felt himself losing the tendency to slip into a trance state of mind, which he says was more possible before he even learned how to play and before he started thinking so hard about what he was playing. (Boykin interview with Toale)

He talks about just picking up the instrument, not knowing how to play, and how it put him into a trance state. (Boykin interview with Toale) But learning to play, getting better and better, and getting more and more sophisticated in his playing meant that he was always doing more thinking. But, when it's time to perform, time to improvise, you need to stop thinking, and just open yourself up, and let things happen, and be creative. Over the years, he felt that happening less and less because he was playing mostly composed music. So the idea of the Sonic Healing Ministries, "was so that you can just listen and respond" and get back to the trance space. "I just grew tired of the business of jazz music, and music period: soliciting gigs, self-promotion and marketing, and all of that. It's a lot to do, for seemingly very little reward. The real reward has always been achieving that transcendental state of mind." (Boykin interview with Toale) So he decided to divorce the music from the idea of making money at music. (*ibid.*)

I participated in the Sonic Healing Ministries nearly every week of David Boykin's residency at the Washington Park Arts Incubator from January to August of 2014. Boykin's Sonic Healing Ministries presents the idea that music is a healing force:

Everything in existence on the physical plane, all energy/matter, vibrates at a particular frequency that defines it.

Love is the force that harmonizes this myriad of frequencies and binds everything together into a functioning whole.

Creative music, spiritual jazz, free jazz, avant-garde jazz, experimental music, improvised music, etc., is a sonic representation of this love. It is a unified expression and celebration of each individuated experience of creation simultaneously. It is a reverberation of the macrocosmic sound. (Boykin, Sonic Healing Ministries website)

When it was housed at the Incubator, Sonic Healing Ministries attracted a considerable, if variable, number of people. In addition to some regulars who had attended its previous location in Boykin's home, there were new congregants who learned about it through the University of Chicago's outreach network. There were other artists who had come to work or attend other events at the Incubator. There were students from the University of Chicago, a short ride away across on the new bike lane through Washington Park. And happily there were quite a few curious passers-by who were just attracted by the music and wandered in; David kept the door open in good weather to encourage this.

The number of people that would come to the Sonic Healing Ministries at the Incubator required more of a formal procedure than at his home: First his group, the Microcosmic Sound Orchestra, would play for 45 minutes or so. Boykin nearly always played the drum set, only occasionally picking up his soprano saxophone or bass clarinet (never his tenor). Dan Godston played trumpet, but he would also bring a number of unusual percussion instruments such as a tongue drum, a closed frame drum with ball bearings in it, a children's xylophone, a bell tree – an array that one might expect to find at an AACM performance, though Godston is not a

member of the AACM. Many of his exotic instruments came from Andy's Music Store in Chicago. Eliel Sherman Storey would play saxophone – tenor or soprano, rarely alto and rarely also bass clarinet. Alex Wing played guitar, keyboards, sometimes drums, occasionally Fender bass.

Sometimes at the beginning of a Sonic Healing Ministries session, Boykin would recite this incantation, which he also included as “Imbroglia – Part II” on *Ultra Sheen*.

Everything in existence vibrates, and thus gives off sound. Silence is representative of the ultimate death – non-existence. Free jazz, creative music, avant-garde jazz, improvised music – it's all an attempt to reflect the divine harmony of the coexistence of the different frequencies of each phenomenon of creation. (Boykin 2010)

Dan Godston has a fondness for peppering silence with an array of almost percussive sound effects on his trumpet. Many sessions would begin this way, except that he was frequently a little late because he came from furthest away. Sometimes David would start by playing the drums, often SOUND drumming – introducing the timbres of the different instruments in his drum kit either without any rhythmic regularity, or with a kind of rhythmic ambiguity. Though David did usually eventually establish some kind of regular groove, it was often characterized by this ambiguity, or softness, so that the drum patterns were always emphatically human, never too precise or mechanical. That quality of relaxation of structure permeated all of this free music.

Eliel Sherman Storey, on the other hand, always started off playing highly structured melodic phrases, constructed on his enormous lexicon of scalar patterns which he practices continually, and which he could often be heard practicing in the hallway before the session began. Eliel was always very encouraging and helpful to me as a horn player, and as our friendship developed, he showed me more and more of his library of exercises, scales and theoretical books. So with Eliel, freedom was expressed more in terms of linking either

seemingly disparate, or surprisingly related scales arpeggios, or such gestures. These passages would once in a while grow in intensity to the point where he would seem to burst from his characteristic restraint and ascend into an ecstatic exploration of timbre, altissimo bending, and other forms of excitations that to me represented the spirit of the climax of an African Diasporic worship practice.

Dan Godston is a trumpeter and also a percussionist, highly adept at tuned idiophones such as the glockenspiel. One of the highlights of the series I remember from that year was Godston's creating satisfying patterns on Boykin's *balafon* that formed the basis for a strong groove. Godston's approach was often a highly energetic exploration of timbres. He would strike any surface of the space with his mallets – chair, doors, the cabinet of the organ, the floor – in addition to his many percussion instruments, even those not designed to be struck with mallets. He also often explored the qualities of different objects used as mutes for his trumpet; he seemed to enjoy the sound it made when he pressed his bell to the skin of the small djembe I would bring. Though Godston tended towards the atonal, he would instantly and effortlessly find his way around the tonal grooves that were usually established at one or two points during a set.

Alex Wing is technically impressive on many instruments and has a great theoretical knowledge and a diversity of musical experience. A guitarist first, he has mastered the upright bass and plays a mean set of trap drums. Wing would often explore different electric effects he could elicit from his electric guitar. He also played the electric organ, often switching back and forth with guitar/bass while sitting on the organ bench. Wing was capable of playing with great subtlety, embarking on extended meditations on sound and patterns to provide an unusual timbral

fundament. He would also readily provide the accompaniment for a rousing blues section when the proceedings suggested one.

These four musicians would improvise freely for 45 minutes or so, sometimes much longer. And then there would be a break. People would talk; David would go around and tell people when it would be their turn to play. For some reason, he usually asked me to play the first guest set, so I would assemble my flute and saxophone, strike my djembe just to hear the sound of it in the room. The regular guest musicians included me, Angel Elmore on organ and clarinet, Lou Ciccotelli on trap drums, George Larson on electric guitar. Ciccotelli is an accomplished drummer who in 2014 returned from an extended period (probably more than 10 years, maybe even 20) living and playing in the UK. Larson, also an interesting visual artist (painter), played slide electric guitar very loudly with marked disregard for any distinct pitches. Angel Elmore will be described in detail later, but she had more of a Western classical sensibility on clarinet, and a self-consciously Sun Ra-ian approach to the organ.

There were two kinds of sets during this period: sets with George, and sets without. The George sets were all-out, blowing-the-roof-off, maximum-sound cathartic experiences. They were a good antidote to certain overly polite music that sometimes can bore. But on the other hand, it did become difficult to hear myself, and the ringing in my ears for some time after the session was worrisome. I started off playing flute only, but because of the volume of George's guitar, I got my alto saxophone repaired just to be able to hear myself play at these sessions. The only rule at Sonic Healing was that there were no rules. Boykin did once throw a drum stick at some disrespectful rogues who had come in to pilfer food. But besides that, everyone was welcome. And everyone got a chance to play whatever they felt should be played. The point of the session was that everyone can and should play music, and that music is something divine or

spiritual. This participatory ethos was one of the key inspirations for the Participatory Music Coalition.

The sets without George tended to be much quieter and given to more subtle interaction between the musicians, although inevitably the loudness of the drum kit would still eventually overwhelm my flute, and I would be forced into the highest register in order to hear myself before switching to saxophone. Lou would usually play an energetic, shifting array of patterns in 4/4 with excellent time and great interest. Playing with Lou offered a chance to explore a much more rhythmic interaction than with any other musician that came to the session. If Lou or another drummer did not come, David would usually keep playing the drums. While playing with David's drums, I realized that his drums were as melodic or even more so than they were rhythmic. And so I would strain to hear the frequencies of his drums (which was challenging) and derive a tonal palate or tonal center or a melodic framework from them. Many times I related to them more like a bass line than a drum rhythm.

Angel Elmore had more formal training than other musicians that came to Sonic Healing, and she was one of the few female instrumentalists to play at the session. When I played with her, among other things, we would often find ourselves improvising some counterpoint between my flute or sax and her clarinet, so that the music often took on a Baroque quality. When she played organ, though, it was a very different experience. She would generally oscillate between suggesting an accompanying role for the keyboard and bursting into unstructured explosions of sound, recalling Sun Ra, sometimes playing with the back of her hands. On other occasions Elmore would circumambulate her keyboard, playing it from behind to explore the effects that would have, then returning to the front.

Besides these most frequent guests, there was quite a number of others who only came a few times. Notable Chicago musicians such as trumpeter Ben Lamar Gay, pianist/composer Charles Joseph Smith, and drummer/percussionist Sura Ramses Dupart came a few times. Julia Price came from the East Coast to perform in the First Mondays jazz series at the Incubator, which David Boykin was programming, and she participated in Sonic Healing while she was in town. There were a few sessions when Dr. C. Siddha Webber brought his group the Ancestral Resurrection Ensemble to play a set of his compositions, which while a striking departure in their higher degree of structure, were similarly oriented towards Afrocentric spirituality (as their name indicates).

The sessions were usually filmed and broadcast through the Internet via a website called UStream.tv. They were available online to see for some time afterwards. Guest guitarist George Larson usually made recordings of the sets he played on, and he would kindly distribute them to the other people he'd played with. From him I learned how much people appreciate that, so I began doing it myself in other performances.

I would characterize my best experiences of making music at the Sonic Healing Ministries as exercises in *free association*. And very much like free association, the unbridled, hopefully non-rational succession of ideas revealed something previously unknown, or that would not have been otherwise revealed. They would begin (I guess) with someone playing the first thing that came into his head: for instance, a sweet saxophone phrase, or a series of trumpet chirps, or a deep rolling continuous drum sound by mallets, accented by gong-ish mallet-struck cymbals. And then the next person would feel inspired, or obligated, or otherwise moved to add something, and he would add something in response to that first something. The approach was “What can I do to make that sound better” *NOT* “What can I do that will sound better than that.”

It worked out best when each player added only what he thought would sound good, not that he felt obligated to make some sound but didn't know what. But what was interesting was the chain of meaning. One sound or phrase or quality would make someone think of a response to it. Sometimes there would be 45 minutes or more of continuous music, and other times it would be broken into segments when a few players reached a silent consensus to be silent at once. Very often, the sets or movements would begin with a lot of space. One player makes a statement. Silence. Another responds to it. Silence. A third adds something else, or elaborates on it. But if the third adds to it at the same time as the first is trying to respond to the second again, an unexpected interaction may happen. Which changes the character. It may change everybody's mind, and people may play according to that new quality.

From the initial, introductory phrases, certain qualities of a SOUND would gradually (or quickly) develop. The drums would have a certain rhythm, tempo, or otherwise a texture or approach or other quality to them, which would be integrated with or contrasted to the melodic phrases of the saxophone, or the harshness of an electronic timbre from the guitar or the organ. Sometimes a groove would develop: the drums would lay down a rhythm, often in 4/4 but not always, and someone would play a repeating pattern in lieu of a bass groove (we didn't usually have a bass) which would establish a key or at least would suggest a tonal center. Different musicians could sometimes interpret the tonal center or the meter differently, which far from being undesirable, made the music much more interesting, as long as it didn't weaken everybody's confidence in the groove. If the groove was strong enough, it would support even the most energetic of ecstatic saxophonic screaming or guitar wailing. Sometimes all of the musicians that came would all come together into an extemporaneous polyrhythmic groove-chorus. I think those were the times when everybody left feeling the best.

All music should leave you in a higher state of being than before you experienced it ... It is our intention, as artists, that our audience feels better when they experience creative music. This belief is communicated above everything else, so we make our music for that specific purpose. (Hall 2010, quoting David Boykin)

Angel Elmore

“You know we like on some underground railroad to the cosmos.” – Angel Elmore

Angel Elmore is a multi-instrumentalist – clarinet, keyboards, percussion – and vocalist as well as a visual artist, producer and arts organizer living and working on the South Side of Chicago. I first met her at David Boykin’s Sonic Healing Ministries. I have watched her develop as an artist at close quarters as we collaborated on the establishment of the Participatory Music Coalition, frequently practicing together in her South Side home studio. During this time, she has also been collaborating separately with other active Chicago musicians such as Boykin, Avreeayl Ra, Renee Baker, Dr. Siddha Webber, Dan Godston, et al. At the time I met her, she had recently become a full-time artist/musician.

Elmore’s background is unique. Her family, as do most Black families in Chicago, comes from the South. Her roots are in Georgia and Alabama, some in Virginia, though she did a lot of growing up in Kentucky (which is where she tells most people she’s “from”). However, she also spent a significant part of her childhood in Kenya. She is well-versed in nearly all the esoteric Afrocentric spiritual discourses I have encountered, from the Kemetic tradition to the Hebrews to Yoruba religion, and especially the Black Christian church. She is a voracious student of both scripture and scholarship and also very keen to engage in philosophical and theological debate. Elmore was steeped in Afrocentric spiritual music from an early age. AACM saxophonist Vandy Harris was a friend of her family, and her father exposed her to the music of Sun Ra with whom, though he has left the planet, she says she communicates regularly.

Elmore incorporates ideas from numerous religious and spiritual traditions into a multivariate spiritual practice which is absolutely central to all of her artistic endeavors. Her visual artwork seems to emanate from her work constructing an ever-evolving altar to her ancestors and other spirits. She speaks frequently about her grandfather who was a great preacher, pastoring four churches at the same time, one after another every Sunday for decades. She has told me that she is driven by a calling to ministry.

Elmore's music career began in earnest in 2012, when she emerged as an avant-garde hip-hop producer/rapper in a duo with DeLundon. Her early work meant to "push the boundaries of sound by experimenting with, opera, jazz, and hip-hop." After that duo split, she then served as the Ministress of Music (something like a musical director) for the MB Collective just before I met her. She says she was first encouraged to play free [jazz] by David Boykin, and he gave her some of her first performance opportunities in this milieu in 2013 or 2014.

Angel is a now vocal advocate of free music. Even though she is trained in classical music and voice from her study of music at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and touring with the college choir, she is fierce in defending free improvisation against all detractors. Even in the face of such giants as Ernest Dawkins, she insists upon playing free improvised music in every musical setting, even when it is not entirely welcome. Her conviction comes partly from her belief that improvisation is a gateway to the ancestors – that they guide us in our music making, and therefore, too much planning and structure interferes with our ability to interpret their directions. This is an attitude that relates to David Boykin's philosophy, though as I noted he has other projects that recognize the value of planning and structure too.

Angel Elmore is a significant artist partly because of her commitment to continuing and developing the tradition of experimental/creative Black music on the South Side of Chicago.

She draws upon the work of Sun Ra, the musicians of AACM, and other, currently working elders and mid-career artists to develop new compositions. But her experiences in the world of hip-hop and electronic music enable her to bridge the divide which has characterized a generation gap for too long.

Like David Boykin, Angel Elmore's personal musical journey was routed through hip-hop on the way to jazz. The conventions of jazz are not sacred or dear to her; what's important is the spirit with which her musical forebears created their music, which she finds common to all Great Black Music (or she says Black American Music.¹⁴)

Her perspective as a female improviser in an overwhelmingly male jazz field is also significant. She told me:

Well here's the dynamic at play black music seems to be primarily a male dominated domain. Unless the woman is in a place where she is a sexual icon or motherly you know all those stereotypes she can't just play music, and she is often not considered as musically proficient then a lot of men. Why is it that Dizzy Gillespie is so well known, yet Mary Lou Williams who had a big influence on him doesn't get as much props? Or even John Coltrane is probably one of the greatest jazz artists of all time, but his wife Alice was equally an amazing and revolutionary musician. And she is recognized as such but not at the level of her husband. Also certain instruments seem to have some gender bias. Like it's ok for a women to play piano, or flute, oboe, clarinet. But when a women is playing bass, saxophone, tuba, all of a sudden there is a subtle questionability about her musical skills and a disdain because there's an assumption that she is being more male. So even with this music its ok if I know who Nina Simone, Billie Holiday is, but if I know Archie Shepp, or Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, or other more avant-garde musicians, people are shocked. I also feel like that pushes me. I am inwardly always rebelling against assumptions. It's definitely something that drives me and keeps me interested in many things. It's a subtle thing that I'm just used to. I mean every day without fail a man is really shocked at my musical knowledge ... And actually working in the [music] store shows me that men are definitely more interested in the pursuit of music then

¹⁴ I personally think she gravitates to this label because it creates the (emphatic) acronym BAM(!) which resonates with her personality

women. Most women who shop in the store are looking for popular music. Even the old popular music. Its rare that I meet a women who is really into this music. Which I must say pushes me to really take even more interest in all music. (pers. comm.)

Elmore often gives praise to the divine feminine, which is conspicuously absent in many current Abrahamic religious institutions. Her approach to Black American Music is ultimately nurturing and encouraging, accepting and healing, but also fiercely protective. I think these qualities are not coincidental, but rather are an integration of her concept of the divine feminine. Therefore she stands in contrast (sometimes in opposition) to decades-old patriarchal structures of jazz such that the “battle” between players and having “gotten my ass kicked” at a jam session have emerged as potent tropes. In the spaces Elmore creates, criticism is all but forbidden. All creative contributions are welcomed and treated as divine.

One of Elmore’s most important qualities is the ability to gather a community of people to create Afrocentric spiritual arts. Her home-studio became a beacon for young creative Black folks in all traditions and media to come and share their gifts. Her hospitality and encouragement were a systematic affirmation that helped young Black artists see their value even though they remained outside of established arts-institutions and unrecognized by critical voices. She created a space where all Black thought is welcome, and where it is safe to worship ancestors through music, poetry, dance, art, ritual or any other way.

Elmore’s small humble carriage house stood in contrast to the grandeur of Theaster Gates’ spaces just a block or so away, which while well-appointed and well-endowed, hardly saw more creative activity. Angel’s space was far less formal and more spiritual and was one of the most important factors in the development of the Participatory Music Coalition.

Participation

I will interrupt the discussion of Angel Elmore in order to briefly introduce the concept of participatory music, which features prominently in two of Elmore’s projects: The MB Collective

and the Participatory Music Coalition. Angel is a great musician in a sense different from that which people commonly think about musical greatness. I have learned that an important aspect in the creation, production, and sustainability of this music is the ability of individuals to bring musicians together. Angel has a unique ability to attract and bring together creative and free-thinking, radical Black people. And because of her skill at this, a unique community of creators began to coalesce in the summer of 2014. Among other musicians with this ability, I think of Fred Anderson as well, who was not only a great performer, but also beloved because of his organizational ability to bring musicians together a creative community. The Participatory Music Coalition was greatly enabled by this ability to encourage participation by a very diverse group of Black people with widely divergent creative purposes and backgrounds. First, participatory music:

One of the ways that hearing jazz on the South Side of Chicago is distinctive from listening in New York or on the North Side is that here, there is more interaction between the audience and the performers. The audience will cheer the performers on while they play. They will shout “blow your horn!” as a saxophonist takes a breath in the middle of his solo. They will say “sing it girl!” while someone is singing. The doing of this such that it is not disruptive, as is the perpetual talking and the reactive berating of the hosts at the Green Mill on the North Side – but rather so that it contributes and heightens the music – magnifies the depth of cultural rootedness of the music in the Black community. It must share a similar ethos with responsorial singing, and responsorial aspects in religious services.

Thomas Turino (2000) discusses the dichotomy between participatory and presentational music. The essence of the difference is that “[p]articipatory music is defined and shaped stylistically by the fundamental goal of inviting the fullest participation possible, and the success

of an occasion is judged primarily by the amount of participation realized,” whereas presentational music is presented to an audience that is kept separate from performers using physical distance, amplification of the sound, and an emphasis on virtuosity [and recording]. (48)

Presentational music is oriented towards specialists, so it can be more difficult to perform and more complicated and difficult to remember. Generally, participatory music is decidedly inclusive, whereas presentational music is to some extent exclusive in this way. Turino shows that the presentational type articulates with capitalism by objectifying the art object and separating the artist from the audience to make ticket and recording sales possible. (Turino 2000) Participatory music often performs a social cohesive function, uniting a group of people in a common action (the performance of the music/dance) and also allows for the collective input of experience.

Turino discusses participatory music traditions in Zimbabwe. He explains that good participatory music needs to include different levels of engagement, specialization and difficulty so as to include people of all skill levels. It is therefore not simplistic music, but rather it contains some simple parts, some medium level, and some advanced parts. (Turino 2000, 52-3)

Among the Shona people, there are the *mbira* and drums at the highest level of difficulty, *hosho* (shaker) parts and average singing and dancing are on the medium level, and simpler singing, clapping and easy dance moves on the easiest level. (Turino 2000, 53)

It would be inaccurate to view this type of organization as consisting of ‘star’ performers ... providing the ‘real’ music with the contributions of others being more peripheral ... Rather, several of my Shona music teachers explained that the situation was actually the other way around. The specialists have the *responsibility* of consistently providing well-played ground parts which are necessary to inspire fuller participation and simultaneous variations in the elaboration parts ... [I]f the best *mbira* players gave their most skilled performance at a ceremony but no one joined in, the performance would be deemed a failure. (Turino 2000, 53; emphasis original)

Turino discusses how, since the 1950s, Shona participatory music has been inserted into, and in being so inserted has been transformed by, presentational and recorded forms in accordance with burgeoning capitalist cosmopolitanism in Zimbabwe. (Turino 2000) As part of an effort to construct a national identity out of a mish mash of different ethnicities within the (arbitrary) geographic boundaries created by Europeans, the Black African cosmopolitan elites in Zimbabwe undertook to revive and incorporate traditional culture, especially music and dance. They did so in order to represent the nation as a whole, not only to itself, but also in an international community. (Turino 2000, 321) But doing this involved certain feats of essentialism. Indigenous musical practices might be part of much larger ceremonies/rituals, part of a multi-day holiday, might involve processions, or might continue all night long, invoking the ancestors. Many of those elements won't fit on a stage, or they would offend cosmopolitan sensibilities, so they would be altered to suit this new situation. For instance, Turino discusses the National Dance Company, which was established under the guidance of foreign experts – one British and one African American. The presentational performances of national culture presented by the National Dance Company featured a great deal of variety, whereas a participatory performance would only have had one or two genres. (324) The rural people tended to reject the National Dance Company's productions as inauthentic. But then the Ministry of Culture in Zimbabwe began travelling into the rural areas teaching the rural people how to turn their indigenous music into nationally and internationally saleable products – how to presentationalize participatory music. (330) Many local musicians began to switch to more presentational productions in order to get paid, with hopes of striking it rich like Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Presentational music therefore threatens participatory traditions.

Chicago organic intellectual and theorist of hip-hop Lord Cashus D among numerous other commentators has observed the same sort of process with regard to hip-hop, perhaps not with reference to nationalism but instead with reference to capitalism. Hip-hop started as young, powerless, poor people expressing themselves and their condition, expressing their frustration. They represented their experience, which was not shown on television, in literature, or any other way. By way of illustration, D recited one of the earliest classic hip-hop recordings:

A child is born with no state of mind
Blind to the ways of mankind
God is smiling on you but he's frowning too
Because only God knows what you'll go through
You'll grow in the ghetto living second-rate
And your eyes will sing a song called deep hate
The places you play and where you stay
Looks like one great big alleyway
You'll admire all the number-book takers
Thugs, pimps and pushers and the big money-makers
Driving big cars, spending twenties and tens
And you'll wanna grow up to be just like them, huh
Smugglers, scramblers, burglars, gamblers
Pickpocket peddlers, even panhandlers
You say "I'm cool, huh, I'm no fool"
But then you wind up dropping outta high school
Now you're unemployed, all null and void
Walking round like you're Pretty Boy Floyd
Turned stick-up kid, but look what you done did
Got sent up for a eight-year bid
Now your manhood is took and you're a Maytag
Spend the next two years as a undercover fag
Being used and abused to serve like hell
Til one day, you was found hung dead in the cell
It was plain to see that your life was lost
You was cold and your body swung back and forth
But now your eyes sing the sad, sad song
Of how you lived so fast and died so young
(Grandmaster Flash and Melle Mel. 1982. "The Message," excerpt recited by Lord Cashus D in a public lecture, May 16, 2015 at Culture Connection 360, Chicago, IL.)

D testified that this was an accurate depiction of ghetto life at that time and the predicament facing young Black men, spoken in their own terms. D's argument was that early

hip-hop artists did not make these statements in order to earn money. But once they started selling records, their goal became to sell records. They stopped rapping about their reality and started talking about partying, drinking, sex and pleasure, consumption of luxury goods. When they talk about poverty and violence, they do it in a sensationalized way that seems exotic and dangerously exciting to the safe and coddled suburban children who were a large part of their audience. Lord Cashus D observed instances in which corporations viciously co-opted hip-hop culture in order to profit by the corruption of Black youth. As a most egregious example, he discussed the “Kool Mixx” concert series that targeted tobacco sales at Black youth through hip-hop, for which Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company was successfully sued by the attorney generals of New York and Illinois. (Lord Cashus D, public lecture, May 16, 2015 at Culture Connection 360, Chicago, IL) And so capitalism, like the nationalist movement controlled by cosmopolitan elites in Zimbabwe, tends to undermine the social and community function of the music as an organ for social commentary that represents local experience, replacing it with other agendas often contrary to those it supplants.

Participatory music has declined everywhere as people have instead participated in global modernity through consumption of recordings of presentational music. African American music has a deep root in participatory forms practiced in the African American churches. Protest songs were participatory. When civil rights activists were singing “We shall overcome” and “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around,” they were coordinating people. The goal was to include and unify people, to bring them together to focus them on a single issue or task. One can also think of work songs as participatory, as the point of them is to coordinate action.

The participatory aspect of jazz is multidimensional. First, there is its relationship with African American spiritual and religious practices, which are far more participatory and

interactive, even in Christianity, than European American forms. Jazz itself has a participatory character: the musician participates in the invention of the music, not just the “composer.” In the collective improvisation of the early New Orleans style, all the musicians would interject their own musical ideas, so that it had a participatory character. In the jam session, the public is invited to participate, though within a presentational milieu. I have seen this presentational milieu break down into a more participatory form, where members of the audience begin to participate by interjecting calls and shouts, singing, clapping, or dancing. In those cases, the audience becomes an integral part of the soundscape.

Charles Keil (1987) begins his article by positing a class he calls “thought-composed Western and other civilized musics” characterized by harmonic devices. This formulation of music is outrageously Eurocentric in that it suggests that some music is, like Western music, civilized and composed with thought, while other kinds are somehow without thought and uncivilized. He then, however, theorizes *participatory discrepancies* in which, he argues, is to be found the “power of music.” (275) He offers this euphoric statement: “Participation is the opposite of alienation from nature, from society, from the body, from labor, and is therefore worth holding onto wherever we can still find some of it.” (Keil 1987, 276) Discrepancies are how he conceptualizes the elusive quality of “swing.” (Keil 1966) For Keil this quality, seen as the quintessence not only of jazz but also of other kinds of feel-good rhythmic music like polka, is that which eludes rhythmic notation and which also provides the “interest” in jazz, thereby involving the listener in the music and thus serving a function similar to the “syntactic or structural aspects ... [that] can create tensions, set up melodic/harmonic relationships that defer resolutions and gratifications ... [in] *civilized* musical systems.” (Keil 1987, 275 *emphasis added*) The Eurocentric tenor of Keil’s language underscores the revelation in musicology that

there is value in music other than Western art music. It reveals the pallid inadequacy of a musicology that can only account for the tiny fragment of the human musical universe represented by Western art music with which it has been obsessed. But it indicates a startled recognition of different aesthetic values, ones which involve a sense of participation and a participatory goal. The human drive to create music, that music be a sound of joy, or a sound of community, a sound of coming together – the imperative that the joy and togetherness and community resound – in most cases [happily] exceeds the desire for perfection of frequency ratios in harmony, the desire for precision in temporal regularity, the desire for purity or consistency in timbre. And that drive is common to all humans, which is why all humans have music. And that commonality allows non-specialists access to the music – a feeling that they can participate, a sense of identity with the music rather than a removed reverence for idealized qualities. As Western music scholarship attempts to incorporate jazz and/or other vernacular music, the Western musical drive for perfection is flummoxed by the integral and characteristic imperfection of more participatory vernacular forms. Jazz is a wonderful case in which those imperfections cannot be used as an excuse to dismiss the music as simplistic because of its complexity. But that fact has led to a frustration among music scholars trying to perfect a theory of the imperfect. Despite the tenacity of Eurocentric musical hierarchy evident in his writing, Keil has valuably identified an element of participation in vernacular music that necessarily eludes rational theorization.

When we speak of participatory music and presentational forms of music, sometimes we're talking about a spectrum. One could argue that the audience, by their very presence in the room, applauding at the appropriate time, is participating even in a Western European art music concert. And there are usually specialists, or at least more skilled people who are counted on to

lead a participatory performance – the choir in a church, or at least the minister. Therefore it is beneficial to think of these as ends of a spectrum, or qualities that music has. An element of participation in many forms of African Diasporic music is one of their distinctive features. The much-discussed call and response patterns are the most vivid example. Those patterns are present not only in American work songs and lined hymnody, but in forms where they are less visible as well. In rap music there are commonly sections of a rapper’s rhyme where the other rappers involved will interject (“uh”, “yeah”, “alright”) and also segments when there will be a doubling of the lyrics.

The Afrocentric spiritual jazz tradition in Chicago illustrates this participatory ethos. Phil Cohran’s “Loud Mouth” was conceived to include audience participation in the form of responsorial singing and action. (Cohran LP 2011)

When we used to play, we’d always have somebody talking in the audience like he was in the show. So I wrote this song “Loud Mouth.” I would explain to my audience that there’s always somebody here who’s talking out of place and don’t have the manners to shut up. So we got this song that we’ll say the Loudmouth, and you point out who is like that. [laughs.] (Cohran interview 2014)

Similarly, Cohran’s more recent composition “Boon to a Loon” includes a series of claps and a final hand gesture that the audience joins in at the end of each verse.

For at least a decade, David Boykin has lowered barriers for entry into the music through his jam sessions and his Sonic Healing Ministries. Since one of the goals of this form of Black music is to coordinate people, bring them together, a participatory form of music would seem called for. The Sonic Healing Ministries sessions are entirely oriented towards the musicians, to allow the musicians to access trance states and spiritual domains. (David Boykin interview at the Dorchester Projects by Erin Toale)

I believe this form of community building is essential to the sustainability of the music. I saw other similar formations on the South Side, especially an event at House of Culture. Lord Cashus D and Queen Zenobia hosted an open mic at their venue, and it was entirely interactive, participatory, and community oriented. New emcees, experienced emcees, dancers, a flutist, and others got on the mic and started to flow. Lord Cashus D later delivered a fascinating presentation on the importance of hip-hop in the movement to raise Black consciousness and the tragedy of the corporate cooptation of hip-hop which he thinks has done more to damage the psyche of young Black men and women than any other force in recent decades. (Lord Cashus D, public lecture, May 16, 2015 at Culture Connection 360, Chicago, IL)

One topic that musicians speak about regularly is the rise in importance of educational institutions in jazz pedagogy and the concomitant decline of less formal, community-based knowledge transmission and/or big-band apprenticeship. What remains of those informal pathways can be found at the several jam sessions on the South Side and the way they maintain the participatory, community ethos independent of those institutions. Ernest Dawkins has an important jam session and also an educational program through his non-profit organization, the Live the Spirit Residency. David Boykin's Sonic Healing Ministries is actively bringing musicians together to play free music. Angel Elmore and I met at one of these sessions, and later we formed an organization for participatory music to work with this idea, called the Participatory Music Coalition.

The conditions that have fostered the music at issue have always been in a state of flux. In some ways, the state of flux must be central to its creation. African Diasporic cultures are characterized by bricolage of "Eastern Hemisphere" ways adapted to "Western Hemisphere" realities. One might well argue that the improvisatory nature of jazz is related to the heightened

propensity for adaptation to circumstances beyond African Diasporic people's control.

Permanence and stasis are not required – and perhaps could prevent – the sustainability of Black music and culture. Which is why the idea of jazz as “classical” is troublesome to many people who would rather see jazz continue to evolve than see it preserved. For many people, jazz is past, and while its structures and practices can be incorporated into new creations, its most wonderful sounds, images, texts and culture were inextricably bound to historical moments that cannot (and should not) be reproduced. For them, what's vital is a continuity with that past, by whatever name, which honors past creators for the benefit of the future but which draws upon their spirit for the creation of those sounds, images, texts and culture that are most needed in the present moment.

MB Collective and Participatory Music Coalition

Returning to Angel Elmore's work: In early 2014 I encountered the MB Collective, a group of young Black artists that present highly interactive and improvisational performance art events in which theatre, poetry, visual/installation art/design, music, and dance are seamlessly integrated. The group was affiliated with the South Side Community Art Center; their name references the Center's founder Margaret Burroughs. More than an explicitly interdisciplinary approach to art, the collective worked directly from African Diasporic performance traditions bound up in spiritual practices and rituals where boundaries between expressive mediums are not salient to begin with. Why would you have music without dance? How could you have instrumental music without vocals? What kind of music does *not* have God in it?

Their performances took root in African Diasporic Christian performance practices, but their subject matter often directly challenged Christian religious orthodoxy and institutions, and instead celebrated alternative spiritualities dealing with Kemetic thought (science/ philosophy/ spirituality/ cosmology), other African Diasporic spirituality such as Santería, Ifá, Vodun, Palo,

and Hoodoo, also Indian spirituality, herbalism, and a host of esoteric thought domains. Ritual was routinely foregrounded. Physical and psychic healing achieved through ritual spiritual practice, yoga, meditation, and herbs was advocated over the use of Western medicine. The group was led by Jenae' Nicole Taylor and Viktor le Ewing Givens (whose dynamic name I mentioned in Chapter One) and also included Sojourner Wright, Medina "Bashira" Perine, and Ministress of Music Angel Elmore.

I first met the members of the MB collective at David Boykin's Sonic Healing Ministries during his tenure as Artist in Residence at the Washington Park Arts Incubator. I later attended a riveting performance of theirs at Renee Baker's Create Fest in 2014. I rehearsed with the group in June of 2014. One of the ritual/rehearsals took place in a grassy abandoned lot at 56th and S. Indiana Avenue. In July I performed with them as they presented "Memoirs from the Pew" written by Viktor le Ewing Givens. The performance opened with drumming and percussion during an outdoor libation ritual. Then the group and audience processed to continued drumming into the interior of the performance/gallery space, which housed a salvaged 18th century Negro prayer shack. Saxophone and flute, clarinet and keyboards, and audience/actor-participants on hand drums, percussion and hand-clapping accompanied a play with interpretive dance. The play was about a young girl trying to reconcile her innocent understanding of the world with what she observed in church. Amidst oblivious other church-going characters and the preacher, her internal monologues questioned the blood-drinking ritual, the giving of money, and the ostentatious wealth and apparent hypocrisy of the cleric. As part of the performance, writer/director/dancer Viktor le Ewing Givens also cooked cornbread in an oven in the space and served it to represent the host. While most of the dialogue was written, much was improvised, and upon the end of the play, the actors, the musicians, and the entire audience ascended into an

orgiastic, clapping, stomping, shouting dance party that spilled out into the garden outside the space (where it had begun).

After that, the MB collective took a hiatus, as co-director Jenae Taylor left Chicago for Washington, DC. But the preparation for that show led to further collaboration between some of the members which focused more on music. Angel Elmore and I worked together on her concert/jam in honor of Alice Coltrane, which was co-programmed by vocalists Gira Dahnee and Stacey Erenberg as part of a women in jazz series called Siren Song Sessions at Elastic Arts on the North Side. After the warm reception that show received, I worked with Angel Elmore and Laurent Viktor Ewing Givens to establish a group we called the Participatory Music Coalition. Drummer/sculptor Sura Ramses Dupart, and vocalist/keyboardist Gira Dahnee soon joined. Our performances drew in other regular participants like vocalist Cher Jey Cuffie-Samateh and visual artist Joshua Robinson. The group performed spiritual Black music with reference to astronomy and to the jazz tradition. We integrated spiritual practices from various new world African Diasporic traditions. Angel pointed out, “PMC is not just built on music but its foundation was also built on ancestor veneration and other spiritual practices.” (pers. comm. December 2015) Each of us had an individual, yet interrelated construction of those spiritual practices. For me, it was my obligation to turn the knowledge I had gained through my study of Black music back into something for the community that it would not be something I extracted solely for the benefit of the academy.

Drummer/percussionist Sura Ramses Dupart is our resident elder, who has played jazz in Chicago and around the world for 50 years. Dupart is discussed by George Lewis as an early mentor of AACM drummer Reggie Nicolson. (Lewis 2008, 413) Bro. Sura eloquently expressed a fundamental tenet of our group: “Before Music was used for entertainment it was used as a

primary source of healing and a sublime connection to the divine. My strongest desire is to continue to perfect my art as well as my music and to become more of a spiritual link to god.” (Dupart website: <http://suradupart.wix.com/suradupart#!bio/c15yd>) Not coincidentally, Sura studied with Phil Cohran for a time. Once as we were playing together, Sura tried to help us understand the process of creating free, improvised music in terms of the celestial balance of the planets. He said, “they each have their own orbit, but they’re all in balance with each other. And that’s what we should strive for. That’s a kind of harmony too.”

The Afrocentric spiritual [jazz] musicians that we have in Chicago now are people like David Boykin, Siddha C. Webber, Eliel Sherman Storey, Sura Ramsey Dupart, Nuwki Nu. They are often less visible because they don’t play music (primarily) as entertainment. Music as a form of entertainment has been the predominant form of music, and it has been presentational. The idea of the Participatory Music Coalition is that more than entertainment, participatory music is that which is meant to coordinate people, to bring them together into a community, to orient them all to a common purpose. We recognize the conjunction of music, dance, art, spirituality, ritual, and ceremony as the headwaters of the many Great Black Music traditions that have flowed from the South Side of Chicago throughout the United States, and across the globe. Whereas the 20th century saw this vital organism gradually dismembered by the machineries of the recording and entertainment industries, our project is to foster its integrity and wholeness through celebration of South Side Chicago community creation.

There are other musicians who are known for their skills as entertainers, but who also approach music in an Afrocentric spiritual way. These include Robert “Baabe” Irving, III, Ari Brown, Dee Alexander, and Avreeayl Ra. Much of this current can be traced back to Phil

Cohran, and to Sun Ra. Light Henry Huff was an important figure in this music as well, though he left the planet many years before I was able to encounter him.

Many people see spirituality as something primitive, less relevant because of science, and completely bound up with religion. The aforementioned musicians are practitioners who have made great advances in *progressive spirituality* and music as a vehicle of *progressive spirituality*, which might otherwise be called esoteric thought. One of the most interesting things I learned from Phil Cohran is this idea that, contrary to what many people are doing, it's important not to blindly follow the traditions of our ancestors. It's important to develop those traditions and make them meaningful for people today.

Each meeting of the Participatory Music Coalition begins with the pouring of libations to our ancestors and calling their names. Typically this is accompanied by percussion (which I usually provide on a small djembe drum) and interspersed with long-tone vocals. The idea is to invite the ancestors into the space. We call upon the names of our own ancestors whose names we know, followed by the names of the musicians, writers, artists or others who have helped us or influenced us and/or who we would like to help us during the following session of music. They have often included Thelonious Monk, Sun Ra, Alice Coltrane, John Coltrane, Fred Anderson, Malachi Favors, Amiri Baraka, Roy Campbell, Evod Magek, Sam Rivers, Yusef Lateef, Mary Lou Williams, and sometimes Sergei Rachmaninoff, Bela Bartok, Michael Jackson and others. The offering is usually water poured either onto the earth or into a potted plant, although sometimes rum is offered. It is always accompanied with incense and candles. In settings where an audience is present, the audience is encouraged to participate in this ritual. An abbreviated version of the ritual is always performed at the end of each session to thank the spirits who have helped us, and to bid them goodnight.

Within the ritual frame, we create Black music as a sacred practice with the help of our ancestors and the spirits whom we have invited. We play a few standards, and a few original compositions, and some of the music is free improvisation. Even within structured settings, free improvisation is always featured somewhere within it. That is because our intention is to allow ourselves to be guided by the spirits.

One of the things I keep hearing from Black musicians is that the shift of the primary locus of transmission of jazz from the big bands and jam sessions to the universities has changed the character of the music. Some malign the fact that universities and conservatories are (nearly?) all run by white people, despite the fact that the instructors may be Black, so that a young Black person must propitiate white authority in order to gain access to the knowledge of his/her own culture. Another complaint is that while jazz has been gaining ground as a respected and respectable art music form since the 1950s, other forms of Black music have not, and therefore, jazz has been extracted from the field of Black music in which it arose and developed. So, whereas musicians of the past had been immersed not only in jazz but also in blues, cakewalks, R&B, jump blues, gospel, rock 'n' roll, doowop, soul music, and other facets of the panoply of African Diasporic musical performance, jazz musicians coming out of the schools are more restricted to "jazz" which has very rigid boundaries, and which is little-informed by other Black vernacular traditions.

Angel Elmore and I developed a repertoire. She did most of the composition of the pieces with some input from me. The compositions took the form of melodies with rudimentary harmonic structures, or simple harmonic melodic structures, which were very flexible. Usually, the most definition was in the form. For instance, in our co-written piece "Saturn," the drum opens with a rhythm in 7/4. Then Angel plays clarinet, and I play tenor saxophone on a certain

harmonized melody. We play a slow melodic pattern, then improvise around that melody for one chorus. Then Angel switches to keyboards, and I switch to flute, which effectively creates a short drum solo. Angel begins improvising on a certain chord, and I improvise along with her, until she gradually drifts away from the original chord, and then finally drops out to leave me to improvise on flute alone for a while. As I continue to improvise, she plays the original melody on clarinet behind my improvisation. Then she re-enters on keyboard and I leave her to solo for a while. Then I play the original melody behind her on saxophone, during which her improvisation becomes ecstatic, and just as I finish the melody I enter into ecstatic saxophone improvisation along with her. The drums become ecstatic, Angel switches to clarinet, and we continue until it's time to end. And then we (suddenly) pause, before playing the original slow, gentle melody again. Angel's other compositions are simpler, such as "Find Your Way," a short keyboard vamp and a melody fragment played for a minute or so, and then ecstatic free improvisation. Her keyboard drops out for a while, but when it comes back in, that's the cue to return to the melody/vamp for the ending. This piece succeeded in gathering participation from many people in dance and vocals.

My composition "Cassiopeia" on the other hand initially failed to attract participation because it had too complex chord changes and a rigid structure like a jazz standard. It wasn't until I relaxed the form, and allowed an extended jam on the intro/outro vamp (oscillating between two chords), that everybody else could get in and get down on it. A similar thing happened when we played Bobby Hutcherson's "Little B's Poem," which has some harmonic complexity. But the way it was performed by Doug and Jean Carn includes an introductory vamp, and after playing the song as it was written, the group frequently jams on that vamp, with an accompanying drum ensemble, very successfully. The Carns' version is also oriented towards

vocalists, has words (which are important since there are many more vocalists than instrumentalists in the community now) and was performed in a key that's easier to sing in than the original.

The Participatory Music Coalition presented a series of performances in October and November 2014 at Eliel Sherman Storey's Transition East studio at 2548 East 83rd Street. This should not be confused with Phil Cohran's space called Transitions East, which is no longer in existence. Eliel had been the bartender at Cohran's space, and he kept the name and the spirit going when he created his own place. The events attracted Black people of many age groups: parents with children under ten, no teens but several people in their twenties, in their thirties, a few I assumed to be in their forties or fifties, sixty and up into the elders range. We considered the creation of an intergenerational Black space to be a success.

On October 25, we invited people to arrive at 7 so that by 8 we would have an audience. At 6 we began to prepare the performance space – Viktor le Ewing Givens created an art installation to transform the space, using automatically changing light patterns so that it was constantly shifting. We used as many instruments as we could fit into my sedan. I had three saxophones, a flute, a bass guitar, a djembe drum, and a violin, and also Angel Elmore's keyboard, a xylophone and clarinet. Sura Ramses Dupart brought two conga drums along with assorted percussion instruments that included a conk shell. Eliel Sherman Storey has Don Moye's drum kit in his space, so Sura played that also. Lesy (pronounced Lee-See) came prepared to cook the food – collard greens, yams and cornbread. The group (save for Sura) painted our faces as we had seen the Art Ensemble of Chicago do. The people came when they were due, about an hour after we had set for the start time. We had set up our instruments in the space usually designated for the audience so that the guests could occupy the stage. In that way

we tried to emphasize the point that everyone was invited to participate. Among the people who came was filmmaker Eric Walker, so he participated by filming part of the performance. Also a vocalist/pianist, who joined in readily, and other variously talented Black people who sang both with the microphone and without it, played the xylophone and my djembe drum. A psychic healer was one of our guests, and she helped to facilitate the participation by inviting people to come to read poetry or simply to speak.



Figure 4 Three guest participants on stage improvising – (Left to right) Bashira Perine, Sis. Marie, and Cher Jey Cuffie-Samateh. Photo by Lesy AKA @thee Urban Rover.

I didn't notice many people dancing besides Viktor, but I was furthest from the open space most conducive to dancing. Taking a break from her culinary performance, Lesy delivered the following poem, written by L.V. Ewing Givens:

Blackness can be
Therefore it must
so we have to reconsider
what is possible
what was
and think of what could be
very possible
and real

and tangible

Nostalgia haunts
so, salt corners
of the room
water above the door
and motion move
stride towards
another arrangement

Move grandma's furniture around
Clean the windows
shampoo the carpets
and open the drawers
for there's no need
to throw away
what's needed

File through and see what's there
and what need be
and go after seek for all is available upon request
no begging.

Blue Black, Green Black
Purple indigo teal
Black has its undertones
exists, not in stale motion
stillborn? no.

Never, Blackness is alive
We must be
Diligent in keeping these things fresh
cleaning the closet
dusting out drawers
because there is in there
something of value
of great worth
worthy of recognition
and reconsideration
of how it will be used in the present

At this very moment
we must measure what we got
and use it in accordance

Linear lines leave most obvious paths

so swirl, dip, sway, seek, imagine, dream
believe
so that we might make new

for life demands it, we deserve it, our future rests in it
Ase.

This was an eloquent representation of the spirit of the group. We try to preserve a spirit of performance and play. We try to remember in order to extend Black culture. We do not categorize Black culture; we do not vivisect it. We strive towards its wholeness. Let writing be a form of music, and music be a form of sculpture, and sculpture be a form of poetry, and poetry be a form of painting, and painting be a form of dancing, and dancing be a form of oratory, and oratory be a form of cooking, and cooking be a form of ritual, and ritual be a form of music. The Participatory Music Coalition is about community. The Participatory Music Coalition is about recognizing and learning from elders, preserving knowledge for the babies – Ancient to the Future.

PMC has since held many more participatory music events. Often, our performances attract new people who then become regular members of the Coalition. Whereas we had rehearsed weekly at Angel Elmore's house, the group has outgrown this space, and so we hold weekly jams at Transition East or at the Hunter International Gallery at 3800 S. Michigan. Sometimes we hold sessions at Sacred Keepers Community Garden, which invites participation by passers-by, especially children.

Though impermanent, the spaces we inhabit thereby become designated as such, for that purpose, and through the exercise of free creative music the designation is reinforced. The structure (or non-) of the music allows for maximum freedom, which again is a loaded possibility for creation to happen. We are dedicated to the creation of these art forms on the South Side, that they continue to be an important part of that urban space. Furthermore we are ever cognizant

that they come out of the history of and are structured by that formation of urban space. And our presentations are directly descended from and are given meaning by a Sun-Raian Afrocentric conception of outer-space qua celestial domain of eternity = distant future = distant past. And so our chief goals which are related to the building of community are addressed through multiple valences of space. The essence of what we do is to create a space for people of any and every experience to come together in music making. We invite people who will dance, who will sing, who will read a poem or play a hand drum or bell, or who will bring their horn and add something new. The point is that we are not up on a stage because we're specialists, and everybody should pay quiet attention to us. We're in the space making music because we're human, and making music is what humans do. So if you're in the space, and you're human (even if you're not!) make some music, and increase your humanity with us.

Afrocentric Spiritual Jazz Lineage

These three Black spiritual musicians – Phil Cohran, David Boykin, and Angel Elmore – represent three different career levels, three different ages, and three levels of refinement of their musical and spiritual practice. Phil Cohran is a legendary master, a pioneer, and a veteran of a number of the most important movements in 20th century Black thought. David Boykin is in the middle of his career, having attained creative maturity and now achieving a level of centrality in the South Side music scene. Angel Elmore is beginning her musical career, though she is steeped in tradition through her family and colleagues.

The three musicians represent a continuity from some of the earliest developments of this Afrocentric spiritual [jazz] to its present. Some techniques and ideological underpinnings developed and taught by Phil Cohran have been passed directly from him to David Boykin, and from Boykin directly to Angel Elmore. All three musicians are dedicated to the development of

these principles of music, but they approach it with very different viewpoints. For Cohran, the spirit can be found in the order of things. His practice is to create disciplined and ordered contexts in which improvisation plays a part but within the structures that have been shown to him by his ancestors. David Boykin maintains a duality between highly structured compositions and entirely free music via his two main groups the Expanse and the Microcosmic Sound Orchestra respectively. And although she performs with the structure-oriented Expanse, Angel Elmore is a free musician. She creates compositions, but her ideological and spiritual commitment to free music means that they are structured so as to maximize freedom and inclusion.

One striking similarity between them is their ability to bring musicians together to form creative communities. They are figures to whom other musicians gravitate. David through his jam sessions has brought many musicians into the scene, myself included. His sessions were my first introduction into the music, and it was at his sessions that I began playing free music in earnest. Phil Cohran has been a teacher, mentor and scholar, spreading knowledge and guiding people into higher awareness for decades. Elmore's social skill brings together not only musicians but artists of seemingly every medium.

Phil Cohran has espoused the ideas of his friend Malcolm X and has never to my knowledge played with an integrated band. His work is filled with ideas, themes and references drawn from and representing constructions of Black identity, historicity, and spirituality. David Boykin, on the other hand, espouses many Afrocentric ideas, but although they are a detectable undercurrent, his public statements rarely carry Afrocentric spiritual messages. He plays regularly with white musicians. Angel Elmore is more explicit about both spirituality and Afrocentric ideas, and she is more intentional about the Black orientation of her artistic and

musical endeavors. This trajectory could be illustrative of a general decrescendo in the currency of Afrocentric ideas in the late 20th century and a re-assertion of Black consciousness in the early 21st Century.

4. Space: Four Dimensions and Sustaining a Black Creative Community

Space and place are key factors in the sustainability of Afrocentric spiritual (free) [jazz] music in Chicago. These (rhyming) terms are so intertwined with each other that they are often conflated. Space is a word with several valences that will be discussed below. Speaking of space and place, or space vs. place, I think of space to mean something more physical, while place belongs more to the psycho-social domain. For example, the arts are seen as key in an activity known as “placemaking,” which is to renovate unused, anonymous, or neglected urban or rural space, and turn it into a “place” where people will want to be, that people will talk about, with a name, perhaps branding, etc. The transformation of a thoroughfare into an arts corridor or an arts district is an ambition that has gained recent traction in governments and funding agencies.

The AACM, formed in 1965, comes out of a once-thriving jazz scene on the South Side of Chicago. George Lewis (2008) discusses the ways that organization of space concentrated and condensed the Black population in an area of Chicago that was exclusively Black and how this containment was a major factor in the way jazz developed in Chicago and in the exclusively Black composition and orientation of the AACM. Lewis draws an interesting distinction between New York and Chicago in the 1960s: “In contrast to the somewhat integrated Bohemia of 1950s and 1960s New York ... the atmosphere that nurtured the AACM was solidly rooted in a geographically and socially overdetermined black community.” (51) But the organization of space, and the reliance on neighbors and community in order to survive dismal living conditions, may have been what led to the spirit of cooperation on which the AACM was founded and which carried it forward through many years of uncertainty for Black creative improvised music. Though there were many similar Black musicians’ collectives formed in the 1960s – e.g. the Black Artist Guild (BAG) in St. Louis, the Jazz Composers Guild in New York, Union of God’s Musicians and Artists Association (UGMAA) in Los Angeles, the Detroit Creative Musicians’

Association – the AACM is the only one that has survived, and it is now in its 50th year of active existence, due largely to this cooperative spirit of community.¹⁵ (Porter 2002, 209) This conjunction of neighborhood, community, race, and migration history in this rigidly bounded space in Chicago shows how much the organization of space can affect diasporic populations and can powerfully shape the creation of their identity.

Of utmost importance to the continuity of Black music in Chicago is the South Side itself. The organization of urban space in Chicago is still characterized by durable segregation. The South Side of Chicago has become, by various exercises of power and choice, a place dominated by Black urban space. But as it has always been, the landscape that fostered so many of the important movements in Black thought of the 20th century is changing. Black people have been moving to the suburbs for decades. Many of the younger Black musicians, including some newer members of the AACM, grew up not on the South Side of Chicago but in suburbs which, while often mostly Black spaces themselves, are much less dense. A trend towards movement away from the South Side resulted in extensive vacancy of South Side, resulting in poverty and dysfunction where there had once been thriving neighborhoods.

A perception of terrifying violence and danger has characterized this large region of Chicago for decades. But organizations such as Theaster Gates' Rebuild Foundation, Ernest Dawkins' Live the Spirit Residency, the performance troupe the MB Collective, the Participatory Music Coalition, and many others regularly re-animate these spaces through institution-building and through spontaneous events in parks, community gardens, and even empty lots throughout

¹⁵ While UGMAA has ceased, Horace Tapscott's band The Pan Afrikan People's Arkestra is still active.

the South Side, invoking the spirits of the souls who once thrived there. Theaster Gates said, “The problem of Chicago is a problem of a spatial sickness that has evolved over the last forty or fifty years, like many cities. I feel like a doctor, a space doctor. Part of the practice is just about helping black neighborhoods become good neighborhoods.” (Gates 2010) Saxophonist, presenter, impresario and AACM chairman Ernest Dawkins presents the annual Englewood Jazz Festival in one of the Southside’s most underserved neighborhoods. But the other side of the coin is that gentrification is radically altering the landscape.

Besides the organization of urban space, performance spaces – venues and recurring events where the music takes place – are of central importance to the kinds of music that can be made and heard. Certain important South Side music institutions have closed recently – most notably the Apartment Lounge and the Velvet Lounge; also (earlier) Geri’s Palm Tavern and (more recently) the South Shore Jazz Festival. But others have opened: the 50 Yard Line Tuesday jam sessions on 75th Street, the Washington Park Arts Incubator, and the Promontory (venue) in Hyde Park. Though many people lament the changes that have happened recently, even before the 21st Century few if any jazz institutions in Chicago remained unchanged for decades on end. For example, Chicago’s oldest surviving jazz institution, Joe Seagal’s Jazz Showcase, has changed locations three times since the founding of New York’s Blue Note, and five times since the Village Vanguard started presenting exclusively jazz. (Jeffers 2011) But despite continuous flux, the music has always kept on going, growing, and evolving. Chicago musicians’ ability to adapt to a continually shifting environment, concomitant with their orientation towards improvisation and their commitment to freedom and self-determination, has allowed the music to overcome these challenges.

And besides urban space and performance spaces, we also talk about space within music in terms of freedom, or aesthetic/ conceptual/ emotive space – a loaded possibility for creation to happen – or as a sparseness or un-structured time to be inhabited by inspiration, by spirit. Many musicians speak about Miles Davis’ use of space within his solos. (e.g. Phil Cohran, pers. comm.) William Parker once said that he and other New York players learned a lot about the use of space within music performance from listening to the AACM players from Chicago, especially from their Delmark recordings. (performance/discussion at Ernest Dawkins’ home, 7/28/2012; [See e.g. Jarman LP 1968]; see “A House of Beauty” in Sun Ra box set (1966) 2010) William Parker talked about performances in New York at which for the first hour, his group would not make sound, but rather they silently read newspapers and other documents. More fundamentally, the structure of jazz as an improvisational music can be seen as such that provides space for individual creativity and freedom. And free [jazz], experimental music, creative improvised music, avant-garde jazz, Great Black Music, is (/are) often an expansion of that space, where only the most minimal structures are used to coordinate individual creativity.

Finally, in this present context, the mutual imbrication of space and place is enriched by the figure of Sun Ra, for whom space meant outer space, and whose most celebrated song is “Space is the Place,” after which is named an excellent scholarly text about him (Szwed 1997) and a film (*Sun Ra – Space is the Place* 1974) starring, written by and scored by Sun Ra and his Arkestra. The integration of cosmology, astrology, and astronomy with music has become a prominent feature of Afrocentric spiritual jazz in Chicago after Sun Ra, particularly by the sweeping influence of Phil Cohran. Sun Ra’s influence looms large over the Afrocentric spiritual jazz tradition in Chicago. Graham Lock points out Sun Ra’s references to ancient Egypt and outer space, which he relates to Christian origin mythology. (Lock 2004) I have learned that

outer space, which I would also call the celestial realm, is important not only because it represents the future in terms of space travel, but also because it is a reference to the Nile Valley Civilization (Kemet or ancient Egypt) for whom the celestial realm represented the afterlife, the eternal domain. A personal relationship with outer space represents an ancient past when Black people were free, the originators of humanity and civilization itself. And also, especially in the 1960s and 70s, it represented a distant future in which Black people will be free and agentic again, perhaps colonizing other planets (see *Sun Ra – Space is the Place* 1974) whereas the recent past and the immediately foreseeable future represented an anomalous historical moment in which Africans are subjugated by European power.

So we have four dimensions, or actually four scales, of *space* in play – 1. urban space, 2. performance spaces, 3. psycho-sonic musical space, and 4. outer space – which are each variously interwoven with place and bear critically on the sustainability of Afrocentric spiritual jazz in Chicago. Before discussing in the present moment important spaces and places that sustain this music in Chicago, I want briefly return to Place historically and disPlacement in terms of diaspora.

Migration and Urban Space: Motivation, Inspiration, Transportation

For diasporic populations, matters of space and place are crucial. The distinctness of diasporic people is by definition based on their relation to a certain place other than the place in which they are living. But commonly, diasporic people live in communities contained within bounded spaces – separate(d) from the rest of the space of that place, constituting a place within. That space is often organized in ways that both reflect and enforce the separateness of the people who inhabit those spaces (a separateness which is based on their relation to a different place altogether). It is often through these bounded spaces that the separateness of diasporic people is

most concretely experienced. The organization of that space is sometimes the means through which the diasporic people are especially subject to the power of the dominant society. For instance, government resources may be allocated according to urban geographic area, and funds for schools that serve the area in which a diasporic community is predominant may be allocated differently from other areas. Police may be targeted towards an area so as to target the diasporic people inhabiting that space. Thus, power and inequality are often mediated through space.

In the United States, space organized around racialized and ethnicized people has a long history. The social and legal concept of segregation has been historically important, not only to describe the separate accommodations that were designated for Negroes, especially in the South, but also to describe the way that urban space was set up to contain minority populations, very notably the Black people in Northern cities. Julia Sudbury suggests that in diaspora discourse, rather than Gilroy's orientation towards movement and flow – traversal of that oceanic space, the black Atlantic – it is profitable to think in terms of the *confinement* of people of the African Diaspora. (Sudbury 2004, 156) Chicago is a powerful example of the effects of confining urban space. (Drake, St. Clair and Horace R. Clayton. (1945) *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.)

The Great Migration refers to one or several waves of migration carrying many Negroes¹⁶ from the rural South to the urban North between 1910 and 1970 (different historians pick slightly different date ranges). Before this period, almost 90% of Negroes were rural Southerners, and after it the majority had become urban people. (White et al. 2005, 215) Negroes of this wave of

¹⁶ See discussion of terms in Chapter 1

migration came to Chicago primarily from areas of the South with some proximity to the Mississippi River. The *Chicago Defender*, the city's most important Black newspaper which had a large circulation in that part of the South, helped provide the inspiration, and the Illinois Central Railroad, which ran from New Orleans and Birmingham to Chicago, provided the transportation. (Wang 1988,101-02) The motivation was manifold. Negroes were frozen out of land ownership opportunities they were seeking in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Ohio and then decided to try an urban existence. (White et al. 2005, 217) George Lewis cites the "economic warfare" against Negroes in the South "including land seizures and various forms of terrorism." (Lewis 2008, 1) Some were fleeing debt created by the tenant farmer system in the South, in which sometimes Black farmers were paid only in currency issued by the landowner. For many different reasons they came, and they kept on coming to Chicago. Celebrated Chicago historian Timuel Black collected many stories from the mouths of these migrants. (Black 2003 and 2007).

Upon arrival, the Negroes were corralled into certain areas of the city's South Side that came to be known as Bronzeville after the prevalent skin tone of the people there. As more and more Negroes arrived in Chicago, they were squeezed more and more tightly into these bounded areas such that people were living on top of each other. (Lewis 2008, 4) The boundaries were enforced by restrictive covenants which prevented Negroes from finding housing outside of Bronzeville, and once the courts struck down the covenants, the boundaries were still enforced, though much less effectively, by violence from white gangs on the streets. (51) The development of the Black community in Chicago was very much influenced by the nature of the urban space it was forced to occupy. The overcrowding in Bronzeville had very negative consequences for health and safety, but it also built a strong sense of community. (6) Such legendary segregation is one of the ways that the exclusivity of Black identity and Black separateness was enforced in

Chicago, which probably goes a long way to explaining why Black Nationalism eventually had such a strong hold here. Black Nationalist ideas had a large impact in shaping Chicago's distinctive formulations of Blackness.

Black jazz music reflects this history of spatial boundedness. The birth of jazz has been associated with a particular neighborhood of New Orleans called Storyville, which was that city's infamous red light district full of entertainment venues. Although early jazz was played in many parts of New Orleans, Storyville was a designated space where morally unsanctionable activities were allowed – contained there so that they would not pervade more respectable areas of the city – and featured a high concentration of places of entertainment and a hotbed of the music. Some accounts describe the closing of Storyville as the event that precipitated the movement of musicians *en masse* out of New Orleans, many to Chicago, though it is claimed by others that the exodus of musicians from New Orleans began much earlier, implying that there must have been a different reason. (see Wang 1988, 101) Chicago had its own version of Storyville – an area southwest of Chicago's central business district – which was soon closed but then relocated to center around 22nd St. (now Cermak) and State Street on the South Side in an area called the Levee District. (Wang 1988) These are the areas to which the migrant musicians of Louis Armstrong's era gravitated to find work. Later on, the center of Black entertainment moved even further south into Bronzeville and became ensconced more permanently around 47th Street and South Park Way (now Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive).

Phil Cohran describes multiple waves of migration from the South to the North. His impression was that the West Side Black community was formed more recently than the South Side in a wave of migration in the 1950s. He remembered that West Side factories recruited

people from the South in order to circumvent organized labor unions, which had emerged among the Black workers on the South Side. (pers. comm.)

The organization of space which contained the Black community meant that the Black music scene and the white music scene were very much separate, and this separateness was reflected in separate Black and white musicians unions. (Lewis 2008, 22) The segregation continued well into the 1960s and beyond. While it was possible for white people to enter into the Black areas, it was unusual and discouraged because there was a common fear that Black neighborhoods were violent places, especially towards white people. (Lewis 2008 51-2). It was less possible for the Black people to penetrate the white North Side of the city because of the very real danger of racist injury. (*ibid.*)

Grossman opens the introduction of his book on the Great Migration by describing the experience of one migrant on the train as he crossed the Ohio River, the boundary between the South and the North. (Grossman 1989, 1) The crossing marked a new kind of citizenship, in which Black people had more freedom. In the story Grossman tells, it's symbolized by a Negro man entering into the whites' car and seeing it for the first time. Synecdochal of his entry into the North, he found that the car was a lot dirtier and smellier than he'd expected. (Grossman 1989, 1)

It would be a mistake to think that segregation has been imposed by white Chicagoans on Black Chicagoans entirely against their will. While segregation is recognized as a form of inequality, many of the Black musicians I spoke with say they like Chicago's existing segregation. On April 29, 2015, AACM member Mwata Bowden told the Black audience at the Washington Park Arts Incubator that when he was growing up, the South Side was a cohesive community, and that he never had any desire to leave or go to the places he wasn't welcome

anyway. Similarly, on September 19, 2013, Ernest Dawkins in a panel discussion about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., discussed at length the devastation to his South Side neighborhood, Englewood, that resulted from the successes of the Civil Rights Movement and the end of *de jure* segregation in Chicago. Dawkins argued that it meant the end of the cohesiveness Bowden would later discuss, in which all socio-economic strata of Black people lived together and had a self-contained economy and culture. A similar ambivalence towards the Civil Rights Movement was expressed by then-AACM Chairman Khari B. in his poetry as part of the jazz suite commemorating Dr. King later on that occasion. Ingrid Monson (2007) discusses the stridence with which the Black musicians union Local 208 resisted integration. Apparently, the white and Black unions had an arrangement that divided up Chicago's territory so that the Black union had plenty of work to spread amongst its members. For the Black musicians, integration meant becoming a minority – a loss of self-determination – and many simply left the union altogether. (Monson 2007, 53) Several Black musicians I work with told me they like the segregation in Chicago and prefer never to leave the South Side – that it's the inequality, not the separateness, that's a problem.

The early 20th Century saw the rise of Black-owned business on the South Side concomitant with the rise of a feeling of independence and autonomy for the Black urban people. (Reed 2011) Historian Christopher Robert Reed labels the 1920s the “Golden Decade of Black Business” and describes the advent of Black-owned business with specific attention to the banking and insurance enterprises by Negroes Robert S. Abbot, Jess Binga and Anthony Overton. (Reed 2011, 72) For Reed, it was upon the success of these endeavors that the realization of a dream of the Black Metropolis rested. The Great Migration created a Negro market when suddenly several hundred thousand Negroes had disposable income. (Drake and

Clayton 1945, 434) National businesses for Black hair care products and publications emerged and were centered in Chicago more than any other city. (Reed 2011, 76)

However, it's important not to forget that this decade was ushered in by the 1919 race riots in Chicago, which began when a Negro child was killed for swimming on the wrong side of a segregated beach. In 2013, Ernest Dawkins premiered a suite for his big band dedicated to the 1919. Real estate schemes had a large effect on the Black communities of the South Side of Chicago. George Lewis talks about some of the juridical mechanisms that held Black people in Bronzeville at the beginning of the Great Migration. (Lewis 2008, 3) There were restrictive covenants – agreements not to sell or rent to Black people written into property deeds. When these were struck down by the Supreme Court decision in *Shelley vs. Kraemer* in 1948, it helped many Black families escape the pressure cooker that had developed because of them. (Lewis 2008, 51) Phil Cohran also speaks of other ways that Black people were affected by predatory real estate practices known as contract selling. Since Black people couldn't get mortgages, they were lured into contracts that were supposed to convert to mortgages but never did. The contract terms were outrageous, and people could be evicted for missing a single payment without being able to recover any prior payments.

Black people in Chicago are of the African Diaspora, but they also have an intermediate homeland in the South. Black people in Chicago recognize and often discuss a Southern heritage and culture. The proximate homeland that they nearly all have in common is the South. On the other hand, as Black culture developed since the 1960s, the idea of Africa as homeland was increasingly promulgated and celebrated. The proximate migration that brought all these people to Chicago, and which concentrated them in restricted urban space where they formed new communities and ultimately new identities in response to their new space, was the migration

from the South. But the discursive homeland to which their diasporic identity was oriented has been Africa. It was primarily migrants to the North who established Black Nationalism, Afrocentricity, and an espousal of Africa as homeland. Many African Americans have traveled from Chicago to Africa to affirm their connection with it, and some have even moved there. In the 1960s, many musicians, including many members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, changed their names, many to African names, wore African clothes, learned African instruments in addition to the Western instruments they had already learned. So this Diasporic socio-ideological formation is complex in that the homeland that this diasporic people shared most immediately was the South, and less even the whole south, but rather areas proximate to the Mississippi River and the Illinois Central Railroad mostly – less so the Carolinas and Virginia. But their diasporic discursive formulation coalesces around Africa.

In early 21st Century Chicago, North Side and South Side are still code words for white and Black respectively because of the stark spatial segregation of Chicago's urban space. When I first visited Chicago on my own in 1998, I found myself on the platform of the redline train, which travels straight north and south. It was the evening rush hour, in the center of the Loop (the central business district). Two trains arrived at the same time, and something amazing happened. The mass of the crowded platform instantly divided Black from white. Every last one of the hundreds of Black bodies boarded the south-bound train; every last one of the hundreds of white bodies boarded the north bound train. Race was carved in the stone of Chicago's urban space. As late as 2015, the year of the 50th Anniversary of the AACM, I attended avant-garde jazz and experimental music events on the North Side of Chicago, and I was shocked to discover how many regular and devoted local patrons of these sonic arts had never heard of the AACM. The segregation of urban space is a reflection and a consequence of a very real separateness

(though far from absolute) between Black and white people in Chicago, even among jazz audiences.

Performance Space: Velvet Lounge

One important difference between Chicago and New York is the availability of space. Chicago is much less dense than New York, and space is not as precious and expensive. In New York the jazz avant-garde emerged in downtown Manhattan largely in what was called the loft scene. Michael Heller's work (2012) shed light on the way the music grew up largely because of the availability of essentially free space in vacant commercial buildings that were temporarily in limbo, without commercial tenants and threatened by Robert Moses's plans to build an expressway across lower Manhattan. As free space became less available, the scene had to shift to the Lower East Side and the East Village, where eventually the last venues were extinguished in the early 21st Century. The Stone is really the only remaining permanent home for that downtown aesthetic in Manhattan, though the Vision Festival and Arts for Art's programming throughout the year maintain a persistent, though sometimes sporadic presence largely in the Clemente Soto Velez Educational and Cultural Center at 107 Suffolk Street. Heller's work highlights the way that the availability of space was key to the rise of free jazz in New York. But importantly, these areas of New York were somewhat removed from large Black neighborhoods like Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant. Arts for Art and the Vision Festival still struggle to reach African American and Latino audiences, a task which grows more and more difficult as those communities retreat in the face of one of the country's most extreme examples of gentrification in the Lower East Side. This stands in contrast to the development of the AACM, which grew out of the solidly Black South Side of Chicago.

One of the most prominent features of Chicago's creative music community across latitude lines is its celebration and reverence for one particular venue, now gone, called the Velvet Lounge. The loss of this space for unfettered creativity is discussed by musicians in every corner of the city. Interestingly, a club named The Velvet Lounge now exists at its last location, 67 E. Cermak. But its ownership has changed, and its commitment to jazz, especially to free [jazz], has entirely shifted such that most of the musicians who had played there consider it gone. The loss of the Velvet Lounge was particularly significant because it was the only full-time jazz venue on the South Side. On the other hand, as is discussed below, its neighborhood had been engulfed by a wave of gentrification and whitening such that it was for many years less and less South qua Black. It's location was very near the historical site of a red light district called The Levee, centered around State and Cermak, which was closed around 1912. But this same location was the northern end of a long tract of massive public housing towers stretching for miles along South State Street, which have all recently been razed.

The Velvet Lounge was founded by tenor saxophonist Fred Anderson, who was an original member of the AACM. Anderson inherited Tips Lounge from its previous owner on February 4, 1982, after having worked there in the owner's absence for some time. (Reich 2009) Once he had taken ownership, Anderson started having jam sessions there every other week. The club was renamed the Velvet Lounge after Anderson's velvety saxophone sound. (Reich 2009) In 1993, he started coordinating with the Jazz Institute of Chicago to host the After-the-Festival Festival each night of the Chicago Jazz Festival. (Litweiler 2001) That led to weekly concerts on Friday and Saturday nights along with Sunday night jam sessions. (*ibid.*) Saxophonist Ari Brown started a weekly Thursday night set; then Jodie Christian started a Wednesday night set; so that the Velvet came to have live jazz five nights a week. (*ibid.*)

The club became the hub of local activity for the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Many younger musicians credit the space for launching their careers, especially because Fred Anderson was always keen to mentor younger musicians. The music became central to the club, but it was not organized in order to make money from the music. Anderson said that the musicians rarely made much money from their shows at the Velvet Lounge, but it gave them a place to develop, to “rehearse themselves.” And for him as a business owner, it increased the value of the bar to have live music there.

The club’s business came not only from patrons coming for the music in the evenings but also largely from daytime traffic. Anderson remembered early days when a fair amount of the bar’s weekday business came from pimps and prostitutes who worked in the area, but that later, when crack swept into the area, the economics of the bar shifted because crack users and crack dealers didn’t drink as much. By the time I was (almost) old enough to get into the Velvet, the weekday business was mostly construction workers. Many were building the townhouses that were reshaping the neighborhood and the kind of massive condo towers that would soon displace the Velvet. (Litweiler 2001) Anderson also rented the place out for various events such as film shoots and bridge club meetings. This diversity of income meant that Fred didn’t rely entirely on the music to draw crowds to keep the lights on. Instead, the musicians were free to explore whatever terrain they would. On the other hand, people would come from all over the world to

play and to listen there.



Figure 5 Scene at the Velvet Lounge circa 2005.



Figure 6 Velvet Lounge circa 2005. Water damage is visible in the upper left.

Gerald Majer's book (2005) does a good job describing what it was like to go to the Velvet Lounge. I will share just two of my experiences from the original location, which took place there about the same time the book was published. Most vividly I remember Evod Magek at the old Velvet Lounge. He made a striking impression as he walked in, looking like an African elder from head to toe with a flowing white beard. I could tell he was operating on an entirely separate plane of existence from the world of office work I was coming from. The musicians on the bill, still greeting each other, setting up, milling around, seemed to acknowledge him and make way for him to enter. He sat off to stage right, near where the musicians sat, but not on the booth bench with them; at a table, so he might have been a customer. He sat there very still and quiet, and after a while I forgot about him. The musicians

commenced playing strong, impassioned music. The first set ended, the break came and went. Midnight came and went. He may have gone away for a while, I don't know, but suddenly he rose from his seat, and I was struck by his presence again. Again I wondered at him, fascinated by the way he was dressed, his African accoutrements and his bright white beard. At first I thought he was rising to leave, but then I realized that the musicians were encouraging him to go up to the mic.

Evod Magek approached the microphone deliberately. This ancient man, a learned elder, got up to the mic and spoke, but not only that. He yelled, and screamed into it! His voice had a rough, complex, otherworldly, growling quality the like of which I'd never heard before. Though standing still, he screamed into the microphone with all the force in his body. With the drums churning behind him, he screamed at us to strip us bare, so that his words would penetrate. And when he had opened us up, he shouted into us, "LOVE! Don't bullshit! LOVE!" I've still never heard anything spoken as strongly as that imperative. He shouted it as though he could have added [you fools] or [goddammit] or some other linguistic device for emphasis, but his presence in the room and the tone of his voice made any such other words utterly unnecessary. With his white hair and beard, in his African garb, at his advanced age, he was majestic, with an almost regal dignity so that we never imagined he would scream. But because he did, it was clear that his message was of the utmost importance, measured and distilled and filtered through his unfathomable experience. His sincerity was extreme. In fact I don't think it could have come only from him, but that he must have been drawing upon his ancestors – as I've now learned, the unbroken chain of love stretching all the way back to Africa. Now that I think of it, it must have been their voices added to his that gave it its timbre. "LOVE! Don't bullshit. LOVE!" Evod

Magek died before I ever saw him again, but I was never the same for having encountered him; he didn't even know I was there.

Another night at the Velvet Lounge, William Perry (saxophone) was playing with Avreeayl Ra (drums), Darius Savage (bass), and Billy Brimfield (trumpet). The music had reached a high level of intensity. Avreeayl had been playing the drums very strongly, with his face snarling his inimitable snarl, and the cymbals had been ringing and the skins had been pounded for quite some time. Billy Brimfield had been doing something with his trumpet he didn't think anybody was appreciating enough for how unusual and dramatic it was. He stared us down, peering into our faces to see whether we'd been impacted. I appreciated it, but I didn't know how to react to show him so. But then it got very quiet. Avreeayl Ra stepped out from behind the drums with his wooden flute, and as he played it, William Perry read the most beautiful poem I'd ever heard. It was called "Before I die" and it was a prayer. He asked God to let him fill the world with beautiful music, to give of himself and to love truly and other beautiful things. With the serious gentle music behind him, and the solemnity in the room to receive it, the moment was very beautiful, and I'll never forget that either.

In 2005, Anderson was forced to relocate the Velvet Lounge when the building was sold to developers. The entire neighborhood had been undergoing a major transformation. From an area full of residential hotels and the aforementioned prostitution, a real-estate wave called the South Loop was sweeping south of Roosevelt Road and reaching toward Cermak (22nd street) and the northern walls of the McCormick Place convention center. New construction featured high-walled compounds sold as townhouses which were built so that a person could walk through their back yard to their garage behind a high wall, drive out through the high, strong, automatic iron gate, and never have to set foot on the sidewalk, where *frightening* Black people

were still lurking (walking in their neighborhood) at that time. The high walls even featured decorative towers, which gave the places the look of fortresses (or prisons). These compounds were marching southward towards the Velvet when the news came that Anderson would have to close the club.

By 2005, the old Velvet at 2128½ S. Indiana Avenue was one of the few structures that hadn't been razed. Anderson told me that the building owner had allowed them to stay and operate the business, but they couldn't ask for any repairs, and the roof was leaking terribly. Calling out to the community to participate in a fundraiser to move the Velvet to a new location, Nicole Mitchell's online post captured this moment:

For a lot of us, the Velvet Lounge has been a home base, a Mecca of Music. For many years, Baba Fred has not only been a great musical inspiration, but he has provided a space for so many musicians to perform and to continue the development of creative music. He has been tireless in his efforts. This is our moment to step up and come together as a community to help him out ... The visual image, for those of you not living in Chicago, is that 2128½ S. Indiana is a lone box on a flattened landscape. The large abandoned buildings surrounding the Velvet have already been torn down and the wrecking vehicles are parked on the side of the Velvet's walls. (<http://forums.allaboutjazz.com/showthread.php?8808-The-Velvet-Lounge-Chicago-Message-from-Nicole-Mitchell> accessed 3/6/2014)

There were a series of fundraising concerts at the Velvet Lounge and at the Jazz Showcase downtown. The one I attended was packed with people – three times as many as I had ever seen in the Velvet before. Every musician I knew from the AACM performed – Nicole Mitchell, Douglas Ewart, Malachi Thompson, Ernest Dawkins, Ari Brown, Avreeayl Ra, Malachi Thompson, and many others – as well as a number of younger musicians who had apparently frequented the Sunday jam sessions. In this and other ways, Anderson successfully raised more than \$100,000, enough to convert a space around the corner on Cermak Road (22nd street) to a new Velvet Lounge.

They called out for volunteers to help move the club to the new space, and I went. They wanted to bring as many of the old furnishings and fixtures as they could salvage to the new place. Many objects, it seemed, saw natural light for the first time in decades, including bronze metal chairs with red padding. We realized that these bronze chairs had originally been silver; the bronze color was in fact a patina made of grease and tobacco smoke collected over the decades, probably since before Anderson had acquired them. Andy Pierce, who led the restoration effort, said there'd been a kitchen in the old place, and this plaque was due to years of airborne grease particles from the fryer. Still, I was saddened by this work and uneasy, as though maybe I was unwittingly scrubbing off some of the magic. And as the history from those chairs collected in black puddles on the brand new floor, Fred walked in the door and announced, "Well, the old Velvet Lounge is officially closed." He told us the roof had collapsed directly onto the stage! There had been a performance the night before, and we thanked God it hadn't happened while someone was playing. It was fortunate that Isaiah Spencer had taken his drums home with him that night too, or they would have been destroyed. I remember being very impressed by Fred at that moment, who accepted the end as a fact of life. It had been a good place, but they had a new place. There were plenty of bad things about the old place, and many things about the new place would be better. It would be clean and fresh and new, with better bathrooms and an actual dressing room for the musicians.

On July 28, 2006, Fred Anderson reopened the Velvet Lounge in its new location. The coming together of the jazz community to raise enough money to move the Velvet Lounge represented a victory over the destructive forces of gentrification. The new location had substantially higher rent than the old place, and that caused a certain amount of anxiety. Keeping the lights on might mean booking acts that were more popular. However, I never saw the

programming compromised, or altered to suit popular tastes. Tushar Samant's music calendar archive (*Now Is*) reveals that they had to expand programming to include Tuesday nights too, so that they presented live music six days a week. More than half of the acts were Black, many ensembles of the AACM, but North Side musicians such as Ken Vandermark, Josh Berman, Jason Adasiewicz, Frank Rosaly and others were presented regularly (*ibid.*). The new Velvet Lounge was going strong when I left Chicago for New York in 2007.

In 2010 I was in New York, at the Vision Festival's free outdoor concert at NYCHA's Campos Plaza, when the news came: Fred was sick. We were sickened. Two days later, the day Anderson had been scheduled to perform at the Vision Festival, instead Patricia Parker came on stage and announced that Fred Anderson had died. The capacity crowd in the theater observed a full ten minutes of silence.

For several months after Fred Anderson's *transition*, the Velvet Lounge continued to operate in full force. The community that had come together to help move it to its new location seemed to be rallying around to keep it going as Anderson would have wanted. When I visited, I met one of Anderson's granddaughters, Rasminee' Harris, who seemed committed to developing a personal relationship with the patrons. The staff was familiar, the programming was the same, and business, they said, was pretty good. However, I was very saddened (along with everyone else) to learn a few months later that the Velvet Lounge had closed on December 1, 2010.

Fred Anderson's granddaughters, Harris and Jasmine Sebagala, had been running the place, but it was owned by his sons. (Reich 2010) The staff from the Velvet told me later that his sons had not understood what the Velvet Lounge was all about, and after the first few months of receipts came in, they had suspected something was awry because they weren't bringing in much money. They didn't understand that the club existed in order to support music that was outside

the mainstream, and as such it didn't generate much revenue. That's what made the Velvet Lounge so special. It was unlike the clubs that exist as businesses mostly in order to generate profit, or to draw the maximum crowds. But to Fred's sons, it seemed that a place so famous (people would come from around the world to visit) should be making more money, and they suspected mismanagement. The sons wanted to take over control from the granddaughters and change things, but the staff and community supported the granddaughters. Reich (2009) quoted Fred Anderson's son Eugene Anderson: "We had a difference of philosophy on the percentages and the corporation. They were doing some very mischievous stuff in the club. All me and my brother did was wait and watch them." The sons asserted their rights and took control, and the staff quit in protest. The club closed the next day.

The landlord of the building, who had also owned (and sold) the Velvet's previous location, reported that that nobody but Fred Anderson could make the finances work out because people would accept a lower artist fees to play for Fred Anderson than for other people. (Meyers 2012) For a time Nicole Mitchell led a group of artists and the community trying to establish a new place. The Velvet Birdhouse Coalition presented the music at the South Loop Hotel about half of a mile away from the Velvet Lounge, but that didn't last very long. Mitchell left Chicago in August of 2011 to become a professor at the University of California, Irvine.

The spiritual, experimental jazz that was possible during the days of the Velvet Lounge became less prevalent after its closing. Douglas Ewart once corrected me when I told him I thought Chicago had a much more spiritual jazz scene than New York. He told me that the Velvet was the only club where you could play like that. Other clubs weren't interested. Nevertheless, Chicago does still offer places where this music can be performed. Since my

conversation with Ewart, Mike Reed has opened a venue called Constellation on the North Side which features Chicago style experimental and creative jazz several nights every week.

The story of the Velvet Lounge is important not only because it constitutes the origin of so many musicians' careers: Drummer Isaiah Spencer, trumpeter Maurice Brown, saxophonist Matana Roberts, vocalist Gira Dahnee, many others. It also goes a long way to illustrate the effects of shifting urban space, gentrification, and the changing of place – what the South Side means now. On one hand the Velvet was pushed out and razed by a wave of gentrification. On the other hand, the construction workers who were transforming the neighborhood provided the business that supported the club, providing an alternative revenue stream so that less proven and lucrative musical concepts could be explored. The community and the good will that Anderson built around the city and around the world helped him raise the money to rise above the destructive forces of gentrification. And although in the end, the Velvet itself did not become the lasting institution that Anderson and all of us thought would be his legacy, felled by internecine fighting, its spirit lives on in other ventures. Other venues that present this music on the North Side – Constellation and Elastic – both have framed portraits of Fred Anderson on the wall, invoking his spirit. That the Velvet Lounge, beloved by so many people, could not survive seems a dire portent for the sustainability of this Great Black Music tradition. But it also suggests an alternative: that perhaps Black places are not permanent; they must be mobile, temporary, undergoing the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. Perhaps they are the *nagas*, transcending death. Perhaps they are in flux, in motion, flourishing on the margins of city centers, and as those margins shift, expanding and contracting, they shift. Perhaps these buildings and businesses, these spaces, are the skin they naturally shed and leave behind as they lithely glide into the shade-dappled edge of the forest again.

The story of the Velvet Lounge brings together the multiple valences of space. The consequences of its existence in the explosion of creative music in Chicago and the development of young Black creative musicians here is a testament to the importance of the space qua venue. Its relationship with the shifting forces of place in dynamic urban space is illuminating, showing yet again the ambiguity in the relationship between Black art, Black music, Black business, Black identity and the power gradient created by racialized inequality. But the fact that it had a different business model, that it was artist-owned/run meant that kinds of music were possible there that are not possible elsewhere. Many musicians complain about playing in a traditional jazz club, where the owners are in business to make money, and the musician's job is to entice people to be in the space and above all to buy drinks. People go to socialize, and they talk. The Green Mill jazz club in Chicago is an example of this, where despite the owner's vehement exhortations that the audience should be quiet ("SSSHHHH!!!" is said into the microphone before nearly every set there) conversations inevitably intrude into the music from the stage. Sensitive ballads are difficult in such an environment, and a piece such as Joseph Jarman's "As If It Were the Seasons" or Jeanne Lee's "Jamaica," composed of great quantities of space, would be impossible. But the different orientation of the Velvet Lounge created the possibility for fostering music with space (as well as its opposite, music featuring overwhelming sound saturation). Music with space tends to take longer; it does not adhere to the five(ish)-minutes per song formula, but can go on continuously for an hour at a time, mesmerizing people that forget to buy drinks.

After the Velvet Lounge

Part of the impetus for my project was the closing of the Velvet, to see what the scene would look like in a post-Velvet Chicago. Could the music and the community be sustained? In

2012, when I returned to Chicago, the avant-garde / experimental / creative / *out* scene was happening on the North Side of Chicago.¹⁷

By the time the Velvet closed finally, an organization called Umbrella Music was presenting weekly series at three North Side venues: Wednesdays at the Hideout, Thursdays at Elastic, and Sundays at The Hungry Brain. Umbrella had been launched in the spring of 2006, during the period when the Velvet Lounge was closed for relocation, and when I and other regulars of the Velvet were motivated to explore new venues for the music. Umbrella had a music festival in November in which many of the outside/avant-garde/creative players from Chicago, New York, and globally would play, and which was kicked off by an event called European Jazz Meets Chicago presenting many European players. This festival and the nights at the Hideout in particular, but also at Elastic and the Hungry Brain, were the primary Chicago outlets for the members of the AACM I heard at this time. However, while the Velvet Lounge had presented groups from the AACM several times every week, including the Great Black Music ensemble every Sunday, after the closing of the Velvet Lounge, they performed in Chicago much less often.

The venue Constellation was opened in 2013 by drummer Mike Reed. It is a large new venue in the building that had been the Viaduct Theater. Constellation quickly became the

¹⁷ It's important to note that despite my focus on the South Side of Chicago in this dissertation, there had been a strong improvised music scene on the North Side of Chicago for quite some time. Fred Anderson's first club, the Birdhouse, was on the North Side. From 2001 to 2005, drummer/percussionist Michael Zerang ran a space for experimental and forward-looking [jazz] music called Candlestick Maker at 4432 North Kedzie Ave., at which many of the AACM musicians performed regularly along with many other musicians. (*Candlestick Maker Past Shows*) Jeff Parker had a standing Tuesday session at Rodan in Wicker Park for at least ten years. The Experimental Sound Studio had existed for many years prior. Ken Vandermark in particular (who sometimes played with Fred Anderson), and many other North Side musicians had been rocking the Empty Bottle for years. These are just a few examples of the vibrant North Side experimental creative (free [jazz]) scene.

premier venue of the jazz avant-garde in Chicago, largely supplanting all of the programming of Umbrella Music (of which Reed was a founding member). In September of 2014, the Hideout stopped presenting free [jazz], cancelling the weekly (Wednesday) *Immediate Sound Series* that had been programmed by Mitch Cocanig for nine years. Two months later the Hungry Brain, which had hosted the weekly (Sunday) *Transmission Series* curated by Mike Reed and cornetist Josh Berman, closed entirely, ending that series as well. And Elastic, the last of the Umbrella Music venues, closed temporarily to relocate; the Improvised Music Series there, curated by Dave Rempis, had since ceased. In 2014, there was no Umbrella Music Festival, though the European Jazz Meets Chicago event did take place as in prior years. It seemed the programming at Constellation, which has a large portrait of Fred Anderson dominating over the center of the bar, mostly satisfies the North Side appetite for the music, if not quite the desire of all the musicians to perform there. Constellation also holds a free Wednesday night free-jazz jam session. Important AACM-related events are centered there, such as the annual Fred Anderson birthday celebration. In 2015, Elastic reopened at a new location near the old one, and the improvised music series as well as the Anagram series on Mondays presented *creative* music. And at the end of 2015, the Mike Reed re-opened a renovated Hungry Brain.

But on the South Side, since the close of the Velvet Lounge, free [jazz] has been peripatetic. The Great Black Music ensemble performed regularly on Sundays at the South Side Community Art Center for a time in 2011. (Samant *Now-Is*) But that waned before I arrived in 2012. Many of the AACM musicians performed at the Hyde Park Jazz Festival, a newer festival launched in 2007 co-sponsored by the University of Chicago. The South Shore Jazz Festival's last hurrah included performances by Ernest Dawkins among other AACM musicians, and it was capped by a performance by Pharaoh Sanders in 2012. David Boykin and several AACM groups

made a few presentations at the South Side Community Arts Center on Fridays, which showed ambitions to become a regular series, but that did not materialize.

Theaster Gates has been engaged in arts-based placemaking in Chicago and elsewhere since the mid-2000s. In 2012 Theaster Gates partnered with the University of Chicago and received a \$400,000 grant from ArtPlace America to create the Washington Park Arts Incubator “as a powerful catalyst for neighborhood revitalization by creating a new hub for artistic production and community engagement on Chicago’s South Side.” (“Washington Park Arts Incubator” on the ArtPlace America Website) The Incubator is run by the University of Chicago. Each semester, artists apply to be Artists-in-Residence, and they are largely responsible for the programming of the space, which includes not only music but largely visual arts.

Tomeka Reid was an early artist-in-residence at the Incubator, and among other programming, she instituted a popular First Monday’s jazz series which continues even years after her residency ended. These events often feature musicians or groups that had performed at the Velvet Lounge, some of which had not been seen elsewhere in Chicago since.

Washington Park is the name of a large park immediately to the west of the University of Chicago and its neighborhood Hyde Park. It’s also the name of the community adjacent to the park (to the West). The park has traditionally formed a distinct boundary between the University’s fortified safety zone and the impoverished and dangerous areas where students were warned never to wander. Washington Park, as mentioned earlier, was also the site of Sun Ra’s meetings with other revolutionary South Side thinkers, where many of his ideas germinated. To commemorate Sun Ra’s 100th Birthday, David Boykin, while an artist in residence at the

Washington Park Arts Incubator, organized a gathering of 100 saxophones for Sun Ra in the grotto where neighborhood intellectuals still gather.

While the Incubator is a welcome cultural institution in a part of the South Side largely lacking in cultural activity, some residents are suspicious. They see the Washington Park Arts Incubator as a harbinger of impending heavy gentrification along the 55th Street corridor by the University of Chicago, which is seen as a juggernaut reshaping South Side urban space at the expense of the cohesion and integrity of local communities. Some people saw its overtures to community outreach as a distraction away from the University of Chicago Medical Center's refusal to maintain a level 1 trauma center to serve the South Side. And indeed, as I was at that time working for the University of Chicago Medical Center, I was explicitly encouraged by executives to try to divert attention away from large trauma center protests by calling the press to music events associated with the Incubator (David Boykin's "100 saxophones [in Washington Park] for Sun Ra[']s 100th birthday]). Some people comment on a lack of energy and activity at the Incubator, especially by residents of the surrounding community. The University of Chicago has also opened the Currency Exchange Café next door in a space that had been a currency exchange. The University of Chicago has been a central institutional figure in the music since the early days of the AACM. Some of the AACM's first concerts were held at the University of Chicago's Mandel Hall, which also recently hosted the largest celebration of the AACM's 50th Anniversary in April 2015.

The Washington Park Arts Incubator has become an important place where free [jazz] is practiced and performed, although the programming there is not consistent in this regard as it depends on the artist in residence during any given semester. At most, it offers [jazz] performances only a few times per month. The Incubator as well as Theaster Gates' other

endeavors, the Dorchester Projects, Black Cinema House, and the Stony Island Arts Bank – collectively under the umbrella of the Rebuild Foundation – often present Afrocentric spiritual music by younger Black artists Khari Lemuel, Avery R. Young, and Yaw Agyeman. These musicians, as well as Gates himself (a strong vocalist) are more rooted in Black Christian, spiritual and gospel traditions than artists more closely associated with the AACM, who draw more on spiritual resources outside the Church. Gates’ spaces are located in poorer Black neighborhoods that had been previously lost most of their arts and cultural businesses and institutions. Gates’ project is to re-animate such urban spaces. Black culture and spirituality is central to all these efforts and these performers, whose performances usually reference or evoke the character of a Church.

In 2014 a new venue opened in Hyde Park (South Side) called Promontory, which occasionally presents free [jazz]. David Boykin currently has a monthly series that highlights the conjunction between hip-hop and jazz. Recently, they’ve presented a tribute to Oscar Brown, Jr. featuring Phil Cohran, Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, David Murray, Hamid Drake, and Pharaoh Sanders.

So, while Constellation provides the music with a stable home in largely the same spirit as Fred Anderson’s Velvet Lounge, that home is on the North Side. New developments on the South Side host the music only sporadically. Theaster Gates’ Dorchester Projects and Black Cinema house tend to program exciting younger musicians whose spiritually charged improvised music is much more centered on Black vocality and has more ties to Black Christianity than the often classically Afrocentric jazz orientation of the AACM.

Jazz, Jam Sessions and the Participatory Ethos

After the closure of the Velvet Lounge, there were no full time jazz clubs on the South Side of Chicago. However, in 2012 there were still many regular jazz events happening so that it was usually possible to hear live jazz on the South Side any night of the week. Many of these events took the form of jam sessions. George Lewis (2008, 19-28) describes the importance of jam sessions in 1950s Chicago for the development of the musicians who would eventually break new ground. In particular, the Cotton Club provided an experimental atmosphere and a center for learning. (Lewis 2008, 18) In the 1960s though, the jam sessions declined along with the jazz clubs and much other economic activity on the South Side. (Lewis 2008) The AACM was conceived partly in response to this vacuum.

In recent years, weekly jam sessions have comprised a significant segment of the jazz scene on the South Side of Chicago. The Velvet Lounge had its Sunday jams until it closed in 2010. Perhaps the most celebrated jam session on the South Side was at the New Apartment Lounge on 75th street, run by Von Freeman for decades. Freeman died in 2012, and that session has ceased. However, a new session arose nearby on 75th Street run by Margaret Murphy-Webb and Anderson “Sonny” Edwards called the Jazz Jam Revival at a bar called the 50 Yard Line. The 50 Yard Line was formerly the El Matador, where Von Freeman had run a jam session many years earlier. One of the regular patrons there once described Tuesday night jazz jams on 75th street as “his religion.” Besides the Jazz Jam Revival, there is a Thursday night jam at the Elks Lodge Prairie off 51st Street called the Brown Derby Jazz Review. Ernest Dawkins runs a lively Sunday night jam at Norman’s Bistro on 43rd Street. On Saturday nights there is a jam session at the John Coltrane Conservatory on 64th and Cottage Grove, beneath the Grand Ballroom. David Boykin’s Sonic Healing Ministries is the most experimental/ free [jazz] jam session. Another free session takes place on Wednesdays at Constellation on the North Side, and there are other

jam sessions North as well such as Sundays at Andy's in the River North central district, and the Friday night after-hours jam session at the Green Mill. The latter are very much more oriented to straight-ahead jazz. In fact all of these jam sessions except for Sonic Healing Ministries and the Wednesday jams at Constellation favor standard jazz.

The straight-ahead jam sessions take a highly presentational form of jazz and make it participatory. Musicians of various levels attend, as well as non-participants, and various means are employed by which people can get up to play. Sometimes there's a list, and sometimes people just mill around with their instrument near the stage until there's an opportunity to get up and play. Instrumentalists are expected to know standards, which vary slightly from session to session.

George Lewis suggests that in the 1960s, jazz writ large was converted from a large-ensemble format, big-band idea to a jazz-jam model as part of an economically determined movement. (Lewis 2008, 27-28) Presenting '30s-style big bands required more musicians as well as composers and arrangers, rehearsals, rehearsal space, and therefore cost more than smaller groups with a universal repertoire. (*ibid.*) In an interview with Ashanti Miller published in the Earth Center's newspaper *Sunnyside* in October 2004, Phil Cohran described the shift away from big bands and its implications for musicians in Chicago:

As a child I remember running down to the train station to see Duke Ellington's train, which was a big thing ... At Black colleges, they all had bands. That was the major form of entertainment in the Black community. If you didn't dance, you could go out and watch ... The music started changing because the musicians knew they had a place where many of us became famous from playing in these bands, but the big bands started to change. People like Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker started playing so much that people stopped dancing and went to the stage to listen. This was an evolution because they started to build bars where you could only fit a small band with no dance floor, so if you weren't a popular or well-known musician you got left out. The size of the bands went from fifteen people to four or five, so this is how the music changed for Blacks. In the 1940s, there were over 2,000 musicians working out of the old Black Union on 39th

and State Street. When I started playing with Sun Ra in 1958, there were less than fifty musicians working. (Miller 2004)

Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie had led what's often called the bebop revolution, which was centered at the jam session at Minton's in Harlem. The shift of the mainstream jazz market to the "jam-as-performance" model undermined jam sessions as spaces of "relaxed social networking and musical learning." (Lewis 2008, 27-28). After half a century of commercialization of the music and the professionalization of the musicians, these spaces have become echoes of jazz clubs. Instrumentalists are expected to be able to follow chord changes and to be familiar with the repertoire that has developed into the jazz canon.

The free jam sessions, however, offer a very different experience, where an idealized object called jazz is not preconceived, though often it has been pre-experienced. The Sonic Healing Ministries was described in detail above. There were standard jazz instruments such as trap drums, saxophones, keyboards, and guitar, but also multivariate other instruments. The music did not follow any particular form, did not have any pre-conceived tonal center. Meters or rhythms were as easily abandoned as they were established, and all musicians would often improvise collectively, without taking turns soloing. There was very little hierarchy between horns and rhythm section. The experience was similar at the free jam at Constellation, except it lacked an expressed spiritual purpose, and also that session had a different format: each session was preceded by a performance of a free jazz group, and musicians signed up. But there were no other conventions that were required. Musicians simply started playing and figured out how to play together in real time. No tunes were ever played. Tonal centers shifted at random, or sometimes stayed the same for an entire set. It is a space that encourages participation by players and vocalists at every level. It didn't require any foreknowledge of songs, chords, rhythms or anything else. And musicians from a wider variety of genres/scenes came to participate. These

spaces of participation create a bridge between the highly professionalized entertainment/music industry and community-based participatory music.

Intra-sonic Space

Besides urban space and performance spaces, another element that some musicians discuss while characterizing Chicago creative music is the use of space within the music.

Once, while he was composing his suite for Nelson Mandela commissioned by the Jazz Institute of Chicago the year of Mandela's death, Ernest Dawkins described one of the challenges of composing for a jazz orchestra. He told me that you may have a lot of ideas of where to take something, want to add a lot of layers, or to take an idea through a few different keys and get really elaborate. But when you have improvisers, you have to leave enough space for them to add their creativity. He told me that he tries to provide enough melodic and harmonic interest to get people started, but then he restrains himself in order to allow space for individual creativity to happen. This philosophy is very audible in his composition, and it also goes hand in hand with his training of young players who, after the fashion of the big bands of yore, cut their teeth playing the repertoire of one leader. The first piece of the suite, "Mandela, Madiba, We Honor You!" is somewhat simple. It is a four-measure melody repeated over and over. Dawkins creates interest by the successive addition of instrumental layers in harmony. But what really gives the piece its power is that he has left space for instrumental and vocal improvisation.

Dawkins is very far from someone I would want to call a "free [jazz] player." While he sometimes uses explosions of ecstatic sound, Dawkins clearly honors and follows the many conventions of the art form that have aggregated to define the genre of jazz over the decades. He has recently worked often with Kahil el Zabar in Zabar's Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, which does include more avenues of freedom, but Dawkins' own efforts, at least in Chicago, have been

mostly oriented towards his big band, which requires significantly more structure than smaller ensembles. Still, I want to focus on this idea that jazz improvisation requires space within the structure of a piece, which I think is one of the main areas that has defined and been expanded in the jazz avant-garde and free [jazz]. In a way, that's what the improvisation in jazz is, and it's the most wonderful meaning of jazz itself. It's simply a space where you can do whatever you want, as long as it sounds good. But there have been various boundaries thought up in order to define what can sound good. And then people emerge who want to play outside of those boundaries who at first sound bad to most people but some of whom wind up pushing the music forward. What has become the conventional rhythm section – piano, bass, and drum kit – are less free to improvise because they are required to maintain the beat and the rhythmic harmonic cycle over which the horns and voices can be free to do what they feel.

As has been discussed earlier, the advent of modal jazz, which eschewed chord changes in favor of more freedom for improvisation, was partly a way of emphasizing melodic creative freedom over harmonic complexity. In Chicago free [jazz] one notices many fewer piano and keyboard players relative to straight ahead jazz, in which the absence of a piano would be unusual. A piano can be constricting because of its tendency to strictly define the harmonic possibilities, and therefore limiting freedom. Many horn players choose not to play with keyboardists for this reason, and they sometimes complain about them. On the other hand, some of the paragons of free [jazz] have been keyboardists Sun Ra and Cecil Taylor.

A spirit of egalitarianism has led to an expansion of the free space so that even the bass and the drums can do whatever they want at any time. This, however, leads to a structural shift and places the emphasis on each player listening to each other intensely. The predictability of a steady rhythm and harmonic pallet can no longer be utilized to create and is no longer available

as a common reference point. Chaos is a very real, and frequently realized possibility. On the other hand, there emerge other possible common reference points – of levels of intensity, subtle atmospheric emotional effects, the idea or feeling of chromatic movement, or wide leaping, or space, or density, passion – which may be expressed differently by each instrument so that tonality and meter are de-emphasized in favor of these other referents.

On “The Speaker,” the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble (Kahil el Zabar, Ed Wilkerson, and Light Henry Huff) demonstrates an exercise in space that makes room for timbral inspiration. At around 1:30, Wilkerson inserts a single chime in the middle of Light’s SOUND-focused improvisation. (Ethnic Heritage Ensemble 1981) The only structure is a three-note ostinato on Kahil’s *sanza*, which leaves one beat of space for improvisation before the next phrase. This structure is somewhat reminiscent of Alice Coltrane’s “Shiva Loka” where Cecil McBee alternates 4/4 measures: in one, the same note is repeated three times in rhythm; then the next measure he improvises, then back to the same 3-of-the-same note pattern.

Part of what makes the jazz avant-garde so free is that this space of freedom has been expanded. Once I was speaking to Butch Morris in New York, and he told me that in his patented Conduction, he accessed the sense of musicality of the players in his orchestra, and used their understanding of what is musical as the notes in his improvisation.¹⁸ Though in his theory it was not the musicians improvising but rather that he was improvising through them, still his structures were clearly built with two separate dimensions of space, one for individual

¹⁸ “Conduction®: The practice of conveying and interpreting a lexicon of directives to construct or modify sonic arrangement or composition; a structure-content exchange between composer/conductor and instrumentalists that provides the immediate possibility of initiating or altering harmony, melody, rhythm, tempo, progression, articulation, phrasing or form through the manipulation of pitch, dynamics (volume/intensity/density), timbre, duration, silence, and organization in real-time.” (<http://www.conduction.us/> (Accessed February 16, 2016))

interpretation of his gestures according to their sense of musicality, and a second for his improvisation.

I think that this sort of unforeseeable blending of personalities and creative sensibilities is the crux of what we achieved with the Participatory Music Coalition described in Chapter 3. Perhaps the next level of expansion could be to extend the freedom beyond the performers on the stage to all the people in the audience as well, so that all the people in the space can improvise together.

Outer-space: Afrofuturism and Afro-surrealism

The fourth dimension here, reminiscent of Einstein's general relativity, represents a relation between space and time. Sun Ra, even in the 1950s while he was still in Chicago, created rich futuristic imagery in sound, visual art, and text. It is perhaps the most distinctive feature of Sun Ra's oeuvre, the most memorable. While Sun Ra may have been thinking of outer space as a reformulation of the spirituals as Graham Locke theorized in *Blutopia*, he was also theorizing outer space as a future terrain of positive possibility for Black people. Thus even if the present doesn't revolve around outer space as he would have predicted, the modality of envisioning a future terrain of positive possibility is very relevant to the present.

Ytasha Womack (2008) posits Sun Ra as a key part of the "Foundational pyramid" of Afrofuturism. "[Afrofuturism] is non-linear, fluid and feminist; it uses the black imagination to consider mysticism, metaphysics, identity and liberation; and, despite offering black folks a way to see ourselves in a better future, Afrofuturism blends the future, the past and the present." (Thrasher 2015) To Womack, one of Afrofuturism's central functions is to explore "race as a technology," utilized for specific reasons. (*ibid.*)

Afrofuturism is a critical and artistic concept that's been developing to encompass, sometimes retroactively, Black experimental and avant-garde aesthetics of a radical Black future. Reminiscent of the disagreement about jazz terminology, an alternative and related concept is Afro-surrealism, which is sometimes distinguished from Afrofuturism in that Afrosurrealism rejects any sci-fi futurism, focusing more on the imaginative now. (D. Scott Miller 2009) The concept was perhaps borrowed from Amiri Baraka. (*ibid.*)

For the figures of Womack's "Foundational Pyramid of Afrofuturism" acting in the mid-20th century, the 21st Century was the future. And the proliferation of transformative technologies, though not so much outer space-oriented, is a dominant feature. Afrofuturism is a concept that has engaged many of the younger Black artists in Chicago in the 21st Century. Gira Dahnee has released an EP entitled Future Geechee, in which she suggests a present-future Black identity based on the cultural survivals that are thought of in the past, but which are ever present, if hidden in plain sight. It was Gira who introduced me to contemporary Afro-futurist musicians Janelle Monáe and Flying Lotus.

Afro-futurism and Afro-surrealism, as Thrasher points out, calls for an integration of technology with mysticism, ancient with the future. In 2015, MB Collective and Participatory Music Coalition, in this instance led by Sojourner Wright, presented an event entitled "Mothership: An Afro-Futurist & Afro-Surrealist Experience of Prophetic Imagination." The description was:

This multi-dimensional workshop hosted by a collective of Chicago Afro-Futurists and Afro-Surrealists utilizes music, dance, art, video, and participatory performance to bring you an interactive experience where you can harness the power of radical imagination and Black Love to create brilliant new worlds.

The evening includes:

Black to the Future News Broadcast: As guests arrive they are asked to submit their headlines for the future of Black and Brown bodies. Once every 15 minutes headlines will be broadcast throughout the space.

Self-Love Station: Participants will be guided through a sensory self-love experience, engage in activities describing their own self care regime, and explore self care resources to incorporate into their daily lives.

Embodiment & Re-Imagining: Utilizing widely influential texts about resistance, healing and restorative justice, participants will take part in action writing activities that guide through embodying and re-imagining selected texts and offering alternative solutions addressed within.

Watermelon Bay: Based on Idle Wilde, an African American relaxation resort that emerged during Jim Crow segregation, Watermelon Bay will invite participants to relax, enjoy refreshments, and engage in conversation focused specifically on visions of the future.

AfroNauts Screening: participants will have the opportunity to watch a free screening of African Filmmaker Frances Bodomo's film Afronauts. Afronauts tells an alternative story of the 1960s Space Race using a Black science fiction narrative.

Freedom Tribute to the Ancestors: This is an open space which will include an altar and site where participants can honor and write messages to ancestors and loved ones.

Experimental Jazz: To complete their journey, participants will be invited to enjoy an experimental Jazz performance from the Participatory Music Coalition (PMC).

(quoted from promotional materials written by Sojourner Zenobia Wright)



Figure 7 MB Collective and Participatory Music Coalition present “Mothership” in 2015, curated by Sojourner Zenobia Wright

Stations as described above were organized throughout an art gallery space interspersed with installation art pieces by Viktor le Ewing Givens, Janelle Vaughn Dowell and others.

Instrumental musicians wandered the space providing a soundscape. Finally, there was a participatory music performance in which guest participants all sang, played percussion instruments, sang and danced together in celebration of Black love. The event was a representation of the integration of usually separated expressive forms that the idea of Afrofuturism can bring together.

The Afrofuturist/afrosurrealist aesthetic has also functioned to incorporate new movements in visual art with performance poetry and creative improvised music in Chicago. There is a long tradition of the interrelationship of poetry with the music and visual art, very well

illustrated by the towering figure of Amiri Baraka. In New York the avant-garde jazz scene has always had performance poetry as an integral part. On the other hand, Chicago's very well developed slam poetry scene, begun on the North Side at the Green Mill, is not very much integrated with the experimental music scene. There is a post-hip-hop poetry practice also being developed on the South Side, for instance by a youth poetry organization called Lyric Squad. While both the slam poetry and the hip-hop aesthetic and the avant-garde jazz aesthetic have seemed incompatible, they have found a common arena in the aesthetics of Afrofuturism. B Rael Ali is as Chicago artist whom I would consider Afro-surrealist, and he's also a performance poet. He has begun a poetry open mic poetry series, which is usually coincident with an art opening, at a gallery on the South Side. After we met him at the Mothership event, B Rael invited PMC to perform along with the poets.

My research was completed in the time of #Blacklivesmatter, a hashtag turned technologically driven social movement in response to police brutality that has recently been better documented with ubiquitous cell phone cameras and social media. Chicago has been an important center for protests against police brutality, especially after the release of a video of the police killing of Laquan McDonald that had been covered up in order to save the administration of mayor Rahm Emanuel who was up for re-election at the time. David Boykin has undertaken to represent the discourse of this political movement in his latest project entitled *The Lynching of (Insert the Name of Any White Killer of an Unarmed Black Here): An Avant-garde Jazz Hip-Hopera*. The all-Black ensemble includes Gira Dahnee on piano, a Black male vocalist Damon Davis, rapper Manu Wise, and Jayvee Montgomery on electronics with which he scratched samples of political speeches and discourse, along with Isaiah Spencer on drums, Rollo Radford on bass, and Brenda Gilbert on violin. In it both Boykin and Wise rap, for instance, "Hands up,

don't shoot. Fight the power 'til they prosecute, that's what we gotta do." The incorporation of rap of and electronics with the avant-garde jazz aesthetic to present this political discourse engendered by the technologically enabled Black political movement is also a strong example of the kind of aesthetics that afrofuturism is made of.

Coda: Fred Anderson Park

There is now a park named after Fred Anderson fairly near the site of the Velvet Lounge, on Wabash between 16th and 18th Streets, most of which is dedicated to a dog park, the remainder designed for outdoor performances. There was a substantial debate among the music community about this park because dog parks are so emblematic of gentrification. But in the end I think most people supported naming the park after Anderson (since, as Andy Pierce, who spearheaded the effort, noted, there were no other parks proposed at that time, in that area, that could be named after Anderson. It was either a dog park, or no park named after Fred.) I attended one of the community meetings during the planning stages for the park, where I witnessed an unlikely intersection of interest groups – dog owners and jazz musicians – who debated the important features of the park. The jazz musicians advocated a stage with power for amplification, lighting, and some storage area for cases and other equipment, none of which were incorporated into the plans. The dog owners, who (unlike the jazz musicians) were also nearby residents, were concerned about the noise of outdoor performances at night and therefore opposed amplification and lights.

A plaque in the park, near the performance area reads:

Fred Anderson Park

[musical notation]

Saxophonist and Composer Fred Anderson (1929-2010) was one of Chicago's most creative, acclaimed, and beloved musicians. The Musical notes depicted here are from his composition, "The Strut."

Born in Louisiana, Anderson moved to Evanston, Illinois as a child during the Great Migration. Later, he lived and worked in Chicago's South Loop for three decades.

Inspired by Charlie Parker's music, Anderson developed his own unique method of playing jazz. As an original member of Chicago's world-renowned Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, he performed in the first AACM concert in 1965.

While working other jobs to support his family and his art, Anderson released more than 30 recordings performed for audiences around the world and mentored countless young musicians.

In 1979 He opened the Velvet Lounge, revered for its innovative music and diverse, loyal patronage. Generations of musicians and fans benefitted from the inclusive spirit of his stage.

Fred Anderson always followed his motto of "patience, sincerity, and consistency."

On Sunday, May 31, 2015, the park officially opened with a concert by the AACM Great Black Music ensemble and others. Dr. C. Siddha Webber was the emcee. The event opened with a prayer, and then the Praise Team from the adjoining True Rock Ministries sang gospel music. Local dignitaries spoke, including Alderman Bob Fioretti. Hamid Drake and Joshua Abrams played a duo set, Hamid on frame drum and vocals, Josh on gimbri. Finally, the Great Black Music Ensemble played a tribute to Fred Anderson, including Fred's "Strut Time" which is inscribed on the park's commemorative plaque, and also Mwata Bowden's composition "Well Woven Web" in which musicians and audience sing "It's our 50th Anniversary, 50 years of Great Black Music." They were raising money to present more concerts at the park.

People commented on how Fred Anderson had a dog and how he would have appreciated the dog friendly area of the park. The park is strangely emblematic of the South Loop. Part is a dedication to Black jazz work with 40 years of history in that place. Part is iconic of the influx of suburban people used to living in houses with yards suitable for dogs who now live in apartments

and want a place for their dogs to play, and also young driven professionals too engrossed in their careers to start a family who have dogs instead of children. For many Black people living in poorly maintained areas of Chicago, the idea that public money should be diverted to a park for dogs rather than to facilities that could improve their wanting neighborhoods is outrageous. Bob Fioretti discussed how his plans to create the city's largest dog park were curtailed in order to make room to commemorate the important jazz history and Fred Anderson's legacy in the form of a performance space. There was indeed a power supply for the amplifiers, but there were no lights and no storage area for equipment.

Conclusion

My research has brought together an investigative processual defining (not necessarily a definition) of Great Black Music with a view of one of its expressions that I peculiarly call Afrocentric spiritual jazz. My concern is for the sustainability of an essential feature of Great Black Music in its power to (re)generatively represent both realized and not-yet-realized states of Great Blackness. The historical states and future possibilities of Great Blackness have been theorized by the discipline of Afrocentricity, the central tenets of which are deployed by many musicians, and they have been operationalized and sometimes institutionalized in spiritual and religio-political movements having strong roots in Chicago. My research has led me into contact with something like a lineage of Black spirit musicians, or if not quite that, an intergenerational flow of Black spirit music practices and ideas in Chicago. Finally, I have centered my understanding of the foundation and potential sustainability of this music in multivalent terms of space.

The South Side of Chicago was the primary site and subject of my research because it is a space where Blackness reigns, where Blackness is the norm, where Black is the exnominated category, so that it does not need to define itself – where it simply is. And as it *is* it *becomes*, and that *becoming* has a sound, which is Black music. That is not to say, however, that the becoming of Blackness is not an effort. On the contrary, it is also a purposeful *doing* by Black people ourselves as we, recognizing that our existence is at stake, either deliberately or recklessly create new ways of thinking Black, seeing Black, shouting Black, loving Black. I sought here to begin a journey towards some kind of hermeneutics of Black music in which Black is the exnominated category as well, where the ideas of Black people about being Black and representing Blackness through music are given the center. I tried to give an understanding of Black music through the categories of Blackness: understanding music from a Black center.

The first step was to say the word *nigger* and to locate it among the labels that have attached to the black body in order to recognize the great achievement that *Black* has been. The journey from *nigger* to *Black* can be traced through music. But furthermore, that journey was partly made of music. Many other identities have entered and left circulation, among them various statements of Africanity – Afro-American, Afrikan, African American – that are all relevant to diaspora. Taking a moment to consider anthropological theorizations of diaspora, we can understand diaspora as a discursive practice as well as a history of mobility, in which an ongoing and evolving relation between displaced people and their homeland is continually imagined, re-imagined, reified and disputed. In these discursive practices, music is extremely potent: calling forth sounds of the ancestors, declaring a relationship with Africa, conjuring images of Africa, theorizing and disseminating African ways of thinking and being. And yet, the diasporic connectivity between Africa and Chicago is also audible in the sounds of musicians whose personal journeys are routed through Africa, and those whose lives span the Atlantic in new forms of African American transmigrancy. Finally, the Black culture in Chicago is a result not only of forced migration from Africa to America, but also of a coerced yet more voluntary migration from the South to the Northern cities. In choosing *Black* the musicians I encountered frequently meant to align themselves with the Black power, Black Nationalist, and Black Arts movements. The history of those movements is inscribed in the places and social memories in Chicago, and its spirit is alive in the music and contemporary movements of thought that are emerging here. There is a similarity between the way Black people resist all externally conceived category labels about their racial/ethnic category, and the way they resist all labels on the music.

In order to understand how the music can mean *Black* and can bring *Black* into being, the semiotic theory of Charles Peirce is valuable. As jazz lessens in its indexical association with Black people, having more white players, its representation shifts into the symbolic and iconic domains. As Turino points out, the indexical and iconic modes, as a less mediated forms of representation, have more effective, more affective interpretants. And so I have identified certain other indexes and icons, as less mediated forms of representation, which also therefore are more affective, more effective in determining group identity, nationalism and defining cultural features.

In order to learn something about the sustainability, both past and future, of this Black music, I examined three aspects I saw as key: ideologies, figures, and space. Having considered all these things, what can I conclude about sustainability of the music? Resistance to the term jazz is partly an aspect of the imperative for self-determination. This imperative flows from the experience Black people have had with the violent effects of categorization and labeling by a dominating Other. The imperative for self-determination is one of the key features that defines Great Black Music both in its concept, and in its form. It demonstrates that Black creativity belongs to Black people, that it can represent Black achievement and ingenuity, and that it should benefit Black people. It is music that should illuminate possibilities for Black people to determine their own destiny. The sustainability of the music therefore inheres in the continued objective of Black self-determination, and then also the realization of the importance of music in that struggle.

Afrocentricity, Black Nationalism, the Nation of Islam, Moorish Science, and the Black Hebrews are alive in Chicago, and their consequent ideologies are still in circulation. They have also influenced the creation of new Black ideologies and social movements such as Afro-

futurism and Black Lives Matter. Afro-futurism maintains a relationship with free/avant-garde jazz especially vis-à-vis the figure of Sun Ra. In Chicago Gira Dahnee, David Boykin, PMC and others push Blackness into the techno-centric present while carrying on reverence for the past and working to extend the teachings of the elders and ancestors. The ideology of Black Lives Matter is expressed in vibrant performance poetry with which PMC and others have created jazz-based improvised music in Chicago, though these connections remain tentative and ephemeral.

Although musicians rarely if ever use the terms Afrocentric or Afrocentricity to describe their practices, Molefi Asante's paradigm encapsulates many of the principles that they do espouse and brings them together into a scholarly discourse. This is why I have chosen Afrocentric as a descriptor: in order to relate the discursive practices to something that already has a presence in the literature. Moreover, something we might call Afrocentric musicology might be developed in order to counter the dominant Eurocentrism in the music academy currently. Outside of the academy, pathways of intergenerational knowledge transmission are evident in the Black spirit music linkage from Cohran to Boykin to Elmore.

The character of the South Side urban space is changing dramatically, but there are new spaces available for the performance of complex improvised music, which are oriented away from the selling of drinks, more towards the creation of art. Several of these venues are affiliated with the University of Chicago, a large institution that is a major factor in the gentrification that may ultimately undermine the character of the South Side as a space of exnomination for Blackness. These spaces, however, especially with the support of the University of Chicago's intellectual community, are fertile incubators of discourse about the meaning of Blackness in the 21st Century. On the other hand, the locus of improvised music has clearly shifted to the white North Side, and it is difficult to envision that trend reversing itself or even coming into balance.

Finally, an essential part of the sustainability of the music is its spiritual dimension. The musicians don't make a living playing this kind of music. Yet, it's very demanding, mentally, physically and emotionally. It therefore requires a level of spiritual devotion in order to cultivate the ability to play it, and to create avenues to continue it, even against great hardships. African spirituality involves the honoring of elders and the worship of ancestors, and that pathway into the past creates the possibility for tradition to flow into futurism.

I hope to further develop this work through the cultivation of community-based space(s) for the practice of participatory music combined with African Diasporan spiritual practice and the study of African centered musicology. I also hope to further develop the theory of semiotics I suggest in Chapter 1½ by more fully analyzing the semiotics of Blackness not only discursively about the music, but also within the sound itself.

I wish to end by very briefly addressing a topic that many scholars, musicians, and jazz music presenters agree must bear greatly on the sustainability of Great Black Music – an ongoing relationship between jazz and hip-hop. Williams (2010) sums up the advent of jazz-rap in the 1990s: “Rap music's borrowing from jazz was a key gesture in the defining of jazz rap as a sophisticated alternative in hip-hop's ongoing struggle for cultural legitimacy.”(459) Concomitantly, jazz presenters who attempt the conjunction of jazz and hip-hop are sometimes aiming to increase the relevance of jazz with a younger, and also Blacker/more Latino audience. The jazz artists I know, on the other hand, who have done so have done it out of a genuine interest in both genres and a desire to bridge the gap between those two audiences.

I have seen several instances of the will to combine the jazz and hip-hop thrust, to present rap music to jazz audiences. First of all David Boykin has been rapping for many years now, incorporating rap into his very experimental creative improvised music quite often. (Boykin

2010, *Ultra-Sheen* CD) The first time I saw him do this would have been in 2005 or so. A decade later, in a public discussion with Nicole Mitchell on August 27, 2014, Boykin explained that in his conjunction of hip-hop and jazz, he attempts to overcome a common shortcoming in other efforts to blend the two genres: that each suffers from a dilution of its central qualities – that hip-hop compromises the subject of its lyrics in favor of inept discussions of jazz, while jazz compromises its rhythmic variation and complexity in favor of the mechanized aesthetics of hip-hop beats. I had seen Boykin perform a concert with rap duo the Chess Mastas at an antique store called A Surplus of Options, and he would later present a performance series juxtaposing jazz and hip-hop at the Promontory in Hyde Park, on the South Side. Boykin's most recent and most ambitious project to combine the two genres took the form of the afore-mentioned "avant-garde jazz hip hOpera" entitled *The Lynching of (Insert the Name of Any White Killer of an Unarmed Black Here)* which he has performed several times in the last year, on both the North and South Sides.

What follows is a description of another performance in Chicago that I found very interesting, indicating potential future directions for Great Black Music on one hand, and difficulties of the marriage of jazz and hip-hop on the other. On March 30, 2013, Elastic Arts presented a mixed jazz / hip-hop concert at their space on North Milwaukee in the Avondale neighborhood on the North Side. The evening was emceed by Mario Smith, who had a weekly show on University of Chicago Radio station WHPK called *News from the Service Entrance* on Thursdays 2-4 pm. The first set was avant-garde jazz by a trio comprised of guitarist Jeff Parker, bassist Josh Abrams, and drummer John Herndon. Parker is perhaps best known for his work in the post-rock group Tortoise, and I imagined he was asked to play because of his success in surmounting genre boundaries. In this performance, Parker used a sampler that he controlled

with his foot so as to build layers of accompaniment over which he then soloed, which is a technique I had seen him use on one other occasion while playing solo. Josh Abrams later told me that he had played with The Roots many years prior, and John Herndon also had formidable hip-hop credentials and experience. However, I found their set to be tentative (as first sets often are in Chicago), and I thought that maybe the musicians were unsure how to relate to a very different crowd than they were used to seeing at Elastic. The second set was a performance by the hip-hop group Prime Meridian – members DJ Jaytoo, Simeon, and Race-Tacular – who put on a solid, engaging performance. They expressed some Conscious themes, performing pieces from their albums *Da Allnighta* (2005) and *Da Morning Afta* (2008). Simeon demonstrated his considerable skill at free-style. For the final set of the evening, Prime Meridian got together with the jazzers from the first set. This marriage was notably awkward, especially for the DJ. None of them seemed to have a sense of how the DJ could work with the musicians. He interjected little sounds here and there, but to little positive effect. Then the DJ put a record on and let it just play, at which time all the musicians stopped, having been blown out by the DJ's louder volume. But despite this awkwardness, the emcees didn't miss a beat, especially Simeon whose freestyle had the improvisatory mastery one expects in jazz. For their part, Abrams, Parker and John Herndon showed great poise, fashioning a satisfying groove for them to rap over. Once they had played for a while (the jazz musicians were clearly ready to quit, I imagine a little taxed by this alien setting) Mario the emcee took the mic and succeeded in eliciting participation from the audience, who cooperated with his entreaties to shout out themes for the rappers to rap about. The themes were GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms), violence, and the 80s. Simeon free-styled about violence and the 80s. The latter was most remarkable, but the audience really appreciated both of topics. Race-tacular flowed briefly about GMOs. Besides then-AACM

president and disco-poet Khari B. whom I noticed in the audience, I did not see any of the usual free jazz/creative music fans that frequent other events at Elastic and elsewhere in the city. Jazz presenter Susan Fox was stationed at the door collecting the admission fee. She told me she'd gotten a grant to do the show from the Jazz Audiences Initiative in Columbus, Ohio. The event seemed like what it was – an experiment of presenting hip-hop in venue much more used to jazz.

The difficulty in blending these two scenes was apparent, which was one of the things I thought made this a very valuable experience. The first thing I noticed was the great difference in loudness. The first set was usual, dynamic subtleties ruling the set and the drummer being conscious not to overpower the guitar and bass. But the hip-hop set was way too loud (from my jazz listener perspective). I was sitting in the second row, and the sound was unpleasantly loud. It was so loud the words were distorted. Most of the people stood to the back. It occurred to me that you don't usually sit at a hip-hop show; you stand, dance, bounce. Halfway through the second set, Race-tacular made fun of us for sitting. He picked up a chair and sat down, and said, "ah, that's better," commenting that we were all sitting down, so he was going to do like us. This moment pointed to the tension between hip-hop's origins with the now dominant jazz-as-art-music model. Hip-hop has perhaps not made the transition that jazz made in the 1940s from a dance music to an art music to be contemplated and savored while sitting. One of the main functions of the emcee has always been to exhort people, "Come on everybody, get on the [dance] floor!" – to stop sitting and dance to the music. So for people to sit and contemplate an emcee's stylings can be to render them ineffectual.

This event reminded me that people who were 18 in 1984 are turning 50. People who love hip-hop but who no longer enjoy standing in loud, dark sweaty venues with teenagers might really enjoy a more jazz-like format for live music. As the pioneers of hip-hop age, their

demographic starts to coincide with jazz. Rap music that eschews images of violence and decadent consumption could be palatable even to more conservative jazz fans, and rap music lovers might enjoy being exposed to the art of using acoustic instruments. But personally, I believe that the drives that propelled the emergence of the styles of jazz I love best – the need to destroy the boundaries that constricted jazz and to expand the possibilities of what can be considered musical – were in some ways best fulfilled by hip-hop artists in New York and then all over the world. Clearly there is great potential here, but the difficulties are apparent too. It's exciting to be on the ground as these two musical currents find common space and as the meaning of Great Black Music continues to expand.

Appendix – Transcription of “Zincali”

Zincali

Kelan Phil Cohran

$\text{♩} = 77$

Trumpet in B \flat

Horn in F

Baritone

Tuba

$\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$

⁴
B \flat Tpt.

Hn.

Bar.

Tuba

2 Zincali

♩ = 77

7

B \flat Tpt.

Hn.

Bar.

Tuba

♩ = 77

10

B \flat Tpt.

Hn.

Bar.

Tuba

♩ = 77

The musical score is for a piece titled "Zincali". It is written for four instruments: B \flat Tpt., Hn., Bar., and Tuba. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 77. The score is divided into two systems, each with three measures. The first system starts at measure 7, and the second system starts at measure 10. The B \flat Tpt. and Hn. parts have melodic lines with some rests and ties. The Bar. part has a simple rhythmic pattern. The Tuba part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Zincali

3

13

B \flat Tpt. $\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$

Hn.

Bar.

Tuba

16

B \flat Tpt. $\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$

Hn.

Bar.

Tuba

The musical score for 'Zincali' is presented in two systems, each containing three measures. The tempo is indicated as quarter note = 77. The instrumentation includes Bb Tpt., Hn., Bar., and Tuba. The Bb Tpt. and Hn. parts feature melodic lines, while the Bar. and Tuba parts provide harmonic support with sustained notes and rhythmic patterns.

4 Zincali

$\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$

19

B \flat Tpt.

Hn.

Bar.

Tuba

$\text{♩} = 77$ $\text{♩} = 77$

22

B \flat Tpt.

Hn.

Bar.

Tuba

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a piece titled 'Zincali'. It is written for four instruments: Bb Tpt., Hn., Bar., and Tuba. The tempo is marked as 77. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 19-21) has a tempo of 77. The second system (measures 22-23) also has a tempo of 77. The instrumentation includes Bb Tpt., Hn., Bar., and Tuba. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The first system (measures 19-21) shows the Bb Tpt. playing a melody with eighth and quarter notes, the Hn. playing a melody with eighth and quarter notes, the Bar. playing a melody with eighth and quarter notes, and the Tuba playing a melody with eighth and quarter notes. The second system (measures 22-23) shows the Bb Tpt. playing a melody with eighth and quarter notes, the Hn. playing a melody with eighth and quarter notes, the Bar. playing a melody with eighth and quarter notes, and the Tuba playing a melody with eighth and quarter notes.

Glossary of People Places and Fests

I have included here a very informal list of some of the musicians and venues I encountered in the course of my research. More than a glossary, these are notes. I make absolutely no claim as to completeness; on the contrary I state explicitly: there are many important artists whom I've not included here. It is clearly impossible not to leave somebody out. However, I know that readers might not be familiar with all of the people and places I discuss, and since I sometimes refer to local musicians, venues and festivals, rather than require a reader to go back and find where they were mentioned, I have included this list. I also thought it would be valuable for posterity to have this list of whom I encountered in the course of my study. I am also not claiming to have an accurate biography of each musician or an entire history of each venue, and since things are constantly shifting, this information was changing as I wrote. I offer this for what it is: a very imperfect glossary for the sake of convenience and as a snapshot of a moment in the jazz scene from one person's limited perspective within a discrete time frame.

Chicago Musicians

Joshua Abrams (bass) – very important avant-garde player. He keeps one foot in jazz, but he's very exploratory. His last record (came out on vinyl only) he only played guimbri – a string instrument of the Moroccan Gnawa (Black) people, which is also favored by William Parker and other jazz musicians lately. He has worked a lot with the AACM people such as Nicole Mitchell. He's the only white person I've seen play with the AACM at the highest levels – e.g. the only white person in the AACM anniversary show, in Ernest Dawkin's tribute to Fred Hampton. He also played with the Roots. I met Josh at the Vision Festival, and he told me a lot about the scene in Chicago even before I returned to Chicago for my research.

Dee Alexander (vocalist) – very prominent AACM vocalist who, among many other things, works very often with Ernest Dawkins’ group.

Fred Anderson (March 22, 1929 – June 24, 2010) **(tenor saxophone)** – Jazz elder/mentor/owner of the Velvet Lounge. There are websites and sessions still dedicated to his memory, years after his death. A full house at the Vision Festival gave him a full 10 minutes of silence on the day of his passing. He is probably the most important figure in the Chicago avant-garde – THE jazz ancestor par excellence. Enormously beautiful man, he kept the Velvet Lounge open for more than 25 years. It was a place where young people could play and hone their craft. And it was the home base of the Chicago AACM. There’s nobody on this scene that doesn’t speak of Anderson with deep reverence. His memory is sacred, like that of Coltrane – unassailable. Many sets are still dedicated to the memory of Fred, even years after his death. They just named a park after him.

Tatsu Aoki (bass, shamisen) – Regular collaborator with Fred Anderson, Mwata Bowden, and other AACM members. Aoki has repeatedly led Fred Anderson tribute performances. He is also a highly skilled performer of Japanese traditional instruments, having been trained in a geisha house in Japan. His Miyumi project combines jazz with traditional Japanese music.

Renee Baker (violin) – frequent collaborator with Nicole Mitchell (Niki’s gone to Cali now, though). She’s part of the AACM, but she’s largely oriented towards classical inflected and orchestral music. Baker works with the MB collective, which I’m now part of.

Harrison Bankhead (bass) – Very accomplished, popular bassist who plays with the AACM with great frequency.

Khari B. (disco poet) – President of the AACM during much of this study, Khari lives in NYC, but comes to Chicago frequently. Khari always delivers highly emotive Afrocentric poetry. He is the son of Mwata Bowden.

Mwata Bowden (bari sax, clarinet, digeridoo, etc.) – Ubiquitous in AACM shows, Mwata leads the Jazz X-tet at the University of Chicago. He's an important leader and spokesperson of the AACM. He's someone who will deftly articulate the most Afrocentric elements of the organization of the AACM – talk about the elders and ancestors, talk about facing the east before they play.

David Boykin (saxophones, drums) – Leader of the Sunday spiritual free jazz jam session called the Sonic Healing Ministries, most recently residing at the University of Chicago's Washington Park Arts Incubator. He's not part of the AACM. He has two main groups, the David Boykin expanse which performs his compositions, and the Microcosmic Sound Orchestra which focuses on free improvisation. Boykin was one of the first musicians I encountered playing this music, when he used to perform more often with Nicole Mitchell. I participated in the Sonic Healing Ministries nearly every week of his residency at the Incubator.

Xavier Breaker (drums) – Exciting young drummer. His group the Xavier Breaker Coalition performs complex compositions, but I have not heard him in any contexts I would describe as Afrocentric, Spiritual, experimental or avant-garde.

Ari Brown (saxophones) – Very popular, prominent saxophonist in Chicago, getting to be an elder himself, and earning wide respect. He plays everything from straight ahead to far out. Ari was the first jazz musician I ever saw at the Velvet Lounge, playing the adventurous music I came to understand only later. Ari had a Thursday session at the Velvet Lounge for many years,

which was an important part of the expansion of the club from offering music only on the weekends to certain weekdays. I was introduced to him by Eliel Sherman Storey many years later.

Maurice Brown (trumpet) – also very popular, good friends from high school with Corey Wilkes. He's in New Orleans now, but comes to Chicago sometimes. At the Englewood Jazz Festival 2012, he performed the most successful integration of rap and progressive/experimental jazz/creative improvised Black music I've seen so far.

Kelan Philip Cohran (harp, trumpet, frankiphone, french horn) – probably the most significant musical elder in Chicago now. Cohran started to ascend when he worked with Sun Ra. He then worked with Oscar Brown, Jr. before helping to found the AACM. Then he split from the AACM and started the Affro Arts Theatre, from which notables such as Earth Wind and Fire sprang. He has many many children; Eight of his sons have combined to form the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, with whom he performs occasionally. He performed with the AACM for their 45th anniversary in 2010, and for the 50th in 2015. Cohran is very committed to Black history and culture, recites African American traditional stories and Paul Laurence Dunbar's dialect poetry as part of his performances. He plays the harp more than anything, but also the frankiphone (a kind of electrified lamellophone of his own design), trumpet and French horn. I spent more than a year in orbit around Phil Cohran, attending weekly discussions in his home on topics ranging from Astronomy to music to history, parenting, medicine, cooking, politics ...

Gira Dahnee (vocals, keyboard) – Solo artist, but also Member of Participatory Music Coalition, collaborator with David Boykin, and singer Koku Gonza, Gira got her start in Chicago at the Velvet Lounge. She was a student of Saalik Ziyad, and now she has released an intriguing

EP entitled *Future Geechee*. Gira was one of my closest collaborators and supporters throughout this process.

Ernest Khabeer Dawkins (saxophones) – current AACM president, highly visible and renowned master, founder and director of the Englewood Jazz Festival and its organization, the Live the Spirit Residency. Dawkins is very committed to keeping the music in the Community. Englewood has one of the highest murder rates in Chicago; even for the South Side, it's pretty damn rough, but Ernest tries hard to keep jazz there. Dawkins has extensive relationships with South Africa and the jazz musicians there. He travels frequently there, also to Mozambique and elsewhere in Africa, e.g. Kinshasa Jazz Festival. I have served on the board of Live the Spirit Residency since 2012.

Justin Dillard (keyboard) – AACM member, used to play at the Velvet Lounge as one of the very few keyboardists that play on this scene in Chicago.

Hamid Drake (drums, frame drum, tabla, etc.) – Hamid is probably the most popular drummer in the music right now. When Hamid performs, it is an event, and everybody from the old Velvet Lounge days comes out. He is rarely in Chicago because he spends so much time in Europe getting paid. He is voracious about drum knowledge, and very generous with it as well. He paused in his recent set at the Hideout to explain his frame-drum. His recent set with Brötzmann was life-altering. He is also the nicest musician. He was a close collaborator of Fred Anderson. Also from Louisiana, also grew up in Evanston, IL (the town just over the northern border of Chicago, which has a substantial Black population too; home to Northwestern University). I spent an hour in the car with him, driving him from Brooklyn to his gig at the Vision Festival, and he was telling me all about Indian tala. And he has since

Douglas Ewart (saxophones, dijeridoo, English horn, etc.) – former AACM president. He lives in Minneapolis, but he comes here sometimes. He's from Jamaica, and he had this great Nyambinghi drum choir that played at the Velvet from time to time, but no more. His group Inventions was great. He's becoming an elder figure now of the AACM, but I think he's still a little too youthful to be classified as such. His concerts are another magnet for Velvet Lounge old-timers. He's a figure that draws people into the music. I've gotten his perspective on the music on several occasions, which have proven very valuable.

Von Freeman (tenor saxophone) – recently deceased master and mentor of innumerable young players c/o his weekly Tuesday session at the New Apartment Lounge. His funeral was attended by everybody in Chicago jazz, and around the time of his death, every set I saw was dedicated to the memory of "Vonsky." Part of 75th street is now named after him – Von Freeman Way. Legend has it he turned down Miles Davis in order to stay in Chicago. He's definitely a local jazz hero par excellence. A large portrait of him is displayed at the Green Mill next to the stage. He was definitely an elder. He seemed not so Afro-centric as the AACM, and I didn't see him working with the AACM people. When I went to the Apartment lounge, many of the musicians there were white, which is remarkable because 75th street is deep in the South Side, not even near Hyde Park, which makes it scary for white people. Many of the people who count him as their mentor were white. So Von Freeman was a rare integrative figure in a deeply racially divided music scene.

Theaster Gates (visual/performance artist, vocalist, arts organizer) – Theaster Gates is an artist and vocalist, but also the mastermind behind several substantial projects to stimulate renaissance on the South Side through the development of arts spaces. His projects include the Dorchester Projects, Black Cinema House, the Washington Park Arts Incubator, and the Stony

Island Arts Bank. Theaster Gates said, “The problem of Chicago is a problem of a spatial sickness that has evolved over the last forty or fifty years, like many cities. I feel like a doctor, a space doctor. Part of the practice is just about helping black neighborhoods become good neighborhoods.” (Gates 2010)

Viktor le Ewing Givens (vocals, visual/installation/video art, intermedia) – Viktor is a creative being who effortlessly slashes boundaries among expressive forms. He engages in jazz vocalism as one aspect of his visual/performance/installation/culinary art/ritual events. A student in Book and Paper at Columbia College when I met him, Viktor was a leader of the MB Collective and the Participatory Music Coalition.

Dan Godson (trumpet, percussion) – Member of David Boykin’s Microcosmic Sound Orchestra and director of the Borderbend Collective. Dan gave me some of my first gigs in Chicago.

Rajiv Halim (saxophone) – a very good young player that plays exciting, original compositions. He plays in Xavier Breaker’s group, sometimes with Ernest Dawkins and others.

Charles Heath (drums) – Plays adventurous straight ahead stuff. Strong drummer, sought after by strong straight ahead players. Charles programs a Wednesday night series, previously at the ETA Arts Theater, 75th and South Chicago Ave., which has since relocated to a restaurant on South Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. I worked briefly with Charles trying to raise funds for his youth music education program and for funding his series. Charles also plays with Ramsey Lewis.

Robert “Baabe” Irving, III (piano) – former musical director for Miles Davis. He leads the Miles Davis birthday celebration every year, in a different location, but always well-attended. I

met Baabe when he came to a few of the discussions with Phil Cohran. His newest ensemble called Generations features Charles Heath on Drums, Emma Dayhuff on bass, Irving Pierce and Rajiv Halim on Saxophone as well as his wife Lolo on sax. As its name represents, the band combines members of several “generations” of musicians.

Christopher McBride (sax) – Strong young saxophonist. Plays uncommon standards, nice original pieces which all have a story attached to them. He just had an incredibly successful (packed house!) CD release party at the South Loop Hotel. He has since moved to New York, but he returns with some frequency to Chicago.

Makaya McCraven (drums) – very important young drummer, popular now with AACM people. He put together an astounding group for a show at the Millenium Park Pritzker Pavillion in 2012.

Taylor Moore (drums, timbales) – young female drummer. Apparently she started at the Brown Derby Thursday sessions, and she is now touring.

Jeff Parker (guitar) – well known even outside of the jazz scene from his work with Chicago “post-rock” band Tortoise, he was also a regular at the Velvet Lounge. Parker had a regular gig at Rodan on Thursdays in Wicker Park for 10 years until 2012.

Junius Paul (bass) – very active bassist who used to play with Fred et al. at the Velvet lounge very frequently. Junius often plays with Ernest Dawkins. I saw him with Kahil el Zabar recently.

Irving Pierce (saxophone) – Thrilling very young saxophonist. I saw him first with Ernest Dawkins' Live the Spirit Residency Big Band performing Dawkins' piece for Dr. Martin Luther King.

Avreeayl Ra (drummer) – very powerful master-drummer of the AACM. He was a regular fixture at the old Velvet lounge. Now he plays in various settings around the city, mostly for free music, rarely straight ahead.

Mike Reed (drums) – Long-time collaborator with Nicole Mitchell and David Boykin, Mike also owns/operates the most important venue for avant-jazz/experimental jazz in Chicago right now, the rather new Constellation in the North Side neighborhood of Ravenswood. He also serves on the programming committee for the Chicago Jazz Festival. He has recently reopened a refurbished Hungry Brain venue on the North Side.

Tomeka Reid (cello) – AACM member and collaborator for many years, Tomeka was an artist in residence at the Washington Park Arts Incubator which included the establishment of the out-jazz series First Mondays, and the organization of the *String Summit*, which also had events at the University of Chicago Logan Center.

Cecile Savage (bass) – French female bass player. She used to play with Famadou Don Moye (of the Art Ensemble) before moving to New York in the 1970s, then to Chicago. In the middle of my study, she moved to New Orleans. I met Cecile at the old Velvet Lounge, and she was very informative about the current scene in Chicago. It was she who showed me the best jam sessions to attend.

Isaiah Spencer (drummer) – Isaiah used to run the Sunday jam session at the old and new Velvet Lounge. He frequently works with AACM musicians, especially Ernest Dawkins. He ran a Wednesday night jam session at the Watering Hole on the West Side.

“Eliel” Sherman Storey (saxophones) – mostly free jazz player. I met him at David Boykin’s Sonic Healing Ministries, and he taught me a lot about music and playing the saxophone. Eliel is the owner/operator of Transition East, a recording studio, music venue, and a record label on the South Side of Chicago, not to be confused with Transitions East, which was a venue operated by Phil Cohran on Cottage Grove in the 1970s.

Justin “Justefan” Thomas (vibraphone) – Young vibraphonist who excels at straight-ahead music, but has also performed more experimental/creative work with Ernest Dawkins.

Edward Wilkerson, Jr. (saxophone, dijeridoo, oud) AACM member. His group Eight Bold Souls was very active in the 1980s. He often plays now with Mwata Bowden, sometimes with Jim Baker.

Corey Wilkes (trumpet) – AACM member. Very popular and capable. He’s replaced Lester Bowie in the Art Ensemble of Chicago and frequently plays with Kahil El Zabar’s Ethnic Heritage Ensemble.

Alex Wing (guitar, bass, oud, alto clarinet, keyboards) – Frequent collaborator with David Boykin, and member of his microcosmic sound orchestra. Alex also plays in a middle-eastern music ensemble and works with Theaster Gates on a music education program involving children on the South Side.

Saalik Ziyad (vocalist) – Former secretary of the AACM. He used to perform regularly at the new Velvet Lounge with his father Talib-din Ziyad. Now he performs with AACM members in other settings.

New York People

Roy Campbell (September 29, 1952 – January 9, 2014) (**trumpet**) – Active part of the Arts for Art scene until his unexpected death in January 2014, Roy Campbell taught me to explore the harmonic series in search of the structures in music.

Cooper-Moore (piano, mouth bow, harp) – accomplished New York figure in the music, Cooper-Moore is also an instrument maker. He created a “loft” performance space at 501 Canal Street in the 1970s. Cooper-Moore taught me some jazz theory that helped me understand what the musicians were playing.

William Parker (bass, etc.) – much celebrated bassist, having worked with Cecil Taylor for some 8 years, and main musical man of the Vision Festival of avant-jazz. He is the author of *Conversations*. I worked as the Associate Director for Arts for Art, inc. – the organization that runs the Vision Festival – in 2011 and 2012, and I continue to help run the festival every year.

Patricia Nicholson Parker (dancer, organizer) – Executive Director of Arts for Art, inc. which has presented the annual Vision Festival for the past 19 years. It was through working with the Parkers and the Vision Festival that I was introduced to many of the musicians in the New York scene.

Matana Roberts (saxophone) – Originally from Chicago, Matana Roberts is a member of the AACM who moved to New York. I was introduced to Matana at the Vision Festival by a

contingent from the Velvet Lounge who had made the trip to New York with Fred Anderson in 2007. Matana was gracious enough to give me a few comments on my project a year or so later.

California People

Nicole Mitchell (flute) – longtime Chicago resident, former president of the AACM, acclaimed flutist who has now moved to California and become a professor. Mitchell was one of the first musicians I encountered on the avant-garde scene in Chicago, who initially led me to the velvet Lounge, and to the Vision Festival.

Wadada Leo Smith (trumpet) – AACM member and extraordinary composer. Wadada Leo Smith has an approach to sound that exemplifies the focus on timbre in the avant-garde. I met him and spoke with him at William Parker's 60th birthday party.

Oluyemi Thomas (saxophone, bass clarinet) – Deeply spiritual musician from the Bay Area. His music, often based on graphic scores much like several members of the AACM, are part of this same tradition. His insights are also valuable for the spiritual underpinnings of his music from the unique perspective of a Baha'i. I met him at the Vision Festival.

Organizations and Collectives

Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians [AACM] (Chicago and New York)

Black Artists Group [BAG] (St. Louis)

Union of Gods Musicians and Artists Ascension [UGMAA] (Los Angeles)

Jazz Composers Guild (New York City) – Bill Dixon

Detroit Creative Musicians' Association (Detroit)

Border Bend collective (Chicago) – Dan Godson

MB Collective (Chicago, DC) – Jenae’ Nicole Taylor, Viktor le Ewing Givens

Umbrella Music (Chicago) – Mitch Cocanig, Dave Rempis, Josh Berman, Mike Reed.

Arts for Art (New York) – Patricia and William Parker et al.

Live the Spirit Residency (Chicago) – Ernest Dawkins

Jazz Unites (Chicago) – Geraldine DeHaas

Jazz Institute of Chicago – Lauren Deutsch

Participatory Music Coalition (Chicago) – Angel Elmore, Viktor Le Ewing Givens, Adam Zanolini

Venues

Full Time Jazz Clubs

Green Mill – famous from its days of hosting Al Capone, the Green Mill presents mostly straight-ahead jazz but often with original compositions. It is very popular and crowded; located in the North Side neighborhood of Uptown. Sometimes Ari Brown plays here, and once Nicole Mitchell held a CD release.

Andy’s – Presents straight-ahead jazz in the heart of the River-North tourism/shopping district. Ernest Dawkins and Corey Wilkes often play here, and some others who sometimes play creative music, but not at this venue.

Jazz Showcase – Fanciest jazz club in Chicago, which presents the most famous, mainstream international acts. Located in the trendy South Loop neighborhood.

Velvet Lounge (now gone, but its spirit lives on!) – Fred Anerson’s club which nurtured free/avant-jazz/creative music for over 25 years. Fred and his club had a lot to do with the

strength of the Chicago free music scene. Most of the free musicians playing in Chicago now, or who've left, got their start playing at the Velvet Lounge. The club was forced to relocate in 2005, managing to raise over \$100,000 to do so. Anderson died in 2010, and the club closed shortly thereafter despite the best efforts of the Chicago jazz community to keep it going.

Constellation – New venue run by Mike Reed. This is the friendliest venue for the free/avant-garde music. Frequently presents New York and European free jazz musicians such as William Parker, Peter Brötzmann, Charles Gayle, et al. A large portrait of Fred Anderson hangs above the bar. Located in the Roscoe Village neighborhood on the North Side.

Series / Sometimes Jazz Spots

**[programmed by Umbrella Music]

Caribbean Cove Restaurant – weekly Wednesday series programmed by Charles Heath.

Co-Lab Space – Kahil El Zabar's loft, with an on-again off-again Monthly series on Sundays

DuSable Museum for African American History – monthly summer series on Wednesdays; occasional large presentations e.g. Ernest Dawkins' King piece, and Charles Heath presents Nnenna Freelon.

Elastic Arts Foundation (Fridays and Saturdays)**

ETA Creative Arts Foundation – weekly Wednesday Series curated by Charles Heath.

Experimental Sound Studio – North Side.

Hideout (Wednesdays)**

House of Bing Chinese Restaurant – weekly Friday series Programmed by Joe Stroter's Mo Better Jazz

Hungry Brain (Sundays)**

Hyde Park Records – occasional performances

Lee's Unleaded Blues – occasional jazz nights

Museum of Contemporary Art (“MCA”) – weekly Tuesday series, Summer; occasional presentations e.g. AACM anniversary, Theaster Gates’ group.

Millenium Park Pritzker Pavillion – Made in Chicago – World Class Jazz series programmed by the Jazz Institute of Chicago.

Negro League Café (now defunct)

Room 43 – weekly Sunday series programmed by the Hyde Park Jazz Society

Skylark – Monday series

South Side Community Arts Center – partnership with the AACM and the MB Collective.

Universal Alley Jazz Jam – weekly summer outdoor series, run by Dr. C. Siddha Webber

Washington Park Arts Incubator – First Mondays

Jam Sessions

50 Yard Line (Tuesdays, run by Margaret Murphy Webb)

Andy’s jam session (Sundays)

The Brown Derby (Thursdays)

City Life (resurrected Sundays, run by June Yvonne)

Constellation Sounds of the City Workshop (Wednesdays)

John Coltrane Conservatory for the Arts (Saturdays)

Multi-Kulti (Tuesdays and Sundays)

Norman’s (Sundays, run by Ernest Dawkins)

Sonic Healing Ministries (Sundays, run by David Boykin)

The Water Hole (Wednesdays, run by Isaiah Spencer, dedicated to Fred Anderson)

Velvet Lounge Jam session (Sundays)

Festivals

Chicago Jazz Festival – Labor Day Weekend

Chi-Town Jazz Festival supporting Hunger Relief – March

Englewood Jazz Festival – Run by Ernest Dawkins and Live the Spirit Residency – September

Hyde Park Jazz Festival – September

South Shore Jazz Festival – Established by Geraldine DeHaas – July

Umbrella Music Festival – November

Annotated Discography

- Abrams, Joshua. 2012. *Representing*. Ermite Records MTE-58 LP. Abrams, a prominent Chicago bassist who has played with many of the AACM luminaries, and also with The Roots, has assembled an ensemble that features him entirely on the guimbri, a plucked string instrument of the Gnawa people of Morocco.
- Adebayo, Soji and the Praise Music Quintet. 2012. *Asase Yaa*. Ancient Africa Music, Inc. digital album, <http://sojiadebayo.bandcamp.com/track/asase-yaa-part-1-of-2> (accessed February 4, 2014). This album was recorded at Transitions East Studio in Chicago, 6/3/2008. Soji Adebayo (Yamaha digital piano, bamboo flute and bells), Avreeayl Ra (drums), Pakisa Fenner (tenor saxophone), Dawi Williams (bass), Enoch Williamson (conga drum, African percussion) Recorded and Mixed by Eliel Sherman Storey.
- Ameer, Malik & The Madmen. 2008. *The Roseline*. Satori Ideas CD. This recording is a bold combination of rap and avant-jazz.
- Ancestral Resurrection Ensemble. 2010. *Rescuing Agape*. CD. Dr. Siddha Webber's group's name is significant, as are the titles to the pieces on this album: "Sacred Space", "Music Just Can't Be Music", "Culture of Insanity", "Have Your Way/Holy Spirit", "When the Killer Kills." Dr. Webber programs the Universal Alley Jazz Jam outdoor jazz concert series in the summer on 75th street.
- The Art Ensemble of Chicago. 1974. "Illistrum" in *Fanfare for the Warriors*. Atlantic LP SD 1651. This recording includes a "myth poem" written and recited by Joseph Jarman, which seems to be cosmological in nature.
- Avakian, Bob. 2011. "All Played Out."
- Ayler, Albert Trio. 1965. *Spiritual Unity*. ESP Disk LP. This recording is one of the seminal works of free jazz. Ayler, drummer Sunny Murray, and bassist Gary Peacock.
- Boykin, David. *The Nextspiritmental Musics of Saxophonist David Boykin*. Dreamtime CD #17620.
- . 2010. *Ultra Sheen*. Sonic Healing Ministries CD. This recording is notable for Boykin's incorporation of experimental (jazz) music with hip-hop.
- Carn, Doug. *Infant Eyes*. 1971. Black Jazz Records LP.
- Cohran, Philip and the African Heritage Ensemble. 1967. *Armageddon*. Tizona Record Co. LP. Liner notes describe an origin story involving outer-space beings who brought experimental mutants to Earth in order to sequester them and observe their development. The pieces on the album represent different aspects of the story, and different instruments represent different elements of the story as well. The notes specify: "Armageddon was conceived in 1958 and written down in 1963. After performing with Sun-Ra and benefitting from the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Phil Cohran's compositions changed decidedly, and he began to focus on cosmology and culture. This particular performance was recorded live at the Afro [sic] Arts Theatre at 3900 S. Drexel, Chicago, IL on February 11, 1968."

- . [1967?] *On the Beach*. Kelan Zulu Productions LP. This studio recording documents the music that was played at the 63rd Street Beach concerts in 1967 organized by Cohran and led by him and his African Heritage Ensemble. It features Cohran playing the Frankiphone, which is Cohran's electrified adaptation of the African lamellophone.
- . 1968. *Malcolm X Memorial (A Tribute in Music)*, Zulu Records, 1968, LP. This LP was recorded live at the Affro Arts Theater in 1968. Its four pieces are a musical periodization of the life of Malcolm X marked by four names used by Malcolm – Malcolm Little, Detroit Red, Malcolm X, and El Hajj Malik El Shabazz – and present distinctly iconic representations of his life during the time periods during which he used those names.
- . [1967?] *Million Dollar Monkey on My Back*, Lost Weekend Records LP, LW 1001. Phil Cohran playing the Frankiphone behind an interview of a drug addict. Starts off saying he had a \$150/day habit = a little over \$1,000/week, \$52,000/year X about 20 years is over \$1 Million. Tommy Williams interviews Oscar 'Curley' McClure. McClure, a musician, tells of losing jobs by being too high and confesses to having to steal to support his habit.
- . 2009. *Spanish Suite*, Katalyst, 2009 CD. Though released much later, the music on this CD was recorded in 1968. Phil Cohran's interest in Spain is largely due to the history of the seven-century rule of the Moors, whom he considers to be one of the greatest civilizations in human history.
- . 2011. *The Zulu 45s Collection*. Jazzman LP.
- Cohran, Kelan Phil and Legacy. 1993. *African Skies*. Captcha Records, LP. This music was commissioned to accompany a presentation of African Astronomy by the Adler Planetarium in 1993. It features Cohran mostly playing harp.
- Cohran, Kelan Phil. 1996. *Meditation*, Katalyst, CD.
- Cohran, Kelan Phil and the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. 2012. *Kelan Phil Cohran and the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble*. Honest John Records LP. This recording features interpretations of several of Phil Cohran's most important compositions by his sons, who comprise the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble.
- Coltrane, Alice. 1970a. *Journey in Satchidananda*. Impulse! LP.
- . 1970b. *Ptah, the El Daoud*. Impulse! LP.
- . 1971. *Universal Consciousness*. Impulse! LP.
- Coltrane, John. 1959. "Harmonique," *Coltrane Jazz*. Atlantic LP.
- . 1965. *A Love Supreme*. Impulse LP.
- Coltrane-Turiyasangitananda, Alice. 1990. *Infinite Chants*. Avatar Book Institute (USA), ABI-102 (Cassette). This recording was made by Alice Coltrane – Turiyasangitananda after her ascension into spiritual leadership at the Vedanta Center in Thousand Oaks, California, at which time her name gradually changed to Turiyasangitananda. This example shows how Alice Coltrane was able to integrate African American sacred music practices with kirtan – Hindu devotional music that is often participational. The rousing first track, "Sita Ram" transitions from a group chant of "sita ram" going through several tonal centers, abruptly shifting to a slower, groove over which a solo soul vocalist improvises melodic phrases over Turiyasangitananda's organ.

Dahnee, Gira. 2015. "Origins," *Future Geechee* EP.

Dawkins, Ernest. 2012. *Afro-Straight*. Delmark CD. This is Dawkins' first recording of standards, which he performs in an Africanized style. The cover art elicits a smile from everyone who sees it: Two pictures of Ernest, one in African garb, the other in a sharp suit, but arranged so that the two images are meeting each other.

Dawkins, Ernest 2009 *Un-Till Emmett Till*. Dawk Music CD. This was a performance of the eponymous suite for Dawkins' Chicago 12 ensemble performed live at the Sons d'Hiver Festival in Paris in February 2008. The

Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, *Ka-Real*, Silkheart, 2000, CD. Kahil El Zabar's project, the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble combines jazz with African traditional music. The roster for this group shifts, but is usually a trio. Here, there is Zabar, Ernest Dawkins, and Joseph Bowie. Zabar plays sanza (African lamellophone) on "Great Black Music", the title of which refers to the concept popularized by the motto of the AACM. Zabar acknowledges Phil Cohran for having introduced him to the instrument.

Ethnic Heritage Ensemble. 1981. *Three Gentlemen from Chicago*. Moers Music LP.

Fertile Ground. 2000. *Spiritual War*. FG00001 This is a more recent, 21st Century spiritual jazz recording from a group led by James H. Collins, Jr. It begins with "Libations", which includes complex polyrhythmic drumming with a trap set as well as conga drums. The lyrics say, "Are you ready for the war? Get ready to fight," over and over. "Spiritual War" moves the congas far into the background, but asserts a strong 6/8 rhythm with a strong syncopated groove in the background (male) vocals. The chorus is: "Life will overcome the darkness. The universal law has taught this. Infinite peace, infinite bliss. Infinite bliss. Infinite light will prevail." "Runaway slave" is a performance poem that turns a noun into an imperative, entreating us to run away from the condition we now find ourselves in. It says "runaway slave, run away back to the time when culture was life, was religion, was food, was love, was god, was real, was right, was nature, was heaven, was music ... " The short piece is remarkable not only for its literal content, but also for the way it fuses earlier styles of performance poetry (such as the Last Poets and Gil Scott Heron) with more recent slam-ready styles that are more influenced by hip-hop (such as the L.Y.R.I.C squad in Chicago).

Grandmaster Flash and Melle Mel. 1982. "The Message."

Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. 2011. *Bullet Proof Brass*. Pheelco Entertainment CD. This album includes "Black Boy" on which Phil Cohran tells a brief story of his ascent into consciousness of the ancestors and their knowledge of the cosmos as well as exegesis of some of that knowledge.

Irving, Robert III. 2004. *Hezu Em Medu Rey Kemet (Songs in the Language of Kemet)*. AIH/Sonic Portraits Entertainment CD.

Jarman, Joseph. 1968. *As If It Were the Seasons*. Delmark LP.

———. 2000. *Lifetime Visions for the Magnificent Human*. Bopbuda CD.

Last Poets, The. (1970) 2000 "Niggers Are Scared of Revolution," in *The Last Poets*, Fuel 2000 Records, CD 2002.

- Lee, Don L. 1970. *Rappin' & Readin'* Broadside Press LP BR1. Also known as Haki Madhubuti, Don L. Lee recorded this early example of recorded rapping following poetry readings. Included is the remarkable “a poem to compliment other poems” interspersing the words “change” and “nigger” with evocative scenarios and exhortations.
- Lowe, Frank. 1971. *Black Beings*. ESP LP. Reissued as CD in 2008. This is reportedly the first album William Parker (bass) ever recorded on. It’s also a stunning example of saxophone SOUND with both Joseph Jarman (alto) and Frank Lowe (tenor). Rashid Sinan (drums), Raymond Lee Cheng (violin).
- McDowell, Mississippi Fred. 1997. “What’s the Matter Now” *Portraits: the First Recordings: Mississippi Fred McDowell*. Rounder CD 1718. This was recorded by Alan Lomax in 1959. It is a solo guitar accompanying vocals on a one-chord blues with responsorial interjections by two women commenting throughout.
- McIntyre, Kalaparusha Maurice. 1969. *Humility in the Light of the Creator*. Delmark LP.
- Mitchell, Nicole. 2002. *Afrika Rising*. Dreamtime Records CD 004.
- Mtume Umoja Ensemble. 1972. *Alkebu-lan – Land of the Black (Live at the East)*. Strata East 2XLP. This record begins with a statement about its relation to the principles of Maulana Karenga’s doctrine of Kawaïda: “the Black ideology of change.” The music is framed as a “humble offering to the unity of the entire Black nation and all those who through Kawaïda have tasted the nectar of its totality.” James Mtume says, “What you are about to hear is not jazz, or some other irrelevant term we allow others to use in defining our creation ... but the continuing process of nationalist consciousness manifesting its message within the context of one of our strongest natural resources: Black music.” He also explains that Alkebulan means Land of the Blacks. “Wherever Black people are.” This is very illuminating regarding the idea of Black Nationalism and the common association between nation and control over land/territory – the equation of the concept of nation with nation-state. Black music must have an effect. “We must begin to view our musical compositions as vessels through which concerts become conscious conversation, and our records, repositories of positive Black images.”
- Murray, Sunny. 1970. “Suns of Africa, pt. 1” *Homage to Africa*. BYG Actuel LP.
- Newberry, Rahpre. 2011 “7 Meditations.” Musical recording, distributed through CDbaby.com. The notes state: “7 meditations was recorded and created on January 7 my Earthday. The music is an expression of my spiritual journey and the many artists that have influence [sic] my playing over the years.” The piece incorporates reggae/ska guitar skank (up-stroke), and burru rhythms in the hand drums. The organ employs ascending and descending Phrygian dominant scale fragments. This saxophone recording is made more mystical with the use of heavy reverberation on the recording.
- Nu, Nuwki. 2012. *Cosmic Forces,,,,,, Now*. Musical recording, distributed through CDbaby.com.
- Participatory Music Coalition. 2015. *Retrograde Sessions: Live at Transition East*. PMC Records CD 001.
- The Pharaohs. 1972. *Awakening*. Chicago: Scarab Records LP.
- Prime Meridian. 2005. *Da Allnighta*. Chicago: All Natural CD.

———. 2008. *Da Mornin' Afta*. Chicago: All Natural CD.

Roberts, Matana. 2011. *Coin Coin Chapter One: Gens De Couleur Libre*. Constellation Records CD.

———. 2013. *Coin Coin Chapter Two: Mississippi Moonchile*. Constellation Records CD.

———. 2015. *Coin Coin Chapter Three: River Run Thee*. Constellation Records CD.

Sanders, Pharaoh. 1969. "The Creator Has A Master Plan," *Karma*. Impulse LP.

Smith, Cauleen. 2013. *Black Utopia – Rehearsal Tapes & Lectures Selected From The Alton Abraham/Sun Ra Audio Archives*. Three Walls LP.

The Soul Messengers, *The Soul Messengers*, CBS 1975, LP. The Soul Messengers were members the Black Hebrew Israelites, a group of Chicagoans led by the Honorable Ben Ammi. They emigrated in 1967 first to Liberia, then to Israel, settling in the cities of Dimona, Mitzpeh Ramon, and Arad in the south of that country.

Sun Ra. 1965. *Angels and Demons at Play*. Saturn LP. According to several discographies, this recording collects recordings made at various times between 1956 and 1960 and features Phil Cohran on cornet and violin uke (a bowed zither).

———. 1978. *The Antique Blacks*. Saturn LP.

———. 1969. *Atlantis*. Saturn LP.

———. (1966) 2010. *Heliocentric Worlds*. ESP-Disk Box Set.

———. 1978. "There Are Other Worlds They Have Not Told You of," *Lanquidity*, Philly Jazz LP.

Tolliver, Charles, "On the Nile," *The Ringer*, Black Lion 1992, LP. Stanley Cowell (p), Steve Novosel (b) and Jimmy Hops (d). 12/8 meter represents Africa. Something in the chord progression, combined with the title, seems meant to represent Egypt or Middle Eastern music. I think it's the Phrygian sound, with the flat 2nd just before the bridge goes back to the A section.

Williams, Mary Lou. 1964. *Black Christ of the Andes*. Folkways LP.

X, Louis. 1960. "A White Man's Heaven Is A Black Man's Hell," A Muslim Sings, 7" 45-RPM vinyl record. Louis Farrakhan started his career as a calypso singer, even before Harry Belafonte popularized the genre in the United States, as Gene Walcott "The Charmer" in Boston. He recorded songs such as "Ugly Woman" and "Back to Back, Belly to Belly." Then he stopped performing as an entertainer after joining the Nation of Islam in 1955. But this recording was recorded in 1960 and distributed by the Nation of Islam. It begins with virtuosic violin playing by Farrakhan (then Louis X), and is followed by a Chicago soul funk song, in a style similar to The Pharaohs and The Soul Messengers, in which he expounds some of the Nation of Islam's doctrine.

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