

**IN THE AURAL TRADITION:
CULTURAL PEDAGOGIES OF BLACK MUSIC**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2017

In the context of cultural networks of black Atlantic discourse, this dissertation asks how black music was and is employed for pedagogical purposes. Recognizing that aurality, race, and pedagogy are dynamically involved in the production, reception, and interpretation of culture, the dissertation outlines new directions of inquiry into the aural dimensions and educative functions of African American musical languages. It submits *aural tradition* as a framework for understanding the ways in which modern African American cultural producers engaged with, intervened in, and regenerated ways of listening that came to mediate popular culture. Moreover, the dissertation conceptualizes *African American cultural pedagogy* to reveal and constellate a series of cultural pedagogies found within the wide trajectories of African American cultural history. By examining listening alongside African American literature's epistemological and political investments in recovering diasporic heritage, the undervalued role of listening attains its proper estimation. Hence, the dissertation begins in the early twentieth century when black music came to circulate widely in national and international flows of distribution and reception, and argues that cultural pedagogies coexist as pedagogically reflexive mediations of cultural production in relationship to the sociopolitical dynamics of black diasporicity. The most fundamental relationship between orality and literary production is not writing itself, but the undervalued art and work of listening that effectively enables writing and subsequent learning. By adopting aural tradition as a category of analysis, long-celebrated techniques of literary craft

used to represent sound and music are further affirmed as virtuosic constituents of African American literary production; in the shift toward listening, however, such techniques are more fully regarded as efforts to recalibrate, recondition, and newly enhance aurality and teachability.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION: AURAL TRADITION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL PEDAGOGY

Across generations of scholarship on the history, politics, genres, and aesthetics of diasporic cultural expression, oral tradition has been an anchor of empirical research, critical analysis, and theoretical inquiry. The epistemological centering of oral traditions has been vital for understanding the cultural trajectories of African diasporas, for it was in so many ways the oral that bridged expressive cultures of Africa with those of other continents, establishing transnational networks of communication, chronicling experiences unrecorded in writing, and engendering communicative pathways for knowledge distribution, identity formation, cultural empowerment, and political resistance. In correspondence with political tipping points, technological turns, and shifting cultural sensibilities, these oral traditions were translated into aesthetically innovative and politically engaged forms of literature, and from W. E. B. Du Bois to contemporary experts of sound and music in language, scholars have continued the work of identifying oral tradition in various genres and contexts, critically and theoretically engaging its transmedial, transgenerational, transnational articulations.

This dissertation outlines new directions of inquiry into the *aural* dimensions and educative functions of African American musical languages. It examines works by African American writers, theorists, and musicians who have reimagined the boundaries between music and literature for the purposes of creating cultural pedagogies that make aesthetic, political, and philosophical interventions. The formal and thematic influence of African American music has shaped key works of literature so thoroughly that literary and musical traditions become, at

times, unified in a project of epistemological reformation articulated through textual and performative cultural pedagogies. Recognizing these works' calls for multisensory modes of interpretation and historically informed, even political acts of "listening," the dissertation responds by advocating for an interdisciplinary way of reading African American literature and music that is predicated on aurality. Under a rubric of aurality, listening is taken literally as a crucial influence in the formation of literary works, and figuratively as a measure of and means for the advancement of egalitarianism.

The dissertation takes up several questions. The first are reciprocal: how can existing theories of listening advance critical understandings of the pedagogical aspects of African American music in terms of performance and in terms of literary communication? Likewise, how can analyses of African American literature's pedagogical applications of the sonic serve to advance existing theories of listening and aurality? While hearing is measurable through acoustical mechanics and physiological response, listening is phenomenological, subjectively interiorized, and legibly sharable insofar as the listener can find ways to express aural experience. Listening is active and intentional, requiring effort to understand stimuli more deeply than what physiologically meets the ear, a decoding that may result in multiple forms of discovery, experience, and learning. Hearing a voice, detecting it, is only the beginning of the work of critically listening to the voice: the analytic listener's subsequent impulse to consider the unconscious of the speaker, the analysand, implicates the analyst, as well. As Roland Barthes writes, "The injunction to listen is the total interpellation of one subject by another" (251). Several articulations of African American cultural pedagogy take up listening in this way, compelling the reader to engage other voices dialogically, to respond to their calls.

Rethinking listening itself as an object of analysis requires theoretical and philosophical foundations, but rather than turn exclusively to academic disciplines to formulate those foundations, in this dissertation I incorporate literary and musical texts themselves as forms of theory and philosophy. Because aural experiences are phenomenologically ephemeral and compositionally difficult to recount—words escape the listener and/or fail to adequately represent aural experience—I find special value in taking up a research paradigm that values the literary text itself as an articulation of critical theory. The special value of literature, especially literature highly attentive to auditory experience as a locus of transfigurative learning, lies in its creators' abilities to represent linguistically psychoacoustic interiorities with great expressive acumen. It is the special achievement of literary authors to find words lost to others, to use words that succeed in expression rather than fail. The experience of sound is discussed across the arts and sciences, yet because experience finds most of its discourse through utterance and transcription, literary authors' efforts to find the words to represent auditory experience can and should be considered as efforts to teach others about modalities of listening. Scholars should not only turn to scholarship on music or to musical objects in themselves, but to the affective transcriptions of aurality and the reconditioning of the senses that can occur through the pedagogy of cultural expression.

As I seek to demonstrate, aurality takes on special value in a context of interdisciplinary African American cultural pedagogy. First, as numerous scholars have demonstrated, African American oral practices have been profoundly influential in the making of African American cultural traditions, resulting in an expressive trajectory immensely valuable for theorizing how aurality influences consciousness—that is, psychoacoustics. Oral culture is so present in African American literary history that to ignore the role, work, and conditions of listening that allowed

for its translation is to hinder cultural-historical and literary-critical understandings of the literature itself. Additionally, by examining listening within the broader trajectory of African American literature's epistemological and political investments in recovering diasporic heritage, the undervalued role of listening in community formation attains its proper estimation: the polyphony of communitarian activity is not about vocalization alone, but about reception, internal reflection, and corresponding action (spoken, written, or otherwise). Moreover, reading aurally reveals African American literature's interiorized spaces of reclaiming and reformulating expressions of individuality and communality. While developments in black political and artistic culture stemming from the Black Arts and Black Power period are often viewed as oppositional and declamatory, cultural engagements with sociopolitical futurity fashion an ethos of aurality and polyvocality quite different from what might be misunderstood as mono-vocal separatisms. From this perspective, the long-celebrated techniques of literary craft used to represent sound and music are further affirmed as virtuosic constituents of African American literary production; in a constructive shift toward aurality, however, such techniques are more fully regarded as efforts to recalibrate, recondition, and newly enhance readers' listening abilities. Such a shift promotes oral writing not as purely representative of voices and sounds in themselves, but as efforts to create rhetorically rich, innovatively pedagogical opportunities that become accessible through the critical work of listening and reading. The chapters ahead identify qualities of African American cultural pedagogy that showcase the educative work of preserving, sharing, and extending listeners' experiences as bases for imagining—and thus compelling others to imagine—egalitarian futures.

The dissertation also engages prominent approaches to the intersection of sound and literature that chart literary works' engagements with various forms of technology, but with a

shift. While it is clear that African American literature, whose prominence escalated in tandem with listening devices' ever-increasing mediation of sociocultural life, responded to and engaged with the rapid advancement of sound reproduction technologies with particular dynamism, I make a subtle but significant departure from the role of technology itself to the acts of listening it enabled. Following the contemporaneous advents of recorded sound and popular African American music in the late nineteenth century, acts of listening to music, oration, and historically specific soundscapes informed African American literary production. And, because aural experiences, sonic memories, and critical listening abilities—what scientists refer to as auditory imagery—structure a reader's engagement with literature, I seek to show how acts of listening to corresponding performance texts enhance the experience of reading African American literature, advance critical appreciation of its forms, and illuminate its ethos of egalitarian knowledge formation.

My title is derived from Amiri Baraka's 1980 spoken-word poem, "In the Tradition" (see Chapter 4). I submit the term *aural tradition* as a framework for understanding the ways in which modern African American cultural producers engaged with, intervened in, and regenerated ways of listening that came to mediate popular culture. Mid- to late-nineteenth-century African American literature found wide circulation just when the popular music industry began to coalesce, a moment when white composers' approximations of black music began to circulate via written arrangements such as Stephen Foster's "Plantation Melodies." Phonographs soon made black sound a tangible, purchasable, yet also disembodied form of cultural property, creating an international audience of listeners removed from the spectacles of minstrel shows and also leading to the innovative literary aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance. By the 1950s, jazz was being played more for listening than it was for dancing, and consumer demand met aesthetic

dedication to sonic quality: five years after a passionate listener and devotee of music, Ralph Ellison, published a quintessentially sonic novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), *Time* magazine covered the emerging cultural phenomenon of “audiophilia.” In the musically explosive years of the 1960s and 70s, literary and political voices of the Black Arts Movement rose above music’s new levels of intentional noise and unprecedented amplification, contributing to the development of contemporary literary and musical aesthetics that today resonate globally across numerous genres.

For generations of scholarship, the normative response to these developments has been to focus on how the oral is written down; in other words, when speaking about African American literature and related cultural texts, the implied counterpart of oration has not been listening, but transcription. The resultant texts are so dominantly perceived as objects of orality, as veritable transmutations of oral expression, that the role of listening is obscured. The text is, in fact, as much a result of listening to oration as the fact of oration itself: without the listener, there is no text. Thus while oftentimes the implied counterpart of oral tradition is written tradition, the virtually unacknowledged counterpart of each is aural tradition. Highly attuned aural traditions enable the very existence of oral literatures; and, as suggested above, representations of and pedagogical lessons about aural practices are significant resources for thinking about how listening mediates, encapsulates, and alters states of experience. The most fundamental relationship between orality and literary production is thus not writing itself, but the undervalued art and work of listening that effectively enables writing and subsequent learning.

Aural tradition denotes African American literature’s historical practice of and advocacy for critically engaged, politically conscious modes of listening. Rethinking Gayatri Spivak’s powerful question of whether the subaltern can *speak*, this dissertation turns to African American

writers who have reclaimed listening as a vital conduit for historical memory and political change, the aural tradition thus marking a turn to the subaltern that *listens*. As Walter Ong reminds us, the past is “the domain of the ancestors, a *resonant* source for renewing awareness of present existence” (98, emphasis added). Remixing and reimagining historical memories shaped by geopolitical separation and neocolonial occlusions of black consciousness (e.g., the trans-Atlantic slave trade and various institutionalizations of segregation), the works I analyze demonstrate that retrieving the occluded past occurs not only through its visualization: it occurs through the *aural* preservation of historical structures of feeling and connectivity. Thus the aural tradition—as a supplement to the long-recognized oral tradition—underscores an epistemologically progressive ethos in African American literature, one that values listening as a communitarian strategy for integrating and equalizing otherwise lost or disparate voices. Aurality thus comes to embrace the hybrid techniques of literary and musical language that evoke, through representation, sensations of sound and the perceptions associated with those sensations (psychoacoustics). Extending transgenerationally across major aesthetic tipping points of the twentieth century, I study music that, like works of literature, creates narrative worlds in which voices of different races conjoin; and literature that, like works of music, engages the reader through formal techniques of sonic representation. As I seek to demonstrate, reading aurally offers a critical pathway toward revaluing long-celebrated oral traditions as *aurally* motivated cultural pedagogies.

When it comes to “cultural pedagogy” and more specifically “cultural pedagogies of black music,” I recognize that these are not commonly used terms. “Cultural pedagogy” circulates sporadically, though with significant variations in theoretical orientation and the contexts of application. Over the course of this dissertation, I will pursue *African American*

cultural pedagogy as a term to be conceptualized and considered primarily in contexts of cultural history and critical theory, literary and rhetorical criticism, and performance studies. Here, cultural pedagogy indicates pedagogies as they take form, are found, and continue to be practiced in cultural production outside of educational institutions and classrooms. While classrooms are themselves spaces of cultural practice, I intend cultural pedagogy not to indicate the art of teaching in classroom settings, but rather about how cultural texts, practices, and performances offer their own unique forms of educational methodology.

As rhetorical analysis requires close attention to a given text's rhetorical situation, cultural pedagogy requires close attention to the text's pedagogical situation and possibilities. To determine only what a text teaches—its “message” or “meaning”—without discerning how and to whom and why that text teaches, is to leave the “lesson” vulnerable to misinterpretation and cultural obsolescence. Thus, one goal of this dissertation is to revive and more concretely constitute cultural pedagogy as a viable concept for contemporary critical studies. In extant cultural studies projects that have used the term as a title or theoretical byway, cultural pedagogy has not been sufficiently defined or applied with enough detail to generate the traction it deserves. Taken as a theoretical paradigm for cultural history and contemporary cultural studies, cultural pedagogy has the potential to anchor scholarship and creative cultural production as bases for innovative and ethical social edification. Cultural pedagogy is thus an academic concept intended to enrich scholarly thought and to potentially enhance educational curricula and methodology, popular interpretations of expressive culture, and everyday discourses about creative production and appreciation that influence social practices.

Beyond making these terminological distinctions, the primary goal of this dissertation is to reveal and constellate a series of cultural pedagogies found within the wide trajectories of

African American cultural history, beginning in the early twentieth century when black music came to circulate widely in national and international flows of distribution and reception. These cultural pedagogies are differentiated in style, genre, intention, and practice, but they are linked ideologically and historically in several ways. They coexist as pedagogical bases of resistance to oppressive racialist social structures. They correspond as negotiations of identitarian models of political solidarity and social communitarianism. They coincide as endeavors to utilize cultural pedagogy as a way to facilitate affinities across and within different modes of identitarianism. Finally, they stand as pedagogically reflexive mediations of cultural production in explicit or implicit relationship to the sociopolitical dynamics of black diasporicity.

An underlying premise is the basic recognition that aurality and listening, as objects of analysis, are playing increasingly important roles in disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry. The move from the musical object to the listening subject—prefigured in Christopher Small's *Music of the Common Tongue* (1987)—is an important development across the disciplines. The aural shift is evidenced by the emergence of the field of sound studies, for instance, which incorporates disciplinary and post-disciplinary premises related to fields as diverse as musicology and ethnomusicology, education and pedagogy, literary and rhetorical studies, history and sociology, psychology and neuroscience, and the digital humanities. Across the disciplines, the importance of listening to African America is manifold, yet African Americans' cultural modalities engaged in the work of teaching people to listen differently remain under-examined. As a result, references to and discussions of the oral, musical, and aural dynamics of African American music are prevalent throughout my analyses. These analyses seek to occupy the space between call and response: the psychoacoustic space and embodied experience of

sound precipitated by the “call” and preceding, anticipating, or even negating sociocultural forms of response.

This approach may seem to privilege black music among the manifold cultural and sociopolitical contributions of African Americans. It may also seem that this area of inquiry has already received enough scholarly attention in the field of African American studies. However, analysis of the extant scholarship on African American musics indicates this is not the case. Influential models of analysis and interpretation do not often focus on culturally articulated pedagogies or furnish an analytic for the pedagogical functionality of black musics, let alone in terms of aurality. Likewise, while studies of African American *pedagogy* often bring to mind histories of educational institutions and biographies of prominent educators, the educational impetuses and methodologies of creative expression need more thorough acknowledgement, analysis, and extrapolation as part of the tradition of extra-institutional pedagogies that has been engendered and sustained by cultures of black America. I do not claim that black music is the most important facet of cultural pedagogy, nor that it is the most important realm of African American cultural practices, nor that it should take precedence in current studies of cultural pedagogy, even within the disciplines of African American and African diaspora studies. One enduring rationale for prioritizing the aural reception of African American music, however, is the historical range and transcultural breadth of the music’s great cultural capital: in addition to its historical relationships with cultural practices of African origins, African American music has been trans-generationally encountered and profoundly influential in private spaces and public spheres. It has been argued, for instance, that the blues is one of the twentieth century’s most influential art forms (Boone 84). What is missing from cultural histories of African American music is its history as a transgenerational, transnational cultural pedagogy. Hence, for the sake of

analytical cohesion across genres, forms, and disciplinary interests, my focus in this dissertation is on auralities of black music, especially the pedagogical potential of musical experience as found in contexts of performance, narrative, poetry, drama, and related discourses that articulate the exigency of listening and learning.

Theorizing these cultural pedagogies within and in relationship to African American music is also a response to contemporary social and political exigencies. Music created by African Americans forges a continuum of cultural expression across generations while also branching into new genres, forms, and networks of consumption with social impact that is beyond quantification. The reach of African American music is transgenerational and international, its influence notable in historical periods and cultural articulations around the world. And yet the sociopolitical aspects of African American expression too often remain silenced, unheard, or misunderstood. *Black music* is heard and even loved by consumers who hold deep-seated hatred for *black people*. Black music is heard—even celebrated, adapted, coopted, appropriated—as black people are not listened to. Black culture is purchased while the pressing concerns of black cultural producers are ignored and misunderstood. This is the symptomology of unheeded, underestimated, and underrepresented lessons from African American cultural pedagogy, lessons that have not been adequately disseminated, received, interpreted, or applied.

Practitioners of African American cultural pedagogy sought and seek to inform and transform cultural consumers' thinking about diasporicity, African American history, and contemporary racial politics, but their efforts to articulate pedagogies are not always received as such. To use the words of Stuart Hall, African American popular culture establishes “common languages” of immense pedagogical potential: “One should not forget why one went to the

popular in the first instance...It's not just an indulgence and an affirmation; it's a political, intellectual, pedagogical commitment. Everybody now inhabits the popular, whether they like it or not, so that does create a set of common languages. *To ignore the pedagogical possibilities of common languages is extremely political*" (qtd. in *Private Learning* 118). Studies of African American culture across the disciplines can be enriched and edified through sustained, collective, and collaborative inquiry into the pedagogical dynamics of black cultural history, especially through analysis of pedagogical elements, forms, and traditions found in realms of creative communication—cultural aspects of pedagogy that are not always welcomed by or recognized within institutionally mediated epistemologies.

Musics and their histories also present instances of intercultural aurality and, in some cases, intercultural affinity that facilitate sociopolitical change. Black cultural producers have long recognized these opportunities and these problematics. They engage with them in their pedagogies, pedagogies for black audiences and for mixed audiences. They have sought and continue to seek out creative means to exceed or negate expectations of entertainment and to facilitate pedagogical experiences whereby physical acts of hearing are used as opportunities to politicize the dynamics of aurality. These efforts are widespread across generations of African American cultural production. They cannot be contained within a single theoretical model or appreciated through a semantics of paradigmatic modification. However, it is my hope that this dissertation and the future research it anticipates will compel those who may not have considered pedagogy as a function of culture to consider the relationships of aurality, race, and pedagogy as dynamically reciprocal in the production, reception, and interpretation of culture. It is also my hope that this project's gesture toward a theory of aurality and African American cultural pedagogy may contribute, in some small way, to a greater awareness of how cultural expression

teaches and to a deepened appreciation of the transformative potential of African American cultural pedagogy as exemplified by the works discussed herein.

1.1 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Following from the present introduction, Chapter 2 examines key narratives in African American tradition as rhetorically motivated and pedagogically engaged extensions of the musical genre known as the blues. Through the process of identifying, describing, organizing, and interpreting the elements of what can be termed *blues narrative form*, the chapter argues that in these narratives performer-listener relationships draw from and also extend the pedagogical dimensions of blues music, lyrics, and performance styles. The chapter introduces a taxonomy of examples developed from a set of approximately one hundred novels and narratives, and proposes several narratological terms to signify these narratives' connections with blues music, specifically strategic variation, vernacular delivery, and participatory musicality. More generally, the concept of *blues narrative form* provides an advance over that of the "blues novel" because it helps to foreground often-overlooked narrative elements that have given unique pedagogical dynamism to the century-long practice of literary blues writing and its connections to the African diaspora.

Following from the previous chapter's identification of blues narrative form as a pedagogical strategy in African American literature, Chapter 3 analyzes Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe* (1992) as a key text that engages with listening as a strategy for reimagining not only the boundaries between music and literature, but also the barriers to listening that prevent learning. Recognizing the novel's calls for multisensory modes of interpretation and historically informed,

even political acts of listening, this chapter responds by advocating for an interpretive approach that is predicated on close attention to the primacy of listening as a literal and symbolic form of learning. The argument proceeds from my central claim that *Bailey's Cafe* should not be read merely as a virtuosic example of musical writing, but indeed, for its achievement as a pedagogy of listening, as an important literary translation of blues music's narrative potential, rhetorical inimitability, and sociopolitical significance.

Chapter 4 examines how Amiri Baraka's blues writings intervene in popular modalities of listening, how they infuse black music with graphic representations of symbolic violence to combat ahistorical listening and, in some cases, to cultivate a diasporically conscious communitarian ethos. Held as constituents of Baraka's cultural pedagogy and contextualized by key works from the Black Arts Movement, the controversial representations of racial, gender-coded violence in Baraka's dramas articulate an interventionist pedagogy that has demonstrably transformed literary and historical musical imaginaries. In this chapter, I read Baraka's blues-related historiography, criticism, and poetry as constituents of, complements to, and interpretive heuristics for the interventionist cultural pedagogy of his dramatic works. In the first part of the chapter, I reconsider Baraka's historiographical and critical work on the blues as ideological and conceptual bases for interpreting blues elements in his literary oeuvre. In the second part, I treat a selection of Baraka's key poems as extensions of his historiography and criticism that complicate and extend prominent sociopolitical concerns of the Black Arts Movement, particularly the Movement's pervasive efforts to reclaim what can be termed *aural rights*. In the third part, I demonstrate the reach of Baraka's critical interventions and poetical ethos in his dramatic uses of the blues that generate complex and even conflicted representations of violence. These audiovisual scenes of violence enact aural interventions that position readers to listen while they

look, disrupting an implied musical-racial imaginary that would otherwise relegate black music to the sphere of apolitical entertainment.

In Chapter 5, I theorize Jimi Hendrix's music, lyrics, and performances with the Band of Gypsys as pedagogical. I collect and utilize evidence from Hendrix-related historiography and biography to provide a basis for close listening analyses of concert performances and audio recordings; furthermore, to theorize, in particular, the intersections of aurality, race, music, performance, and pedagogy that underpin Hendrix's work with the Band of Gypsys. Although Hendrix occupied a marginal place within the Black Arts and Black Power movements, and although his participation in those movements is usually viewed as peripheral at most, I argue that Hendrix's performative deliberation over Black Arts and Black Power discourses constitute an important site of cultural pedagogy. Hendrix translated his pedagogical impetus into performances and recordings that positioned his audience to become attuned to Hendrix's own variations on black aesthetics and black cultural politics.

Chapter 6 presents *cultural pedagogy* as it relates to a number of disciplinary applications in critical inquiry; moreover, it considers the implications and opportunities of *African American cultural pedagogy* as a theoretical paradigm. In order to clarify what cultural pedagogy signifies in terms of aurality in the context of African American studies—and how cultural pedagogy might be taken up interdisciplinarily—Chapter 6 addresses each of the aforementioned terms, including extant usages of cultural pedagogy itself. After doing so, it reiterates and further elucidates certain African American cultural producers' notable investments in aurality as a locus of transformational learning, while also establishing a platform for a working definition of cultural pedagogy. These terminological distinctions foreground criteria for appreciating and

constellating important cultural pedagogies found within the wide trajectories of African American cultural history.

2.0 THE STORY OF A DISCOURSE: BLUES NARRATIVE FORM AS DIASPORIC CULTURAL PEDAGOGY¹

The blues is arguably the most influential art form of the twentieth century.

Graeme M. Boone
"Blues" (1997)

And how will art live as knowledge?

Thomas Mann
Doctor Faustus (1948)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Ralph Ellison perplexed his readers by claiming that *Invisible Man* (1952) was the blues. "I tell them," he wrote in a 1952 letter to Albert Murray, "I told Langston Hughes in fact, that it's the blues, but nobody seems to understand what I mean" (*Trading* 31). Murray, who later described his own *Train Whistle Guitar* (1974) as a "jam session," and who was Ellison's confidant in all things musical, readily grasped this idea (21). Yet isn't it curious that Langston Hughes, one of literary history's most celebrated blues writers, didn't?

Hughes's response to Ellison did not likely stem from doubts about the literary possibilities of the blues: Hughes represented the blues in his fiction, promoted the genre in his

¹ A shortened version of this chapter was published in the journal *Narrative* in 2016. See D. Barlow, "Blues Narrative Form, African American Fiction, and the African Diaspora."

essays, and popularized written blues poetry more widely than perhaps any prior literary figure. A difference of opinion about blues definitions would not have kept Hughes from understanding Ellison, either. Granted, it is entirely possible that Hughes simply viewed Ellison's novel as insufficiently "bluesy" to be called the blues, yet perhaps Hughes's confusion followed from something deeper, something about the strained and often-overlooked relationship between the blues and narrative. Amidst others' characterizations of blues lyrics as disjointed, broken, and even illogical, how could a written, soundless narrative actually be composed as the blues?

Ellison's frustration represents a lasting problem in literary scholarship. It is a poignant symbol of the uncertain place of the blues within literary studies, especially within narrative inquiry. While it still calls our attention to the blues elements of novels like *Invisible Man* or *Train Whistle Guitar*, it also leads us toward broader and deeper inquiry into the relationship between blues music and literary narrative. In what follows, I seek to contribute to that inquiry by identifying significant features of the intermedial relation between the two forms.

In the years since Ellison made his compelling but ill-received claim that *Invisible Man* was the blues, scholars have catalogued manifold instances of narrative method in archived blues lyrics, from folklorist Michael Taft's linguistic analysis of more than 2,000 blues recordings to literature scholar Julia Simon's recent exposition of narrative time in Son House's "Death Letter" (1965). Nevertheless, critical estimations of blues writing—for example, studies of "the blues novel"—still tend to assume that the blues component affects primarily themes, icons, and ideologies. The formal qualities that endow a given narrative with blues musicality are rarely considered. To take one foundational example, literary critic Houston Baker's generative conception of the blues matrix "as a vernacular trope for American cultural explanation in general" does not go so far as to assess the importance of how narratives translate or analogize

actual blues music or lyrics (14). Following Baker, blues scholar and performer Adam Gussow's paradigm for the blues literary tradition insists on the centrality of Jim Crow violence, even the definitive role of violence in forming "black blues subjects" (6). As with Baker's analyses, however, Gussow's model delimits the blues literary tradition to a set of historical influences, to a set of topics that are too tightly yoked to identitarian concerns, and to a circumscribed U.S. geography—at the expense of formal inquiry.

By comparison, literary blues authority Steven Tracy outlines a somewhat more diversified methodology for understanding what is commonly referred to as "the blues novel." However, despite the importance of Tracy's main point—"to call a work a 'blues novel,' the blues should likely be present concretely and substantively in its social, historical, political, musical, and/or aesthetic context"—his literary examples so readily fit into the blues novel category because the criteria for that category are based almost exclusively upon the identification of blues themes and references (126). As useful as his work is for cataloguing novels that contain stories related to the blues, questions of how the blues shapes narrative discourse and structure remain largely unanswered. In each of these cases, critics' reliance on the category of the blues novel in a thematic sense tends to detract from the innovative qualities of blues narrative forms. As a result, literary criticism still tends to emphasize what a given novel is about at the expense of understanding how narratives translate the blues and why the history of that specific tradition of translation matters.

"Blues novel" does remain useful as a category for identifying those novels that tell some story about the blues. However, I want to propose *blues narrative form* as an alternative way to understand translations of the blues into print narratives. As a term of formal inquiry, blues narrative form offers an interpretive lens that foregrounds those often-overlooked narrative

elements that have given such unique rhetorical dimension to the century-long practice of literary blues writing. This rhetorical perspective builds upon narratologist James Phelan's approach to literary narrative as purposive communication—"somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened"—in order to stress blues narrative form as a mode of telling that "has designs" on an audience ("Narratives" 167; "Teaching" 219). My conceptualization of blues narrative form is also, in part, a response to Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s calls to translate principles of literary criticism into the "rhetorical realm" of black texts (xx) and to generate "text-specific theories" (xxi) regarding "the nature of black narrative forms" (41). Like Gates, I am concerned with the "nonthematic manner by which texts...respond to other texts" (41), particularly in terms of how literary works narrativize the blues and to what rhetorical effect.

In what follows, I seek to identify, contextualize, and bring additional analytical precision to the formal attributes of key literary works that deploy blues narrative form, with a particular focus on those attributes' potential to rhetorically situate readers as audience members—and thereby engage them as listeners. Through the process of locating, describing, and interpreting the elements of blues narrative form in a taxonomy of examples (taken from a set of approximately one hundred novels and narratives), I propose several narratological terms that signify these narratives' various connections with blues music. Ultimately, I argue that the politics, aesthetics, and rhetorical dynamism of the blues have evolved through literary narrativizations of performer-listener relationships.

Following from this argument, I also situate these blues narratives in the wider context of the African diaspora. In the process of identifying key qualities of blues narrative form and showing some of the ways it works, this chapter maintains that literary blues narrative form is an

extension of blues music's rhetorical, educative, ethos-shaping, community-building functions. Literary blues narrative form is important not only because it successfully incorporates aesthetic qualities of blues music, but also because it expands the musical genre of the blues and attends to diminished components of its history. Thus in addition to scholars gaining a better understanding of musical innovations in narrative form, a shift of critical attention toward blues narrative form alters traditional perspectives prevalent within the field of African American literary criticism; namely, it allows for new insights into how this literature reflects and extends Clyde Woods' assertion that the "establishment of an African American community of consciousness based on recorded blues and jazz was one of the most fundamentally significant and enduring mobilizations of [the early twentieth century]" (110). By pursuing this approach to blues narrative form, we may generate a literary extension of Woods's endeavor to bridge expressive cultural practices with a revitalized conception of the blues as a theory of sociopolitical change. This is a narratological parallel to Woods's project of remembering the blues as the cultural medium that "united the Southern African American working-class communities and continually reeducated the burgeoning Northern, Midwestern, and Western diasporas" (108). As an engagement with the African diaspora's continuum of sociopolitical complexity, blues narrative form emerges as a strategy to recover the educational, rhetorical work of blues music. As an object of critical inquiry, blues narrative form reveals a collection of shared narrative situations that effectively deepen the history and widen the geography of blues music's initial critique of "plantation social relations and their extensions" (Woods 20). Just as blues music functioned for African Americans as equipment for living in the post-Reconstruction United States, a variety of blues narrative forms are repeatedly and strategically incorporated to engage blues music as a vehicle for epistemological recovery, cultural innovation, and diasporic community formation.

2.2 THE BLUES AND BLUES NARRATIVE FORM

A rhetorical perspective on blues narrative form leads us to reconsider Ellison's proposition that a written narrative can in fact be the blues. It asks us to identify not only what such a narrative would look like, but also what it would mean to have a psychoacoustic experience of the blues without physiologically hearing the music, to "listen" to a blues narrative even in silent acts of reading.

To anchor the rhetorical aspects of blues narrative form in blues musical and lyrical traditions, some working definitions of the blues will be useful. In terms of structural and expressive elements of the blues, I want to stress along with Stephen Tracy that conventions such as the twelve bar pattern, the I-IV-V chord progression, and the AAB lyrical formula provide less a strict set of limitations, but instead a working basis for creative expression. Such conventions provide the foundation for individual artists' creativity, both for composition and for improvisation in performance settings. In terms of other formal elements, the blues verse form is unique for its use of repetition with difference—known vernacularly as "worrying the line"—that leads to a sense of resolution in the often-rhymed third line. This formal feature of the blues lyric allows the singer to express a problem or sentiment, restate it with variations of emotion in a different formulation, and finally develop, explain, extend, or resolve the original problem or sentiment.

Historically speaking, blues music operates with such rhetorical immediacy in part because the emergence of the blues—from its post-Emancipation folk cultivation and 1890s

musical coalescence to its explosive popularity in the 1920s—marked a moment in U.S. cultural history wherein large numbers of African Americans from various socioeconomic positions, including and especially the rural and working classes, began to recognize more fully the immense geopolitical proportions of the African diaspora. The blues became a “popular” music in the sense that they were “generated by and for an evolved community of consciousness and memory” (Woods 83). This process of “popularization” facilitated increasing recognition of the diaspora’s effects of disrupting ties to historical memory and familial structure. In other words, the blues became a significant cultural medium—a “popular” medium—that acknowledged the unnatural absence of historical forms of knowledge and, through various forms of circulation, reconstituted community ties.² Reconstituting the network dynamics of blues music’s circulation in this way, the blues may be seen as a pivotal articulation in the African diaspora that, through and across difference within the genre, has subsequently been developed as a consistently operative metaphor in African American literature’s larger cultural project of recovering and/or reinventing diasporic heritage while also restoring networks of diasporic community.

In terms of content, the blues is diverse, but the genre is largely concerned with secular (rather than religious) issues. Meta-analytical approaches to the archive of blues lyrics of the first half of the twentieth century demonstrate that the most prominent topics in blues lyrics are love and relationships, movement, and anxiety about changes brought about by movement—in other

² Ron Eyeran’s work on culture and identity provides a useful conceptualization of blues community formation that extends beyond the U.S. south and into the intra-national diasporic routes of African American workers: “At the turn of the century, for unskilled laborers scattered across the mid-Western, Southern and Eastern sections of the United States...the blues provided a network of shared experience, which migrant workers could immediately plug into as they moved around. It was not by chance that the clubs where the blues were featured or performed lay in the marginal areas of cities and towns. It was to these sections that the newly arrived and the less well-off flocked and that the more established and better educated both avoided and disdained. Blues, in other words, helped create a community within a community” (83).

words, topics that reflected “the disruptions going on in contemporary African American social relationships” (Taft 196). Historical blues lyrics, then, often concern social change and the ways in which singers and the communities they addressed navigated such change. Extended into the literary, blues lyrical content became core themes of African American literature, especially suffering, survival, and social communication (Boone 84).

Taking these elements of content and form together, the blues provides “a structured but expansive place for the individual to relate to and express the community, and for artists to touch home base but still express themselves individually” (Tracy 124). The blues enables a discourse community that thrives on social solidarity as well as creative independence. As the following analyses indicate, such reciprocities between content and form, between the social and artistic, and between the communal and individual are present and important features of blues discourse in print narratives—my primary concern here—where blues stories and blues discourse become intricately woven as musical writing.³

Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* (1928) is an illustrative starting point. It is a canonical blues novel in that it is about the blues and articulates various blues themes (some of which fed into the controversies surrounding the novel and the identity politics in which it became embroiled). Themes include troubled relationships, domestic violence, movement from place to place, alcoholism, and labor issues. Chapter titles reflect blues themes, such as “Going Back

³ The community-building ethos of blues narratives is rooted in the African American literary tradition; white-authored blues literature deals comparatively very little with the conceptualization of the African diaspora or its sociopolitical problematics. Adam Gussow identifies three prevailing preoccupations in white blues literature: “1) Robert Johnson as an irresistible subject; 2) the older black bluesman/younger white bluesman dyad, which might be called the white blues apprenticeship model; and 3) white blues performers, white blues feeling, and white blues apprenticeship *without* significant connection to actual black people” (*Journeyman* 124). Blues narrative techniques in white blues literature tend to serve different purposes than in the African American literary tradition.

Home” and “The Railroad.” There is pervasive gambling. Violence erupts between African American men and women, often involving weapons such as razors. But beyond such themes, *Home to Harlem* is especially illustrative because it is about meanings of the blues and it maintains a blues lyrical and musical infrastructure.

Home to Harlem can be read as a blues novel, foremost because it is a deliberation over the meaning of the blues. Its reference to and negotiation of blues themes is foregrounded throughout; for instance, blues music is recognized as newly emergent and rapidly evolving, as are the ills of modernity that cause people “to have the blues,” so to speak. The novel contrasts blues music as a source of vitality with the general state of depression commonly known as “having the blues,” which characters believe results from living through what Ray calls “the agony” and “the illness of this age” (243). These terms are, in fact, the same as those used in medical circles throughout the decades before *Home to Harlem* was published: for instance, A. D. Rockwell’s 1893 speculations about neurasthenia, the condition known colloquially as having the blues. That the novel engages with colloquial, nonmusical uses of the blues as a term for general depression is all the more reason to consider it a blues novel: it introduces a prevalent cultural tropology to elicit and negotiate familiar themes of the blues.

But *Home to Harlem* also utilizes blues discourse to tell its story. More than a catalog of themes, it is one of the earliest print narratives to emerge with such a pronounced investment in written blues expression—arguably as significant as the celebrated blues poems of Langston Hughes—yet the interpretive implications of that discursive style are far less understood than the topics and themes which allow McKay’s work to fit into the blues novel category.

I mention *Home to Harlem* as but one illustration of the blues novel versus blues narrative form dilemma, one that I will return to later in this essay, because I am most concerned

with the larger constellation of blues narratives and the taxonomy of techniques within the blues narrative form. In this set of narratives, blues content emerges dynamically through the use of blues discourse, which is to say, through the delivery of the story in blues discursive styles that comprise what I am calling blues narrative form. I turn now to identify those techniques, starting with blues lyrics themselves.

2.3 BLUES LYRICS

We know that blues lyrics sometimes evoke narrativity and sometimes remain within the tradition of the lyric. While some blues songs follow no chronological sequence from stanza to stanza, there is a spectrum of narrativity on which many blues songs lie, “from well-ordered narrative lyrics to thematically consistent songs to seemingly random collections of unrelated stanzas” (Taft 103). The aforementioned analysis of more than 2,000 blues recordings (by more than 350 artists) conducted by Michael Taft offers a groundbreaking perspective on this spectrum of blues lyrics’ narrativity. It shows that most blues lyrics are, in fact, “fairly free” of the constraints of linear chronology: “they are commentaries on some situation, rather than narratives about some situation,” as would be the case with third-person ballads (17). Narratives in blues lyrics are often implied, rather than plotted out explicitly, because blues lyrics are “usually developed in an indirect fashion through pithy and aphoristic statements on the effect of the narrative on the persona, the persona’s reaction to the narrative, or the emotional atmosphere that surrounds the narrative” (17). But these are not weaknesses of the form.

The implicit narrative quality of the songs “give[s] rise to different emotions, dreams, and imaginary scenes,” and so if blues singers “were free to express these perceptions from the

mind's eye in any sequence they chose," they were also at liberty to work from an implicit narrative and to make "free associations around this event from stanza to stanza" (Taft 106). Thus even the non-narrative blues song "facilitates the use of traditional formulas, because a chronological sequence in a song automatically limits the choice of formulas that can be used in any one section of the song—the singer would have to worry about the temporal logic and progression of the narrative" (281). Were a blues singer bound to chronological linearity, he or she would also have been "more restricted . . . in adhering to a set plot or an inflexible theme" (ibid.). The narrative flexibility of blues performances thus allows for great variation in stanzaic arrangement in blues lyrics while also encouraging performers to return to core concepts from a variety of angles. In other words, while narrative flexibility is the key to blues improvisation, the defining quality of the blues lyric formula is still repetition, "a concise, semantic message that singers consciously employed and that their audiences consciously heard and understood as repetitions" (302).

This strategy of repetition is educative as listeners are offered variations on important subjects the singer wishes to emphasize. It is also a formally flexible technique that liberates the singer from rigid constraints on imaginative improvisation. The influence of oral performance, then, upon blues lyricism, lends to it a liberated narrative modality that allows for more affective rhetorical address and generally less rigid adherence to chronological linearity. This is a modality of willfully circumventing an illusory "real-time" narrative chronology. What Taft's analysis of degrees of narrativity in blues lyrics ultimately provides is an antidote to century-old misconceptions: blues lyrics are not necessarily fragmented, but *circumlocutious*; not disjointed, but *associative*; not illogical, but *implicative*. Furthermore, these features of blues lyrics lead to deeper explorations of the emotions and attitudes expressed in the blues.

Albert Murray gives us additional reason to rethink literary blues narrative form as a constituent of the blues musical genre, particularly when he establishes the origins of blues music as performance-centered and pedagogical, as well as diasporically oriented. Murray identifies parallels between storytelling and blues singing, writing that the storyteller's "fundamental objectives are extensions of those of the bard, the minstrel, and the ballad maker which, incidentally, are also those of the contemporary blues singer" (*Hero* 21). Just as Taft parallels the educative value of repetition in epic poetry with that of blues singing, Murray compares performer and listener to instructor and student in order to elaborate narrative pedagogy as a source of the listener's edification.

It is telling that Murray, whose literary and historiographical work on the blues constitutes a trove of cultural insight, situates his statements about the value of narrative pedagogy in the context of blues heroism. He assimilates the function of blues lyrics to that of earlier oral narrative forms, linking the craft of narrative composition to the functional value of blues narrative form that is, at its core, rooted in improvisational art and improvisational living. As he writes, "*Improvisation is the ultimate human (i.e., heroic) endowment*" (107). It is the art of improvisation that "will enable contemporary man to be at home with his sometimes tolerable but never quite certain condition of *not* being at home in the world" (ibid.). When Murray writes that improvisation enables one "to be at home" with the "never quite certain condition of not being at home in the world," it is clear that his blues hero is heroic precisely for the ability to navigate change, to manage uprootedness, to self-locate culturally in spite of the placelessness that diasporas sometimes engender.

These qualities of narrativity in blues lyrics accrue specific rhetorical value in African American literature's larger cultural-epistemological project of recovering African and African-

derived discursive practices. Their significance is yet more deeply contextualized in light of Amiri Baraka's compelling incorporation of the ethnomusicological work of Ernest Borneman in *Blues People* (1963). Part of Baraka's well-known project, of course, was to link blues music with African discursive practices, one of which—circumlocution—marks a key distinction between European and African uses of music and language: “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. In language, the African tradition aims at circumlocution rather than at exact definition. The direct statement is considered crude and unimaginative” (Borneman qtd. in *Blues People* 31). In its strategic circumvention of linearity, or of conformity to culturally established norms of refinement, blues narrative form evokes Borneman's interrogation of hierarchies that tend to privilege socially conditioned notions of discursive “exactitude.” Indeed, if directness can signify crudeness and lack of imagination, as Borneman writes above, blues narrative form offers a communicative mode of strategic indirectness, spatial and temporal narrative play, and flexibility that conveys performance qualities of the blues. These are useful qualities for understanding the performance-tailored nature of blues lyrics themselves, and especially for identifying key features of literary blues narrative form.

I have taken the time to resituate these insights and possibilities so that we may arrive at a more rhetorically informed, formally engaged, and audience-oriented perspective on the century-long tradition of literary blues composition. We can see how in certain respects the blues, a communicative articulation within the dispersed cultural geography of the African diaspora, has been cultivated as a literary-rhetorical instrument of what Brent Hayes Edwards terms the *practice* of diaspora. Authors and critics have taken up the blues as such an effective model for

these practices of recovery, reinvention, and recuperation because of its improvisational nature, its adaptability, and its capacity to accommodate, rather than flatten, individual differences. This reorientation of the blues resonates with Edwards' terminology and illuminates the functionality of blues music in the literature of the African diaspora. As Edwards writes, *décalage*, which indicates the reconstitution of something that was previously uneven or diverse in nature, "directs our attention to the 'antithetical structure' of the term *diaspora*, its risky intervention," and "articulations of diaspora demand to be approached this way, through their *décalage*" (15). Edwards' key terms—diaspora, articulation, and *décalage*—highlight the functionality of the blues in several important ways. In the first place, the practice of diaspora allows for the conceptualization of fluidity and individualism within a community's formation; the blues is a powerful generic representation of these qualities, and because the conception of practice "forces us to articulate discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference in full view of the risks of that endeavor" (13), to view the blues in terms of diaspora recognizes its functional connectivity as well as its individual, agential breaks from group homogeneity. The music itself is an instrument of practice.

One main point to stress is the paramount importance of narrative discourse in blues literature: the telling is part of the tale. Thus a definition of blues narrative form must be derived from the narratological differentiation between story and discourse: because a blues story (what is told about the blues) is companion to blues discourse (how the story is transmitted in a blues-related fashion), blues narrative discourse involves "the rearrangement or treatment of the events [actions and happenings] and existents [characters and setting] on the level of presentation" (Shen 566), insofar as a narrative's delivery and arrangement can be shown to correspond to some formal qualities of blues musicality, lyricism, or performance styles. To adapt Gates's

metaphor of the signifying monkey, this is to say that blues narrative form is not so much about signifying *something*; rather, it is about signifying “in some way” (239).

2.4 A TAXONOMY OF TECHNIQUES

2.4.1 Multimedial Combination

The first and perhaps most readily identifiable relationship between blues music and another narrative is *multimedial combination*: the use of blues music as a nuanced version of a narrative’s soundtrack. Examples include, for instance, Baraka’s cues to play blues music in several scenes of *Madheart: A Morality Play* (1967); Marion Brown’s musical accompaniment to a vocal reading of Jean Toomer’s “Karintha” on the *Geechee Recollections* album (1973); or Richard Fleischer’s use of the music of Muddy Waters to open his film *Mandingo* (1975). All of these examples combine multiple forms of media—music is actually played aloud in combination with a drama, a prose poem, and a film. There are, at least theoretically, other instances of multimedially combining audible music with a purely scribal text; for instance, the editor’s inclusion of a supplemental discography for every song and album referenced in Nathaniel Mackey’s series of novels, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate* (2010).⁴ As these examples suggest, multimedial combination represents a very common way in

⁴ The inclusion of a discography with this volume of three novels suggests the possibility that a reader could assemble an actual soundtrack for the reading of the trilogy by playing the records that correspond with the text, or listening to them all so extensively as to memorize them before reading the text; in terms of the possibilities of the text itself, however, such a discography adds an additional layer of intermediality comparable with, for instance, the integration of sheet music with a written narrative. In the example of Mackey’s trilogy, multimedial combination in the purest sense would require the simultaneous use of some playback technology along with the reading of the written text.

which blues music is paired with non-musical narrative; it suggests a nuanced and variable conception of the soundtrack.

2.4.2 Intermedial Reference

In the absence of audible music, there is a second and multifaceted way in which blues music can exist within other narrative media: *intermedial reference*, which can occur through the inclusion of blues content or through the assimilation of blues forms. If multimedial combination is most like the coupling of a soundtrack with another narrative media, intermedial reference can be perceived as the verbally composed musicscape of a literary narrative. Intermedial reference occurs, for example, as a description of a blues performance: portions of “Guitar” and “Dance” from Langston Hughes’s *Not Without Laughter* (1930), “The Blues I’m Playing” from Hughes’s *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), and James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” (1957) stand as particularly well-known instances among the many descriptions of blues performance in fiction. Intermedial reference also occurs through the discussion of the qualities of the genre of blues music: as with ragtime in James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), spirituals in Toomer’s *Cane* (1923), or jazz in George Schuyler’s *Black No More* (1931), the qualities of sound and the cultural significance of the blues genre are recurrently reflected upon in works such as McKay’s *Home to Harlem* (1928), Baraka’s *Dutchman* (1964), and Arthur Flowers’s *Another Good Loving Blues* (1993).

Intermedial reference can also occur through *thought and consciousness representation*, especially *thought report* or *psychonarration*, which can represent a range of inner thoughts and affective responses—from memories and fantasies to dreams that result from one’s experience of

blues music. Examples include the memories of Soupspoon Wise narrated in Walter Mosley's *RL's Dream* (1995); thoughts about blues or thoughts raised by blues as causes for narrative action, such as Deighton Boyce's pursuit of career musicianship in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959); latent states of mind or the unconscious accessed by listening to blues music, such as Lutie Johnson's sonic-inspired retrieval of distant memories in Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946); expansions or elaborations of realizations of particular significance that coincide with characters hearing blues, as with Scooter's developing appreciation of blues heroism in Murray's *Train Whistle Guitar*; combinations of thought processes and descriptions of the blues within the storyworld, such as Jake's ruminations and pontifications over blues and black culture in *Home to Harlem*; or even intermental group thought facilitated by the shared experience of listening to or playing blues music, as in the breakthrough performance that brings Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" to its conclusion.

Finally, intermedial blues reference happens in narratives with the naming of a blues musician, song, or album, either by explicit citation or implicit allusion, as in Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) when the protagonist whistles Bessie Smith's "Don't Cry Baby" (1929) just before threatening to kill a coworker. Similarly, August Wilson's representation of Ma Rainey as a protagonist in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1985) is an explicit and sustained intermedial reference. But these kinds of intermedial references may be far subtler, too, as with Frank London Brown's epigraphic use of Muddy Waters' lyrics in *Trumbull Park* (1959), which finds no explicit reference thereafter in the narrative. Such references, even if seemingly fleeting or insignificant, can create a sonic presence in the mind of a reader, evoking musical memory (and thus sensations of listening) without necessarily describing sounds of music. Intermedial reference is, in the simplest sense, a reference that runs between two media forms, and

sometimes these simple references can redirect interpretive possibilities and enable aesthetic immersion to the point of pedagogical edification.

2.4.3 Extended Formal Analogy or Mimesis

The most generative source for examining the literary-rhetorical dynamics of blues narrative form, albeit the least understood, also happens to involve the most complex way that blues music intermixes with narrative. It is a subset of intermediality that remains in the medium of print, and in some cases can generate the rhetorical effect of multimedial immersion for the reader. It is *extended formal analogy* or *extended mimesis*, which involve adapting some structural features of blues lyrics and/or music to a written narrative text “by shaping the narrative signifiers in such a manner that their acoustic potential is foregrounded in what has been called ‘word music’” (Wolf 326).⁵ As one useful point of comparison, the formal mimesis of spiritual music as poetry and narrative in Toomer’s *Cane* can be differentiated from, for example, the inclusion of spiritual epigraphs within W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). As a novelistic instance, Jane Phillips’s *Mojo Hand: An Orphic Tale* (1966) is so thoroughly infused with blues devices with such consistency that it constitutes an extended formal analogy. Not only is it full of

⁵ Whether such forms of fiction “always require some explicit thematisation in order to be decipherable as intermedial references,” as narratologist Werner Wolf suggests, is contestable (326). For while Wolf’s use of “always” suggests the impossibility of musicalized fiction without some concrete intermedial reference, many critics interpret texts as musical despite the absence of any such reference; for example, both Adam Gussow and blues fiction writer and literary critic Gayl Jones regard Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) as a “blues novel,” despite the absence of concrete blues references in the novel’s title, subtitles, descriptions, characters, and cultural references (*Liberating Voices*). However, to reiterate my earlier observations, calling any text a “blues” text does not mean the text itself has musical qualities specifically derived from the formal qualities of blues music, lyrics, or performance, but can instead be applied to any text that concerns themes or historical actors commonly associated with the blues musical genre.

intermedial references, with lyrics cited, musicians represented, and the genre pondered; *Mojo Hand* also incorporates these elements by weaving together the musician's artistic process, the daily life of working class people, and the communal elements of blues creation throughout the narrative whole. Extended formal analogies such as *Cane*, Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), and *Mojo Hand* are extended in the sense that blues forms are drawn out or stretched across a substantial portion of each print composition.

Applying this established narratological terminology (multimedial reference, intermedial reference, thought report, and extended formal analogy) to blues literature provides a viable basis to begin a more thorough characterization of blues narrative discourse. In order to more thoroughly identify and interpret the formally significant qualities of blues music and lyrics, we need to include the more blues-centric concepts of *strategic variation* and *vernacular delivery*.

2.4.4 Strategic Variation

Strategic variation is a narratorial derivation of the blues performance strategy known as worrying the line, which is a technique of altering a lyrical line in its repetition (for instance, making a change to the second "A" of an "AAB" stanza). Common in the composition of lyrics and in their vocal delivery, worrying the line serves to emphasize the singer's concerns, as in Bessie Smith's "Poor Man's Blues" (1928):

Please, listen to my pleading, 'cause I can't stand these hard times long
Oh, listen to my pleading, can't stand these hard times long (qtd. in Davis 328)

Smith worries the line in this case to more effectively implore the listener; the dramatization of the singer's experience makes that experience important, noteworthy, even palpable. Another

example from Ma Rainey's "Traveling Blues" (1928) shows the dramatization of second-person address in emphatic vocal performance:

The ticket agent said, "Woman, don't sit and cry."

The ticket agent said, "Woman, don't you sit and cry . . ." (qtd. in Davis 251)

Strategic variations in literary blues narrative form are more functional than incidental. They are longer than these lines, as well, comprising episodic recurrences or revisited narrative situations, and they are rendered textually visible through spatial and temporal ordering of events, images, or statements in a narrative sequence to the extent that the sequence can arguably be said to resemble the blues lyrical strategy of worrying the line.

Of course, "variation" occurs in all kinds of narratives, and so it is not variation alone that constitutes what I am designating strategic variation. Tracy offers useful means to discern the connectedness of a given text to the blues, albeit in terms of theme, in his writing on the blues novel: "The question becomes, how can one determine whether novelists are deliberately evoking the blues tradition rather than simply making use of elements that might be found in other sources?" (126). A variety of indicators such as titles or explicitly genre-specific intermedial references facilitate the identification of other formal narrative devices, such as but not limited to strategic variation, as with Toomer's recreation (and citation) of worksongs and spirituals in *Cane*,⁶ Hughes's adaptation of readily identifiable blues lyrical forms in *The Weary Blues* (1926), Baraka's use of a music venue setting in "The Screamers" (1967), or Naylor's insertion of subtitles such as "The Vamp" and "Miss Maple's Blues" in *Bailey's Cafe*. In these cases, we are clued into the blues components by the fact of various concrete references; upon identifying those clues, the search commences to "dig out the specific references to the blues as a

⁶ See D. Barlow, "Literary Ethnomusicology and the Soundscape of Jean Toomer's *Cane*."

genre in order to make a firm and reasonable assertion of its presence and influence” (Tracy 126). Thus a text’s intermedial blues references—whether foregrounded, subtle, or even at first undetectable—are sometimes valuable as starting points toward the more thorough identification of strategic variation.

Another way to understand strategic variation’s derivation from the blues is to recall the musical strategy of vamping, which typically refers to the use of an introductory phrase that can be repeated indefinitely until a soloist enters. Circumlocution, as discussed above through the work of Borneman, Baraka, and Taft, is an additional form of strategic variation. In their literary forms, of course—as opposed to musical improvisations—strategic variations are unabashedly artificial: they are static textual constructions of the spontaneous, improvisatory variations that are endlessly available to a musical performer. Nevertheless, literary texts can utilize strategic variation to recreate performance energy and position the reader as listener. Thus strategic variation, derived as it is from performance techniques that are specific to the blues, is a core constituent of extended formal analogies of the blues. And, in its cyclicity, strategic variation can produce the effect of immersion so characteristic of highly rhythmical blues music. I offer just a few illustrations of the many that are available:

1. William Attaway’s *Blood on the Forge* (1941). Attaway’s narrative commences with a slide guitar blues performance, foregrounding blues influence and calling attention to the use of strategic variation in two significant ways: first, by highlighting the individual perspectives of three brothers’ shared experiences, those experiences are relayed not in one controlling narrative perspective, but from three vantage points, thus incorporating difference through repetition; second, by repeating their experiences of structural racism in three different geographical contexts: located first in a context of southern sharecropping, then in their migratory escape to

the north, and finally throughout their employment in the turbulent violence of 1919 industrial Pittsburgh. All three perspectives on each of the three distinct experiential contexts are formally interlaced by a blues soundscape created by one brother, Melody, whose blues lyrics and delta-style guitar playing make the Great Migration legible as the geography of U.S. blues music.

2. Claude McKay's *Banjo* (1929). McKay chose to have the protagonist's band play one particular blues song, Papa Charlie Jackson's "Shake that Thing" (1925), repeatedly throughout the narrative's developments. This is but one example of *Banjo*'s multiple uses of strategic variation, and the band's playing a core song in different contexts and in different styles is central to the narrative's various outcomes. Through *Banjo*'s miscellany of idea-bantering rendered narratorially viable by the novel's self-stated status as a "story without a plot," the narrative takes strategic variation as one of its most effective forms, resulting in an immersive, cultural pedagogical articulation of blues narrative form. *Banjo*'s episodic use of repetition allows characters to carry out variations on recurrent discussions of topics that frequently resurface with additional nuance or clarity at some later point in the narrative. Taking the blues band as a symbol of community formation, *Banjo*'s use of strategic variation serves to identify the abundance of differences that fracture anything like a uniform conception of the blues, all while toying with possibilities of collectivity via the representation of the band's tenuous formation. In depicting a spectrum of discursive interactions in various episodes that are frequently accompanied by music, *Banjo* utilizes strategic variation to imagine and reimagine the problematics of community formation—but also to generate a highly incantatory blues narrative experience not unlike the immersive repetitions of a blues performance. (One might go so far to say, as well, that McKay's 1929 *Banjo*, viewed appropriately as a black internationalist project—as it is viewed in the work of Brent Hayes Edwards and Michelle Stephens—is *in itself* a

strategic variation upon the McKay's 1928 U.S.-oriented *Home to Harlem*, published one year prior.)

3. Jane Phillips' *Mojo Hand* (1966). An example of extended formal analogy, *Mojo Hand* also achieves an extended blues effect through the heavy use of strategic variation in a fashion similar to McKay's. Phillips' loosely biographical tale of Sam Lightnin' Hopkins, in its effort to valorize the musician and his music, represents multiple variations of blues musicians, repeatedly considers and reconsiders the blues genre in multiple contexts, and cites lyrics in differing iterations throughout the novel by a narrator who, again and again, attempts to understand her relationship to black culture through blues music.

2.4.5 Vernacular Delivery

There are uses of language that are unmistakably representative of, drawn from, or similar to vernacular language in the blues. In addition to strategic variations that are so central to blues narrative form, the individual voices of narrators and characters often rely on vernacular delivery: vocal qualities and lexical choices attributable to blues styles of vocal and instrumental performance (e.g., the voice of the narrator and of characters incorporate blues-specific devices and vocabulary). *Vernacular delivery* refers to the textualization of flexible pitch areas, tonal patterns, and vocal texture; compositional traits like polyphony and tempo; and generic propensities of the blues such as second-person address, irony, and parody.

Oftentimes, vernacular delivery is readily detectable and functions simply to establish a narrator or character's voice as a blues voice, as in Flowers's *Another Good Loving Blues*, or in Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe* when Bailey, the lead narrator, speaks in a blues lyrical voice to maintain

his status as performer and the reader's position as listener: "Wronged and wounded, that was me. Misused. Abused (yeah, I could feel the blues coming on)" (18). Very frequently, blues vernacular is implemented for the purposes of critical commentary, as in Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" when Sonny draws on blues imagery to describe "that old-time, down home crap"—the music of Louis Armstrong—in contrast to his estimation of modern jazz, which allows Sonny to think forward, to think of his future "all the time" (Baldwin 122). Sometimes, vernacular delivery is less frequent in the narrative whole, thus functioning to illuminate a key narrative event, as in Baraka's *Dutchman* when Clay's otherwise nonmusical voice gives way to blues vernacular—and extreme irony: "Plantations didn't have any wire," he says. "Plantations were big open whitewashed places like heaven, and everybody on 'em was grooved to be there. Just strummin' and hummin' all day" (*Dutchman* 29–30).

Some of the most interesting cases of vernacular delivery are those which can shift prevailing interpretations of literary texts, newly revealing dynamic uses of language and page-space to represent voice and instrumentation in ways that summon the spectrum of blues styles. Ellison's *Invisible Man* incorporates such highly implicative vernacular delivery. When Peter Wheatstraw proclaims, "I'maseventhsonofaseventhsonbawnwithacauloverbotheyesand-raisedonblackcatboneshighjohntheconqueror andgreasygreens," his blues vernacular functions to conjure distant memories the narrator might have otherwise lost—memories that "went far back to things I had long ago shut out of my mind. There was no escaping such reminders." When these memories begin to fade, invisible man is left pondering the meaning of the blues as if for the first time: the "strangeness of it came through to me" (176–77).

In Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), the circuit-rider-like figure of Brother Davis, as one example, stands out for the style of his delivery of a spoken word

poem: not only does he offer it “with his own variations,” but he does so by chanting it. The poem is taken up by the others of Eatonville, becoming a communal song that is sung “over and over until it was wrung dry” (Hurston 73). The singer’s variations encourage extended group singing, while his chanting preserves its sacred quality. The singer’s vocal style and formal innovations chart the reciprocity between spirituals and blues that cannot otherwise be simply understood according to conventional geographical (or temporal) coordinates. Finally, in Toomer’s *Cane* the use of ellipses in sections such as “Karintha” may be understood as more than mere structural indications of absence or silence, but indeed as melismatic vocal technique. This approach to vernacular delivery complicates interpretive arguments on the use of silence in *Cane* by suggesting the possibility of Toomer’s filling the presumption of silence with the wavering resonance of a trailing voice.

As this brief series of examples suggests, supplemental terms that originate from blues music can be applied productively to narratives that exhibit some relationship to blues music. A better understanding of strategic variation and vernacular delivery provides access to and subsequently illuminates the rhetorical nature of these narratives, specifically the ways in which they channel the blues in order to position the reader as a listener—and thereby compel a sense of audience participation.

2.4.6 Participatory Musicality

Stemming from its community-building heritage, the participatory nature of the blues indicates the need for another term to conceptualize blues narrative form, which may be termed *participatory musicality*: the work of a narrative’s diegetic or narratorial devices to involve and

implicate the listener (i.e., the reader). Blues narrative form advances from two participatory premises of blues music: first, that the “form and content of the performance can be determined to a great degree by the response of the audience”; second, that “performers and listeners are in a more intimate relationship than literate [i.e., classical] musicking can create” (Small 297–98). Because in a blues performance the performers and listeners have a dynamic reciprocity wherein “the listeners respond, not with stillness and the formal signs of ‘polite’ attention, but with cries, handclaps, shouts, movement and dance” (Small 298), blues narrative form as I am conceptualizing it should also manifest distinctive blues elements of audience engagement. The narratives exist in the first place because of an author’s proleptic anticipation of an audience’s need to acquire, experience, or be reminded of valuable knowledge. The blues are utilized with the expectation that, through the literary application of the blues’ expressive and rhetorical currency, the audience will come to think or sense differently and respond accordingly through some participatory gesture that the educative function of blues narrative form compels.

Participatory musicality compels not just by describing events, but by involving, incorporating, conditioning, and ultimately arriving at narrative events with a higher degree of provocation. It is the harnessing of musicality to move the reader toward participation in multiple “senses” of the word “move.” Listeners who have been moved by some music—“I found this concert especially moving”—express a psychodynamic response of being moved emotionally, but the hearing of music is also the literal sensation of being physically moved by vibrations, and although a textual strategy of participatory musicality cannot physically reproduce these effects, it evokes them by combining strategies of narrative positioning and reader implication with blues musicality. This might occur through the simple but literarily less common use of second-person address, as in Naylor’s *Bailey’s Cafe*: “If you don’t listen below the surface, they’re both one-

note players. Flat and predictable” (33–34). It might use declamatory imperatives to bring the reader inside the process of musical creation, as in Hughes’s “The Blues I’m Playing” when Oceola announces, “This is mine. . . . Listen! . . . How sad and gay it is. Blue and happy—laughing and crying. . . . How white like you and black like me. . . . How much like a man. . . . And how like a woman. . . . Warm as Pete’s mouth. . . . These are the blues. . . . I’m playing” (122–23). It might combine blues narrative elements to foreground blues epistemology for readers, as in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, where the combined use of blues references, strategic variations, and vernacular delivery generates a participatory musicality that urges the reader—as well as the protagonist, Janie—to *enchant* the dire (rather than only chant it). More obviously, but still with refined subtlety, Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” reaches its climax with a narratorially exceptional use of the inclusive “we,” thereby incorporating readers into the story’s realization of its ultimate and perhaps most profound lesson: “For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new,” announces the narrator, “it always must be heard. There isn’t any other tale to tell, it’s the only light we’ve got in all this darkness” (139).

2.5 BLUES NARRATIVE FORM AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

In light of the prominence of nontraditional family organizations represented in blues literature—as delineated by literary scholar Cheryl Wall—and given the rethinking of familiarity in diasporic communities that frequently results in kinship identifications independent of genealogical lines, blues narrative form can be seen as the evolution of an expressive form as well as an expansion of earlier blues music’s critique of plantation power. It expands that critique

into the broader project of recuperating diasporic heritage and diasporic community consciousness. In other words, *the formal elements of participatory musicality take on more dynamic rhetorical significance when understood in a diaspora-specific context*; namely, when a blues narrative's diaspora-specific content incorporates formal attributes of participatory musicality as a strategy to operate legibly in a diaspora-specific context, it can be analyzed and more deeply recognized as a reciprocal engagement between form and function. This often takes place through the use of narrative blues elements heretofore discussed as a means to incorporate various "blues lessons," teaching moments of particular relevance to diasporic communities. The following set of illustrations illuminates the tradition of blues pedagogy as it has been literarily rearticulated in diaspora-specific contexts:

1. Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972). Jethro, the blues teacher who "knew all the 'old songs,'" teaches Moses how to play "the heaviest sound they [Blue Nile musicians] had ever heard" (Reed 176). Reed effectively remembers the blues as possessing far older—and far more ancestrally pronounced—historical and geographical origins than culturally dominant accounts of the blues' Americanness would have it.

2. Albert Murray's *Train Whistle Guitar* (1974). While early on protagonist Scooter states that he "didn't know very much about history" (Train 66), he soon overhears his teacher speaking of "Histy-book whitefolks" that had omitted black history: "there was some histy book blackfolks in there somewhere too . . . You just look at it close enough" (69). Thereafter, the young narrator learns that Africa was not shorthand for the "African Hill Neighborhood," but was a separate continent (81), and he comes to recognize parallels between, for instance, "the Belly of the Whale and the Bowels of Middle Passage" (82). Murray's blues novel utilizes blues

narrative form to fill in parts of the incomplete story of the blues—the lost, obscured, forgotten stories of black America that are still being written.

3. Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975). Jones engages a blues singer protagonist in dialogues that reveal layers of genealogical and cultural knowledge across multiple generations. In one of the powerful passages where “Mama kept talking until it wasn't her that was talking, but Great Gram” (Jones 124), the young Ursa gains perspective on black men and black history when she learns of a renegade slave community in Brazil, where “some black men's that had some dignity . . . had started their own town, escaped and banded together” (126).

4. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Fictional blues icon Shug Avery is the vehicle by which Celie gains access to her sister Nettie's letters, which enables Walker to harness the epistolary function of direct pedagogical instruction and to spark interest in a number of historical figures, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and J. A. Rogers, while rethinking the possibilities of diasporic community formation.

5. August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1985). The play is introduced with an epigraph of lyrics borrowed from Blind Lemon Jefferson: “They tore the railroad down / so the Sunshine Special can't run / I'm going away baby / build me a railroad of my own” (qtd. in Wilson, epigraph). An implied theme of black ownership is immediately established with this blues lyric; more than the virtue of black ownership in itself, it is also significantly about the ownership of direction and destination, suggesting that the play that follows is, of course, going to somehow be about black communities' acquisition of power in the present to take control of the communities' future. The citation of the lyrics establishes the blues' educative power as a precursor to the pedagogy of bluesman Toledo, who seizes opportunities to educate his band members on “African conceptualization” (32), on recognizing “that we been took and made

history out of” (58), on the colonial landgrab in Africa, and on the dangers of unchecked assimilation (94).

2.6 *HOME TO HARLEM AS BLUES NARRATIVE FORM*

Taken in diaspora-specific contexts, the achievement of participatory musicality through the use of multiple blues narrative strategies now leads us back to our opening case study, Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem*. The novel’s abundant uses of intermedial reference, vernacular delivery, and strategic variation constitute an extended formal analogy that achieves participatory musicality. Examples from the text indicate each of these uses:

1. *Intermedial reference through description*: Readers are frequently led to imagine blues sounds through descriptions of musical performances, such as: “Drum and saxophone were fighting out the wonderful drag ‘blues’ . . . The cymbals clashed. The excitement mounted . . . Clash! The cymbal snuffed out saxophone and drum . . .” (37).

2. *Intermedial reference through genre discourse*: Readers are engaged in considerations of the blues genre, not just through McKay’s depictions of the music, but also through narratorial explanations of its effects: “Oh, ‘blues,’ ‘blues,’ ‘blues.’ Black-framed white grinning. Finger-snapping. Undertone singing . . . ‘Blues,’ ‘blues,’ ‘blues.’ Red moods, black moods, golden moods. Curious, syncopated slipping-over into one mood, back-sliding back to the first mood. Humming in harmony, barbaric harmony, joy-drunk, chasing out the shadow of the moment before” (54).

3. *Intermedial reference* through the naming of a *blues musician, song, or album*: In addition to the inclusion of fictional and transcribed lyrics in many of the novel's chapters, readers are provided familiar anchors, as in the references to Julia Johnson's "Tickling Blues" (c. 1928): "put on that theah 'Tickling Blues' on the victrolly" (73); "Put on that theah 'Tickling Blues' that we's all just crazy about" (84).

4. *Intermedial reference* through *thought report* or *psychonarration*: Intermedial references guide readers into the quite profound thought reports of Jake and Ray, as in Ray's reflections about race that proceed from a blues memory: "He remembered once the melancholy-comic notes of a 'Blues' rising out of a Harlem basement before dawn. He was going to catch an early train and all that trip he was sweetly, deliciously happy humming the refrain and imagining what the interior of the little dark den he heard it in was like. 'Blues' . . . melancholy-comic. That was the key to himself and his race. That strange, child-like capacity for wistfulness-and-laughter . . ." (266). Intermedial references lend rhetorical dynamism to thought reports that would otherwise leave readers without some working knowledge of the bases for the characters' most insightful realizations, as when Ray comes to deepen his understanding about race relations by ruminating on the meanings of the blues: "No wonder the whites, after five centuries of contact, could not understand his race. How could they when the instinct of comprehension had been cultivated out of them? No wonder they hated them, when out of their melancholy environment the blacks could create mad, contagious music and high laughter" (267).

5. *Vernacular delivery*: Readers encounter African American vernacular in all kinds of literary texts, not just blues narratives; however, *Home to Harlem* builds from the intermediality of its blues infrastructure to utilize vernacular delivery found in many blues lyrics, thus adding yet another immersive dimension to the narrative experience. For instance, "O Lawdy, Lawdy! I

wants to live to a hundred and finish mah days in New York” (25), and “Ain’t no peace on earth with the womens and there ain’t no life anywhere without them” (34) present expressions and phrasings that are prevalent in blues lyrics. Similarly, a blues club singer uses blues mannerisms in conversation: “I don’t care what you do whilst you is mah man. But hard work’s no good for a sweet-loving papa” (40). The lyrical quality of Jake’s inner monologues are especially rich in blues vernacular delivery, as when he awakes the morning after one of his deeper meditations upon blues meaning: “I ain’t got a cent to my name,” muses Jake, “but ahm as happy as a prince, all the same. Yes, I is” (15). When contrasted with the “standard” American English of Ray’s narrative segments (e.g., all of Chapter XVII) and various thought reports, these examples of vernacular delivery and their effects are particularly striking.

6. *Strategic variation*: Rather than treat the blues as a static object, *Home to Harlem* uses circumlocution to maintain an extended blues narrative; the blues is never held in one place or restricted to one set of meanings. One result of this circumlocution is that it allows *Home to Harlem* to make strategic returns to various definitions, impressions, and iterations of the blues. It allows the novel to engage the blues as a source of cultural epistemology without vaunting the blues as an orderly container of diasporic knowledge; instead, the blues are newfangled, incomplete, joyous but undefined, and metamorphosing and adapting constantly. For instance, Jake’s thoughts about the blues are returned to, reflected in, and revised through Ray’s variations upon such thoughts about blues experience. In the following juxtaposition, Ray’s variation on Jake’s sentiments provides the reader with an expanded sensibility of the blues genre. Jake: “Oh, to be in Harlem again after two years away. The deep-dyed color, the thickness, the closeness of it. The noises of Harlem. The sugared laughter. The honey-talk on its streets. And all night long, ragtime and ‘blues’ p l a y i n g somewhere, . . . singing somewhere, dancing somewhere! Oh the

contagious fever of Harlem. Burning everywhere in dark-eyed Harlem. . . . Burning now in Jake's sweet blood. . . ." (15). Ray: "Going away from Harlem. . . . Harlem! How terribly Ray could hate it sometimes. Its brutality, gang rowdyism, promiscuous thickness. Its hot desires. But, oh, the rich blood-red color of it! The warm accent of its composite voice, the fruitiness of its laughter, the trailing rhythm of its 'blues' . . ." (267). The use of multiple strategic variations on the meaning of the blues is further reflected by the way the word blues is written in different chapters: sometimes with quotations ("blues"), sometimes without (blues), and sometimes capitalized ("Blues") mid-sentence.

7. *Extended formal analogy and participatory musicality*: Arguments can be made for *Home to Harlem* as a blues macrostructure; for instance, the fact that the novel's three parts—I, II, III—can be said to resemble the three-part chord structure of the blues—I, IV, V—insofar as the stability of Part I is thrown askew by the complications of Part II and followed by the uncertain, incomplete feeling of Part III that leaves one craving fuller resolution (e.g., the return to chord I). In other words, Part I celebrates love, life, and love of life; Part II introduces complications of the intellect, the problem of balancing the life of the body with the life of the mind; and Part III awkwardly makes a brief nod to the elaborate orchestration of cultural-epistemological dissonance in Parts I and II. Aside from these possibilities of macrostructure, the foregoing makes clear that *Home to Harlem* has a blues-based infrastructure.

Still more significant, however, is how the prevalence of blues references, descriptions, thoughts, and lyrics keep readers immersed in the blues, reading as audience members, imagining the blues as they experience, like listeners, a narrative replete with blues musicality. In other words, *Home to Harlem*'s achievement is not just the representation of the blues, but the immersion of the reader in the blues so the reader, like Jake, can begin to connect blues

experience with blues knowledge. For Jake, this connection begins when Haitian-born Ray criticizes Jake's use of the word "bulldyke," a term Jake had absorbed from blues lyrics: "And there is two things in Harlem I don't understand / It is a bulldyking woman and a faggoty man. . . ." (36; 129). The result of Ray's intervention is that Jake comes to occupy the position of a listening pupil; no longer in the transcendental throes of blues experience, "Jake listened [to Ray], rapt, without a word of interruption" (136). Jake's lessons are too numerous to list; in short, however, it is clear that they initiate a series of profound realizations about unprecedentedly massive subjects: Africa, slavery, the African diaspora, black independence movements, and African America, to begin with. The reader is implicated with the questions posed not directly by Ray, but in the voice of the narrator: "Had Jake ever heard of the little Republic of Liberia, founded by American Negroes? And Abyssinia, deep-set in the shoulder of Africa, besieged by the hungry wolves of Europe? The only nation that has existed free and independent from the earliest records of history until today!" (135). Were it not for Jake's repetition of a word he absorbed from a blues performance, this pedagogical moment might never have commenced, this knowledge perhaps never gained.

The narrator's emphatic descriptions of blues music are presented as the thoughts of protagonist Jake, but their lack of explicit association with Jake's dialogue or inner monologues—i.e., the lack of quotation marks and formal dialogue within the narrative—render them atmospheric, diegetic, and integral to the literary creation of McKay's vibrant Harlem setting. The reader is immersed in Harlem as a listening subject, the reciprocity of a physical place and its sonority rendered seamlessly into an immersive narrative soundscape. This strategy implicates readers, involving them in the thinking about the blues and blackness taking place on the page and priming them to encounter multiple outlets of pedagogy, particularly from Ray,

whose vast knowledge about Africanist politics and the difficulties of recovering diasporic community stands as an answer to the questions of form (community) and content (history) that the blues so insistently asks. This is reflected in *Home to Harlem*'s third part, where a degree of resolution is announced in the narrator's characterization of Jake at the novel's conclusion:

Each human body has its own peculiar rhythm, shallow or deep or profound. Transient rhythms that touch and pass you, unrememberable, and rhythms unforgettable. Imperial rhythms whose vivid splendor blinds your sight and destroys your taste for lesser ones. Jake possessed a sure instinct for the right rhythm. He was connoisseur enough. But although he had tasted such a varied many, he was not raw animal enough to be indiscriminating, nor civilized enough to be cynical. . . . (311)

The blues are a point of reference in *Home to Harlem* that allows the narrator to merge musicality with pedagogy, to merge Jake's initially innocent exuberance over the blues with Ray's lessons on a more historically enriched, more socially inclined model of diasporic community consciousness.

The case study of *Home to Harlem* thus points to blues narrative form's participatory musicality as a targeted means of rhetorical engagement and provocation. Blues narrative form, without a soundtrack in the multimedial sense, compels readers through the intermedial evocation of this kind of multisensory movement, appeals to the audience's inner ears, uses musical language to ignite the capacity of achieving the sensations of listening in the silence of reading. Put another way, blues narrative form offers the reader an extraordinary opportunity to learn "how" to listen. By recovering and reimagining diasporized bodies of knowledge, blues narratives conjoin the participatory with the educative.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has identified several previously established terms of analysis and shown their usefulness for the study of blues narrative form: intermedial reference, thought and consciousness representation, thought report or psychonarration, extended formal analogy, and extended mimesis. It has also proposed three categories specific to blues narrativity, which fall under the broader category of blues discourse: strategic variation, vernacular delivery, and participatory musicality. Fuller recognition of these formal qualities of blues narrativity both enriches and complicates the category of the blues novel as it has recently been described.

Given the enormous social, political, and historical importance of the blues, it is understandable that scholarship on blues story outweighs scholarship on blues discourse. It is reasonable that scholars would more extensively engage the political circumstances and legacies of blues music, especially considering Angela Davis's powerful claim that critics should not "marginalize the orature—the popular music—of [the 1920s] by treating it simply as raw material for literary form" (149). Davis's intervention productively necessitates deeper analysis of the extent to which literary works amplify or quiet what Clyde Woods terms blues epistemology: "a self-referential classificatory grid [that] provided support for the myriad traditions of resistance, affirmation and confirmation" (29). As I have attempted to show, the narrative means by which blues stories are transmitted—the classificatory grid of cultural wisdom, verbal forms, literary attributes, and narrative techniques—have constituted blues

discourse as a communicative pathway of blues epistemology. It is one way that the art of the blues will “live as knowledge” (Mann 181).

Particularly in light of the foregoing studies of blues community formation, these instances of blues narrativity evoke Bill Ashcroft’s formulation of the *transnation*. For Ashcroft, the concept of the transnation is similar to the historical formation and literary recapitulation of blues communities: it contests “the idea that the nation is an integral, imagined whole...and the idea that diasporas are necessarily *outside* the nation, characterized by *absence* and *loss*” (14). Blues community networks within the U.S. similarly challenge the idea of national wholeness; more importantly, they challenge the idea that diasporas are always international, and they demonstrate the potential of blues expression as a practice of diaspora that stimulates intra- or subnational community formation—a practice that is not only about “recovering” what is absent or was lost, but indeed about reinventing and newly producing cultural knowledge. The above literary-rhetorical instances where the blues catalyzes narrative action leading to the access of historical remembrance and community reconstruction—all while the reader is included as a listening participant, rather than merely an observer—are sufficiently numerous to merit their distinction as a recurrent narrative situation within the African American literary tradition. In accordance with the foregoing critical studies and literary examples, blues narrative form may be regarded as one of the important rhetorical means by which authors have complicated otherwise isolated temporalities and geographies of dispersed peoples of African descent. Blues narrative form entails a prevalent modality whereby African American authors scribally preserve the blues as a listener-oriented educative resource; at its most dynamic, as in the next chapter’s case study, blues narrative form forges connections through time and across regional, national, and

continental divisions, using blues soundscapes to reimagine otherwise isolated realms of diasporic connectivity.

3.0 DIASPORIC LISTENING: GLORIA NAYLOR'S NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY

*hush now can you hear it can't be far away,
needing the blues to get there
look and you can hear it
look and you can hear
the blues open
a place never
closing:
Bailey's
Cafe*

Gloria Naylor
Bailey's Cafe (1992)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I suggested that blues narrative form engages readers in psychoacoustic experiences of the blues without physiologically playing the music and that imaginative forms of “listening” to a blues narrative can occur even in silent acts of reading. I built from James Phelan’s framework that treats literary narrative as purposive communication, “somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened” (“Narratives in Contest” 167), where narrative is held “as an act of telling that has designs on its audience” (“Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric” 219). In this chapter, I maintain that approach with an extended case study that focuses on the pedagogy of narrative. By drawing parallels between bell hooks’ classroom pedagogy and African American cultural pedagogy, analyzing the

pedagogical components of blues narrative form, and foregrounding one profound yet underappreciated illustration of how form and function reciprocate in narrative writing, this chapter presents an extended case study of how vital listening is to African American investments in cultural pedagogy.

Expressions of listening, pedagogy, oral tradition, and musical practice in African diasporic cultures resonate not only from the voices and songs of griots and musicians, but also from the archive of sonic memories sustained by their listeners. This dynamism of the oral tradition—the reciprocation of orality and aurality—bridges expressive cultures of Africa with those of other continents, establishing transnational discourse communities, chronicling experiences unrecorded in various writings, and engendering communicative pathways for knowledge distribution, identity formation, cultural empowerment, and political resistance. In correspondence with social tipping points, technological turns, and shifting cultural sensibilities, oral traditions and their aural resonances continue to be translated as aesthetically innovative forms of cultural pedagogy.

African American literary traditions emerged from this context in reciprocal engagement with the new listening technologies that came to mediate popular culture. Mid- to late-nineteenth-century African American literature found wide circulation just when the popular music industry began to coalesce, a moment in which white composers' approximations of black music began to circulate via written arrangements, such as Stephen Foster's "Plantation Melodies." Phonographs soon made black sound a tangible, purchasable, yet also disembodied form of cultural property, creating an international audience of listeners removed from the spectacles of minstrel shows while also forging creative pathways to the literary aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance. By the 1950s, jazz was being played more for listening than it was for

dancing. At the same time, consumer demand for new music coincided with mass culture's aesthetic dedication to sonic quality: five years after a passionate listener and devotee of music, Ralph Ellison, published a quintessentially sonic novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), *Time* magazine covered the emerging cultural phenomenon of "audiophilia." In the musically explosive years of the 1960s and 70s, literary and political voices of the Black Arts Movement rose above music's new levels of intentional noise and unprecedented amplification, contributing to the development of contemporary literary and musical aesthetics that resound powerfully, and globally, today.

Recent theories and methodologies seeking to understand the intersections of sound and literature have tended to chart literary works' engagements with various forms of technology, as evidenced by studies of literacy (Ong; Jackson and Richardson); American literary modernism and postmodernism (Graham; Schweighauser); experimental poetry (Morris); and African American literature (Weheliye; Mathes). While it is clear that African American literature, whose prominence escalated in tandem with listening devices' ever-increasing mediation of sociocultural life, responded to and engaged with the rapid advancement of sound reproduction technologies, less substantively charted are the ways in which listening itself has been cultivated as a means for historical recovery and epistemological change. When literary authors channel, restore, or conceive anew the resonations of African diasporic heritage through its oral and musical traditions—and especially when they do so as part of broader inquiries into the challenges and possibilities of diasporic community formation—of special interest are those works that invest in listening as a communitarian modality of integrating and equalizing otherwise lost or distant songs and voices.

This chapter presents a case study of one novel that reclaims listening in these very ways. This novel gives musical amplification to historical memories shaped by geopolitical separation

and neocolonial occlusions of black consciousness (e.g., the trans-Atlantic slave trade and subsequent institutionalizations of segregation), and reminds us that retrieving the occluded past occurs not only through visualization: it occurs through the *aural* preservation of historical structures of feeling and connectivity. Following from the previous chapter's identification of blues narrative form as a pedagogical strategy in African American literature, in this chapter I analyze Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe* (1992) as a key text that engages with listening as a strategy for reimagining boundaries between music and literature and for teaching ways of listening that facilitate diasporic connectivity. Recognizing the novel's calls for multisensory modes of interpretation and historically informed, even political acts of listening, this chapter responds by advocating for an interpretive approach that is predicated on close attention to the primacy of listening as a literal and symbolic form of learning. The argument that follows will proceed from my central claim that *Bailey's Cafe* should not be read merely as a virtuosic example of musical writing, but indeed, for its achievement as a pedagogy of listening, as an important literary translation of blues music's narrative potential, rhetorical inimitability, and sociopolitical significance.

3.2 LEARNING TO LISTEN

In the previous chapter, I presented a taxonomy of literary devices that comprise blues narrative form: the practice and craft of articulating blues musical and lyrical qualities in printed text. As part of the cultural continuum extending from African diasporic cultural expression, the rhetorical dimensions of the blues in narrative form developed as constituents of African American cultural pedagogy. This century-long pedagogical tradition was and is diverse and varied, yet unified through blues-oriented, listener-focused, community-minded recurrences of

teaching moments wherein characters and readers alike experience epistemological discovery, edification, or recollection. In some cases, blues narrative form exhibits pedagogy within the narrative diegesis as characters teach other characters; likewise (and even concurrently), blues narrative form may implicate the reader more directly, engaging the reader through personal address, lyrical immersion, and the deliberate cultivation of psychoacoustically imaginable soundscapes. An encounter with blues narrative form is thus an opportunity to render the self *susceptible*, in the sense of becoming “capable of receiving into the mind, conceiving, or being inwardly affected by (a thought, feeling or emotion); capable of; disposed to; disposed to take up or adopt; able to take in or comprehend” (“Susceptible” 1d). Susceptibility—as a position, a mindset, a modality, a mindful affect—cultivates learning environments in which readers grow as attentive listeners.

Attentive listening is as important for learning, personal growth, and self-enrichment as it is for developing and sustaining legitimate respect. At the interpersonal level we know this, because from the earliest stages of childhood onward, attentive listening is the foundation of respect. At the level of social, cultural, and political changes effected by the African and African American diasporas, aurality is remarkably dynamic, because it requires not only humans’ soft-wired ability to empathize at the interpersonal level, but also because diasporic aurality involves the learned ability to empathize with and at some level identify with many others across historical time and transnational space. Shana Redmond expresses this when she argues that alternative listening modalities serve to hold diasporas together because they “privilege hearing over seeing,” thereby departing from conceptions of diasporas “based in race and sight” (19). As Redmond writes, “To hear the struggles of others—versus the *hearing of* or seeing of them—requires a different level of engagement with the communities represented therein” (19). It is not

merely the physiological instances of hearing that ensure and facilitate diasporic connection, nor is it mere familiarity with the widespread struggles diasporic communities can face; rather, it is becoming susceptible, learning to listen attentively, and deepening inter-communal respect to the point of truthful empathy for a large and diverse population.

While intentional susceptibility in an environment predicated upon mutual respect leads to attentive listening and learning, susceptibility in a historical continuum of white capitalist patriarchy risks becoming *vulnerable*, of being “open to attack or injury...to the attacks of raillery, criticism, calumny” (“Vulnerable” 2b). This sense of vulnerability can lead to fear in classroom settings, for instance, where students of color “express the feeling that they are less likely to suffer any kind of assault if they simply do not assert their subjectivity” (hooks 39). In the same way that persons of color are structurally marginalized from the purportedly democratic politic sphere and its concomitant sociocultural opportunities, “students from marginalized groups enter classrooms within institutions where their voices have been neither heard nor welcomed” (hooks 83-84). However, when listening is treated as an exercise in mutual recognition, classroom pedagogies can be restructured to authenticate standpoint epistemologies from student perspectives. Among others, bell hooks treats attentive listening as a key to effective pedagogy:

This pedagogical strategy is rooted in the assumption that we all bring to the classroom experiential knowledge, that this knowledge can indeed enhance our learning experience. If experience is already invoked in the classroom as a way of knowing that coexists in a nonhierarchical way with other ways of knowing, then it lessens the possibility that it can be used to silence...Our collective listening to one another affirms the value and uniqueness of each voice. (84)

The underlying concern here is that encouraging voices to be audible without teaching listeners to be susceptible gives a false sense of participation to the speaker and negates the possibility of sociopolitical traction. This is why it is so crucial to identify and be receptive to cultural pedagogies. Just as classroom pedagogies should facilitate environments predicated upon attentive listening in order to respond to students who have been silenced or ignored, cultural pedagogies develop in response to conditions that distort or prevent forms of what bell hooks names as *collective listening* in the passage above.

In the same way that educators may “alter the existing pedagogical structure” and “teach students *how to listen, how to hear one another*” (hooks 150), cultural authors of the African diaspora utilize music to call for, theorize, and teach attentive listening in pronounced and urgent ways. With increased understanding of textual meaning as “less a fixed object than an ongoing, participatory, and interpretive process” (Graham 19), narrative writings that are rich in musicality cultivate spaces for readers to become learners, to reconceive the norms of aural experience, and to thereafter engage with listening as a figurative component of humanity’s social, cultural, and political apparatuses.

As argued in the previous chapter, blues narrative form in particular involves the rhetorical continuation of blues performances in which the singers enlist audience members as participatory listeners. This is especially the case when it comes to the aural dimensions of blues narrative form in Gloria Naylor’s *Bailey’s Cafe*. Historically speaking, the blues first emerged not only as a new genre, but indeed as a new form of self-conception for singers and listeners. The individualization of the blues singer—as distinct from a choir or a group of workers singing together—gave way to listeners’ broader conceptualizations of group belonging that could not have been imagined before the technological advent of musical reproduction and mass

distribution. In spite of severe restrictions on black social life at the turn of the twentieth century, the blues emerged as a “medium of communication that united this censored, yet mobile, generation” (Woods 82). It “dramatized the cultural vitality and rebelliousness of the participants, evoking race and class solidarity” while also “revitalizing the black oral tradition during the post Reconstruction era” (W. Barlow 5). The formation of a wider blues community occurred through the sharing of values, ideas, and styles in performances, through the letters sent from southern customers recommending local singers to blues record companies, and through listeners’ abilities to access of records and radio broadcasts. Even as the blues remained a form of “communal property,” it was a vehicle for both “individual and group expression” (Levine 229), suggesting that listening to the blues became a significant modality of identification and self-communication. In this way, blues became not just a local community music, but a mass community music, signifying the emergence of a popular cultural means for reconnecting a diasporic community at the level of wider, interregional (and, very quickly, international) circuits. As a result, individual listeners “living far apart could now share not only styles but experiences, attitudes, folk wisdom, [and] expressions...in a way that was simply not possible before the advent of the phonograph” (Levine 231). In other words, if blues performance involves pedagogical intentions, blues listening became a significant cultural resource for its “students,” a resource that offered pathways to the restoration of historical knowledge and the constitution of community ties.

3.3 GLORIA NAYLOR'S NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY

Despite Naylor's invocation of this historical precedent, the existing criticism on *Bailey's Cafe* has yet to recognize just how important the novel is within the longer development of modern African American fiction. One book review does call the novel a "virtuoso orchestration" (Wakefield 11). And a synoptic overview accurately but briefly likens its musical structure to a "performance," calling it an "ingenious concert framework" that "has successfully integrated form and content" (Reisman 102). Quite usefully, another overview goes deeper to explain some qualities of its musical structure in *Bailey's Cafe*, but focuses more centrally on the novel's biblical imagery without exploring the implications of its blues-based delivery and pedagogy (Whitt 154-57). Similarly, scholarly articles about the novel pass over its musical qualities by way of introduction (Swindell 400), or exclude it entirely from their interpretive lens (Ivey 85-108). In short, the musical construction of *Bailey's Cafe* as an extended formal analogy has been only partially acknowledged. Meanwhile, its service as an instance of transnational cultural pedagogy has yet to be discussed. This comes as a surprise considering that blues music and blues pedagogy runs through the text from its first words to its last, effectively urging a reprioritization of the senses through which knowledge is received and amplifying aural experience in opposition to ocularcentric categorizations of human difference.

Naylor opens *Bailey's Cafe* with a strategically composed, synesthetically suggestive epigraph that precedes the narrative beginning. Perhaps the most important feature of this epigraph is that it references the blues as a means for instructing and challenging readers to listen

closely to the musical text they are about to encounter. Even the visually conical shape of the stanza suggests the diminution of sound as it reaches its narrowest point with the words “Bailey’s Cafe.” Pictorially, Naylor’s epigraph resembles an “ear trumpet,” a funnel-shaped device held to the ear to collect and intensify sound for those hard of hearing.

hush now can you hear it can’t be far away,
needing the blues to get there
look and you can hear it
look and you can hear
the blues open
a place never
closing:
Bailey’s
Cafe

In addition to pictographically resembling a listening device, this short stanza is poetically interesting, conceptually complex, and, above all as an epigraph, interpretively significant. It utilizes diminution of lyrical line length *and* of geographical space to focus readers’ aural attention on the words and place, “Bailey’s Cafe,” suggesting that the place itself—just like the novel of the same name—must be listened to. In this way, the epigraph of *Bailey’s Cafe* serves to extend the blues’ functionality as a dynamic aural resource.

This marks the beginning of a pedagogy that analogizes blues forms to reorient readers’ conventional listening practices toward what Don Ihde conceptualizes as phenomenological listening. Ihde’s examination of what it means “to listen *phenomenologically*” results in a methodology: “more than an intense and concentrated attention to sound and listening, it is also

to be aware in the process of the pervasiveness of certain ‘beliefs’ that intrude into my attempt to listen ‘to the things themselves’” (49). Rather than giving oneself over to sound in aesthetic reveling, listening phenomenologically is a mode of critically engaged sensory appreciation that requires the listener to monitor the already-conditioned self at an objective distance. Like a “lens” or an “optic” used to “see” or “witness” some phenomenon, listening phenomenologically requires an interpretive awareness of the subjective self. Thus, with the epigraph’s call to “look” in order to “hear,” it emphasizes the process not of looking optically but of seeking and discovering something truthful beyond the reader’s preconceived understandings.

In the epigraph, Naylor also cleverly plays with grammatical error to establish the polysemy of her novel’s very first line, thereby acknowledging how the polysemy of the blues can be obscured by assumptions that “unrefined” means unsophisticated. This results in a dynamic rhetorical combination of command, question, and statement. It is a command to “hush now.” It also asks two distinct questions: “can you *hear*” and “can you hear *it*.” And it is a statement: “it can’t be far away.” In this first and foundational instance of audience engagement, readers are questioned about whether they are capable of truly hearing, asked whether they are capable of hearing the blues, and nudged forward with the declaration that with care and effort, the sound *will* become audible. This instance of narrative prolepsis demonstrates how literary blues writing goes at least one step further than call-and-response: readers are not asked to respond with words or sounds, but with the actions of attentive listening and of repositioning their perspectives. This blues is not, in the beginning, music for dancing: it is music for listening. Naylor’s rhetorical use of the epigraph serves dually to structure the text as a reciprocally functional enterprise between text and readers—and to challenge those readers who take listening for granted.

That the blues are “needed” to locate the cafe suggests one way to conceptualize the novel’s thematic use of the blues, which is worth sorting through insofar as the themes do become riffed upon throughout Naylor’s formal innovations. In the case of this epigraph, the blues would seem to signify a troubled state of mind, “neurasthenia,” suicidal tendencies, disorientation, the condition of the abusers and the abused. To the extent that Naylor’s epigraph establishes a thematic orientation to *Bailey’s Cafe*, it corresponds with Ralph Ellison’s aphoristic definition of the blues that has informed a great deal of criticism. As Ellison writes, “The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism” (“Richard Wright’s Blues” 129). For Ellison, having the blues, playing the blues, and writing the blues is like the painful pleasure of caressing a scar. At least thematically, then, Naylor’s epigraph does resonate here, but like the aforementioned flexibility in reading that the epigraph demands, *Bailey’s Cafe* takes this theme as a malleable starting point for the narrative’s subsequent variations upon it.

In fact, Naylor’s grammatical play on the words “the blues open” in the epigraph suggests that she is not just interested in the themes of the blues. This epigraph treats *the blues* as a collection of singulars: not “the blues opens,” but rather “the blues open.” This use of “blues” as a collection of songs as opposed to the musical genre’s title suggests that Naylor is drawing attention to the affective capacity of a set of blues songs—the particularities of specific blues songs, rather than the generalities associated with the blues genre—to “open” the cafe to listeners.⁷ Indeed, beyond its epigraphic function as a container of themes, Naylor’s stanza is

⁷ Here, I need to make an important grammatical clarification. Just as the word “rock” and the word “roll” are two terms rendered singular in order to identify the genre of “Rock and Roll,” “the blues” is a plural term rendered singular when used to identify the genre that we call “The

significant for its recapitulation and revision of the rhetorical gestures made in *Invisible Man*'s prologue.⁸ Ellison's prologue establishes the invisible man's ethos by conveying his profound aural experience—listening to Louis Armstrong while in a cannabis-induced trance—in order to model for readers a method of listening that requires “hearing not only in time, but in space as well” (*Invisible* 9). As the invisible man reflects on his descent into deeper and deeper levels of psychoacoustic experience, his rhetoric transcends the descriptive and becomes implicative, challenging the audience to engage with listening as a daring form of inquiry—to join the very few who “really listen to this music” (12). Although the invisible man believes that “to *see* around corners is enough,” for “to hear around them is too much” in that it “inhibits action” (13), the prologue nevertheless results in a challenge to listen differently, to “hear around” corners long enough to prepare for a “more overt action” (13).

While the italicized dream portion of the *Invisible Man* prologue carries readers through the narrator's experience as a strategy for revealing levels of listening, Naylor's epigraph, by taking up the space of the page in the shape of a listening device that instructs the reader without any reliance on a known narratorial voice, differs in that it establishes the ethos of the text itself

Blues.” Hence, not “the blues *are* a pedagogically significant genre,” but rather, “the blues *is* a pedagogically significant genre.” However, “blues are” is a phrase often used to reference any collection of individual blues songs (or the entire collection of blues songs) in the same way that “rock and roll songs” would be used. Hence, not “Lightnin’ Hopkins’ blues *is* far more numerous than Robert Johnson’s,” but rather, “Lightnin’ Hopkins’ blues *are* far more numerous than Robert Johnson’s.” Naylor’s use of “the blues open” suggests the last usage, as in “blues songs open Bailey’s Cafe.”

⁸ I look to Ellison's prologue here instead of his epigraphs because the epigraphs, which are taken from Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* and T.S. Eliot's *Family Reunion*, function primarily to point towards shadows and shape-shifting—both visual tropes that, apart from Ellison's citation of Captain Delano's cry, are less concerned with aurality than Naylor's epigraph. Hence, I attend to the elements of sound and listening that are most prominent in Ellison and Naylor's novelistic framing devices, which in Ellison's case points us toward the prologue.

as a guide to listening. Furthermore, by suggesting that Bailey's Cafe is impossible to locate and inhabit by using only the eyes, the epigraph establishes the premise that in order to find the cafe one must first look and then hear: "look and you can hear it / look and you can hear." In this way, Naylor's epigraph echoes but also seems to reinterpret *Invisible Man*'s notion of hearing "in space": for Naylor, to "look" and to "hear" is to visually approach but aurally inhabit the "space" of the printed language that constitutes *Bailey's Cafe*.

Through this use of the epigraph, then, *Bailey's Cafe* begins with a clever but ultimately more direct challenge to its readers to occupy a less visual, and more aural, subjectivity. The epigraph insists, in fact, that readers adopt an aural approach to the text itself. By demanding a synesthetic approach, it effectively recasts the invisible man's hesitation about hearing around corners: "look and you can hear it / look and you can hear." While the invisible man plays "the *invisible music of my isolation*" (13, emphasis added), stressing a form of listening as a solitary act of hibernation, the epigraph of *Bailey's Cafe* confirms that the text makes communitarian music both participatory and visible: the cafe represents a visible point of entry into the soundscape of a diasporic community in the process of formation. Approaching *Bailey's Cafe* with these insights, one is guided to listen to the blues music that structures the novel's soundscape—to become immersed in blues narrative form—and to become susceptible to the narrative's pedagogy of listening.

3.4 LISTENING TO LEARN: BLUES AS PEDAGOGY OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

As an extended formal analogy of blues music, *Bailey's Cafe* enacts a unique iteration of the blues' narrative potential, incorporating blues structures and strategies to rhetorically situate its audience as listeners. The pervasiveness of blues music in *Bailey's Cafe* offers numerous points of entry into the novel's sociohistorical interests, many of which echo Walter Ong's meta-anthropological claim that the past is "the domain of the ancestors, a *resonant* source for renewing awareness of present existence" (98, emphasis added). As a multivoiced, trans-Atlantic, transtemporal narrative, *Bailey's Cafe* reminds us that attuning to the resonance of the past occurs not only through visualization, but through the *aural* preservation of historical structures of feeling and connectivity. Naylor's reclamation of listening as a conduit of diasporic epistemology becomes crucial to her representation of communities that maintain respect for human dignity by working through and across human difference, generating a poignant literary representation of Stuart Hall's conceptualization of diaspora identities: "those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (137-8). *Bailey's Cafe* utilizes the blues as a structure capable of embracing transformation and difference. The novel articulates an epistemologically progressive ethos, one that values listening as a communitarian strategy for integrating and equalizing otherwise lost or disparate voices, and it does so by adopting the blues' special functionality as a communitarian aural resource.⁹ Proceeding from the epigraph, the novel further establishes its blues structure with the sections' subtitles, most all of them musical: "Maestro, If You Please...", "The Vamp," "The Jam,"

⁹ On narrative frameworks in relation to readers' auralities, see also D. Barlow, "'And everyday there is music': Folksong Roots and the Highway Chain Gang in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*."

“Mood: Indigo,” “Eve’s Song,” “Sweet Esther,” “Mary (Take One),” “Jesse Bell,” “Mary (Take Two),” “Miss Maple’s Blues,” and finally “The Wrap.” As the co-proprietor of the cafe and the lead composer of the narrative orchestra, “Bailey” makes it clear that the set about to be played is only going to be audible for those who are willing to listen. Different from the third-person vantage point of the balladeer, Bailey’s speech resembles a blues singer’s first- and second-person commentary and establishes the terms for the audience:

And if you’re expecting to get the answer in a few notes, you’re mistaken. The answer is in who I am and who my customers are. There’s a whole set to be played here if you want to stick around and listen to the music. And since I’m standing at center stage, I’m sure you’d enjoy it if I first set the tempo with a few fascinating tidbits about myself. (Nadine, nobody asked you.) (4)

Bailey’s declamatory style of narration establishes a blues voice. Also noteworthy is the parenthetical comment at the end of the passage above, the aside directed at Bailey’s spouse, Nadine. It introduces the singing voice of an intuitive, improvisatory performer skilled enough to keep playing the song while also engaging the characters around him and the audience before him. He addresses readers just as he addresses characters, positioning each reader as a participatory listener within the novel’s diegesis.

Bailey’s voice is crafted in the blues idiom to constitute what can be viewed as a recovery of the blues as a pedagogical cultural medium that “continually reeducated the burgeoning Northern, Midwestern, and Western diasporas” (Woods 108), for while Bailey imparts experience, wisdom, and guidance to his audience, he frequently reveals that his own learning process was extensive. He insists upon life in the cafe—a symbol of the blues community—as a site of cultural pedagogy: “[S]chool isn’t where real learning happens,” he writes. “I went to

kindergarten on the muddy streets of Brooklyn, finished up grade school when I married Nadine, took my first diploma from the Pacific; and this cafe, well now, this cafe is earning me a Ph.D. You might say I'm majoring in Life" (Naylor 3). His narratorial blues voice—a distinctively masculine one, at that—would seem to threaten to dominate the entire performance, until we learn that Nadine has not only given Bailey “the blues” in the sense of emotional distress, but also a series of “blues lessons”: “Sure, she taught me a lesson, and a whole different way of looking at her—and women” (19). Even as he quips that this lesson “doesn’t negate the fact that my wife is still a little strange,” one recognizes that this blues narrator has learned—and is still learning—respect for women. Finally, “Maestro” anchors *Bailey’s Cafe* in yet one more tradition of the blues. It does not resound so fully at first, but by the novel’s end, Bailey’s analysis of segregated baseball, linked with his comment that the “Star Spangled Banner is played to the tune of a cash register” (12), quietly develops into an audible critique of U.S. racial capitalism in the novel’s concluding track, “Miss Maple’s Blues.”

Immersed in the blues tradition, “Maestro” follows the epigraph to set the stage for the subsequent performances in “The Jam,” expressly mandating audience participation and giving the narrative a flexible enough structure to accommodate a series of strategic variations that are enabled by the novel’s narrative vamp—an introductory phrase that can be repeated and varied upon indefinitely until a soloist enters. Returning to the vamp in nearly every section of the novel, *Bailey’s Cafe* harnesses the rhetorical dynamism of the blues genre discussed above; each crucial “line” finds its way back into the narrative whole through this process of vamping. While in each chapter of *Bailey’s Cafe* characters step forward one at a time to “solo,” in “The Vamp” Bailey introduces two deceptively minor characters with very major roles—Sister Carrie, a caustic and judgmental religious zealot “afraid of her own appetites”; and Sugar Man, a slick-

talking, streetwise “hustler and pimp” (33). Even as they appear as opposites, both characters unwittingly reveal their true stories, but only at the lower frequency and thus only audible to those who work at listening.

Bailey’s Cafe is structured to enable a responsive blues narrator’s periodic interjections, which amplify otherwise diminished voices in each performance and ensure that potentially inaudible thought representations are intensified sufficiently for readers to penetrate through superficial discourse and enter the psyches of the characters. Cues such as “And when you take these down to even a lower key you’ll hear about...” (Naylor 34) lead to revelations about characters, representing insight into human nature achievable through attentive and dedicated listening. Such insights also give narrative resonance to Don Ihde’s account of the limits of *sight*:

I hear [a windstorm’s] howling and feel its chill but cannot see its contorted writhing though it surrounds me with its invisible presence. No matter how hard I look, I cannot see the wind, *the invisible is the horizon of sight*. An inquiry into the auditory is also an inquiry into the invisible. Listening makes the invisible *present* in a way similar to the presence of the mute in vision. (51)

Ihde’s interest in invisibility, and particularly in the work of listening that makes the invisible present, should most immediately recall the sonic dimensions of Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, whose protagonist becomes increasingly aware of his own subjectivity not only through encounters with visible characters, but through the auditory resonance of black cultural expression so profoundly elaborated in the prologue and epilogue. Along these same lines, Ihde’s words help to explain the heightened importance of listening in *Bailey’s Cafe*, where sociopolitically invisible characters are rendered present by communal acts of listening and where listening makes present a more diversified, inclusive epistemology. As Bailey says of living in the currents of the vamp and

listening closely to each solo, it has been a “real lesson for me in human nature” (31). Reiterating lessons about listening at the lower frequencies similar to those that frame *Invisible Man*, the vamp of *Bailey’s Cafe* ensures that such lessons repeatedly emerge throughout the course of the novel. In this way, the vamp is a structural tool for “worrying” the novel’s most important “lines” in order to engage the reader in (imaginative, psychoacoustic) acts of audition that are not merely sensory, but phenomenological.

In addition to fostering participatory musicality with blues structural devices, strategic variations, and vernacular delivery, *Bailey’s Cafe* frequently makes intermedial blues references. Perhaps, as Margaret Whitt suggests, readers are meant to recall or reference the lyrics of Duke Ellington’s 1930 “Mood Indigo” when reading “Mood: Indigo,” the first extended tune of “The Jam” in *Bailey’s Cafe*. If those lyrics—

I’m so lonesome I could cry
Cause there’s nobody who care about me
I’m just a soul who’s bluer than blue can be.
When I get that mood indigo,
I could lay me down and die (qtd. in Whitt 166)

—serve as an accompaniment to this story, they may strike readers as less sorrowful than the expression of loneliness the story achieves using blues devices. Ellington’s profound mood is sustained through the repetition of devastating narrative events, but with an occasional lightness of delivery that always causes wonder about the possibility of protagonist Sadie’s salvation: she enters into prostitution at the age of thirteen, endures an abusive marriage, returns to prostitution on and off again, and suffers from ruinous alcoholism, yet she retains her magic-like ability to transform the ugly and maimed objects of the world into things of unimaginable beauty. Chipped

mugs turn into fine porcelain in her hand. And her laughter—heard but once in the cafe—“was like music...the whole cafe stood still” (73). Strategic variation is used to relay sequences of tragic episodes of prostitution and homelessness in Sadie’s life, yet in the tradition of the blues this lonesomeness is punctuated with tragicomic commentary.

The novel’s sustained pedagogy on the ethics of listening comes to partial fruition in “Mood: Indigo,” as the interior world of Sadie’s detached imagination becomes increasingly present in the text. As perhaps the most sorrowful blues in the novel, Sadie’s fantasy of having a home where she could spend “*Nights just like this, sitting on the porch, stretching into eternity*” (77) is unrealizable, despite the best efforts of the members of the blues orchestra that comprise Bailey’s Cafe. The representation of increased audibility occurs through Naylor’s use of extended, intermittent, italicized thought reports. The sense of sorrow is compounded when Sadie’s simple dream of “*Nights full of music*” are not realized, when her fantasy of “*Nights full of peace...*” goes unfulfilled. Not unlike Jean Toomer’s use of ellipses in *Cane*, this single, solitary use of ellipses in Sadie’s italicized thoughts suggests the melismatic stretching of “*peace*” into a lingering, wavering intonation of sadness.

“Mood: Indigo” is especially important because of its narrative perspective and its innovative use of polyphony. Because of the blues’ ability to amplify women’s voices in novels such as Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, poems such as Sonia Sanchez’s *A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women* (1974), and scholarly works such as Angela Davis’s *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998), one might expect all the women of *Bailey’s Cafe* to sing their own songs. Yet Sadie does not tell her own story. The community of voices in the cafe makes her song perceptible. Although Sadie’s blues are her own, they need amplification from the maestro to become audible: she lacks the capacity to communicate verbally with others, but the maestro’s

demonstration of phenomenological listening brings out her song. It is through Sadie's interactions with the community—from Bailey's attunement to her lower-frequency story, to Iceman Jones's kindness and receptiveness, to the whole cafe's accommodating treatment of this woman called a twenty-five cent whore on the outside—that her story is registered through audition.

In these ways, the use of a narrative structure that functionally incorporates a blues community of sympathetic listeners offers sufficient amelioration of Sadie's ostracization to give sound to an otherwise voiceless presence. That Ellington's "Mood Indigo" underscores the narrative is yet another unifying element: if it is Ellington's tune playing throughout, then it is because of *that* music that Iceman continues to return to the cafe and subsequently engages with Sadie. Though Ellington's name is never mentioned, the blues discourse of the story creates distinct overlap with the song's lyrics and suggests the possibility that it has facilitated a communalism symbolized by the cafe's diasporic community. Indeed, it is through the interactions among Sadie, Iceman, Bailey, and the others in the cafe while this music is playing that the narration of Sadie's inner thoughts becomes possible—that is, the narration comprised by the polyphonic interplay between her inner voice, those tragic moments in italics where the songs of her fantasies play for a captive audience, the music of Ellington, and the voices of this particular diasporic community.

Biblical references shape "Eve's Song," the next solo in "The Jam," and so it stands to reason that the story has been analyzed by a variety of scholars foremost for its revisionist approach to Judeo-Christian principles and texts.¹⁰ As a revision of Edenic creationism, Eve's song tells of her own birth from out of the very ground of the delta; of her upbringing by a

¹⁰ Excellent work on the biblical elements of *Bailey's Cafe* appears in Whitt, Ashford, and Swindell.

supernatural, foreboding “godfather”; of the moment of her expulsion from his house; of her alleged half-millennium journey from the deepest point of the Louisiana delta, Pilottown, to Arabi and to Chicago; and of her recreation of a new Eden in the yard outside her brothel. While these events certainly draw attention to the biblical, there has been virtually no attention paid to the significance of references in “Eve’s Song” to delta dust, its allegorical representation of the blues through the journey of a young child from the deep south to urban Chicago, nor to its very title as a “song”—all of which, in the context of this musically designed narrative architecture, suggest rich connections with the often mythologized history of the blues. Indeed, blues singer Sippie Wallace established a connection between the biblical Eve and blues music when she said, “Eve is the cause of all of us having the blues, child” (qtd. in Harrison 117).

As its title suggests, Naylor’s “song” of “Eve” combines music with a central icon from one particular narrative of humanity’s origins; moreover, it combines conceptions of diaspora with the story of the blues. For Eve’s song, like the blues and like Naylor’s Eve, is born out of the “delta dust,” but does not remain fixed there. The music travels as Eve travels along the path of the Great Migration, yet Eve always has the dust with her, its constant presence a metaphor for the constant presence of the diasporic past. This leads her to wonder several times over whether others know anything about delta dust at all, whether they appreciate how powerful it is. This question about others’ knowledge of their distant but actual origins becomes a refrain throughout her song. Eve’s expulsion from the Edenic delta results from the symbolic “godfather” discovering her sexual experiences during girlhood, which involve a young man who stomps on the ground between her legs, the vibrations bringing her sexual ecstasy. The composition of Eve’s song is thus built on vibration and sexuality, the sounds of stomping and

sexual feeling thereby adding sonic dimension to this symbolic parallel to blues legends that revolve around agrarian soundscapes and sexual power.

Just like Eve's song, the early blues existed on the periphery of the black church. Just as the blues have long been regarded as the evil counterpart of black spiritual music,¹¹ the earliest moments of sound in Eve's song are contrasted with sounds of religious music: the sound of stomping and Eve's sexual utterances mingle with the sound of hymns "drifting out of the church." As the stomping occurs, the godfather—who always laughed when he became enraged—discovers Eve's exploits and expels her from the garden, thus commencing the forcible beginning of her epic walk, her own diaspora. By the time Eve arrives in New Orleans, she claims to have already "lived a hundred years ten times over" (90-1), but the year she reaches New Orleans happens to be 1913—within just months of the publication of the first blues songs ever put into print.¹² "Eve's Song" does not simply mean "the song of Eve"; read as a contraction, it signifies as well that Eve *is* song.

As the first-person narrator of her own tale, Eve speaks with the wisdom of an experienced blues professional about the lost and desperate young women and girls who knock on the door of the brothel: their stories, to Eve, always seem to shift "into the familiar key of and-nobody-loves-you-when-you're-down-and-out" (82), much like the lyrics of Ellington's "Mood Indigo." Like an ironic blues vocalist, Eve claims to have lost her sense of humor over the course of her incredible journey, and yet her story is laced with tragicomical smirks and commentaries. Much like the scattered and distant origins of the earliest blues music and its predecessors, Eve "didn't have an age when I lived in Pilottown. Godfather always told me that...I never had a real mother or father" (82). In the same way that many blues singers have

¹¹ See Spencer, especially xi-xxx and 1-34.

¹² On the history of the publication of early blues and proto-blues songs, see Muir, 1-27.

uttered some variation on “the day I was born” there having been a fire-red moon, Eve states her origins as supernatural: “the day I was born...he said he found me in a patch of ragweed, so new I was still tied to the birth sac and he had to bite off the umbilical cord with his teeth and spit it out to save me from being poisoned” (83). These lines suggest on the one hand the dawn of patriarchal dominance over Eve, the first woman; on the other hand, however, they suggest Eve’s *song* as a parallel to the numinous origins of the delta blues and their nascence from out of black American agricultural labor. Thus “Eve’s Song” functions as a revisionist lesson on blues history, for here in the garden of the godfather there is only Eve—and no Adam—thereby reformulating the ownership of the blues as the music of black women. Moreover, it is a retelling of Eve’s expulsion from a metaphorical Eden in parallel with the emergence of the blues, making the story of this music the story of forced displacement, of being cast out, of beginning a life out of dispersion, of necessarily practicing diaspora. In this way, the story of diaspora held in the blues becomes aligned with one version of the story of that “first diaspora”—the exit from Eden. The story of the genesis of the blues becomes the story of a diasporic community’s dehumanizing but also culturally proliferative exodus. The story of humankind in these terms is revealed as *always already a story of diaspora*, the blues powerfully invoked in this novel not just as an articulation of the diaspora stemmed from the Atlantic slave trade, but indeed as an articulation of diaspora as fundamental to the human condition.

Silence in *Bailey’s Cafe* is not absence, but the rhetorical instrumentalization of silence itself. In stark contrast to “Eve’s Song” and virtually every other portion of *Bailey’s Cafe*, “Sweet Esther” has no explicitly musical title. Instead, it is shaped by moments of traumatic silence: the word “unspeakable” is repeated twice in these six pages of broken narrative; and the italicized memory, a refrain that breaks the story into what few pieces are in fact “speakable,”

“*We won’t speak about this, Esther*” is repeated five times. Each utterance of this single line creates vacant page space, persistently forcing readers to fill in the breaks as Esther struggles to confront the memories of her experienced horrors. However, the recurrent silence in “Sweet Esther” may be more symbolically significant than one might at first think. We must first acknowledge the central fact of Esther’s narrative that the main character, a young girl of only thirteen by the time she reaches Eve’s brothel, was sold into sex slavery by her brother. Her escape from enslavement brings her to Eve’s new Eden, but it is a brothel after all, and Esther’s life is dominated by her exploitation by male patrons. By escaping from the material confines of slavery and into the less-official but still-enslaving world of prostitution, Esther’s story parallels the “end” of U.S. slavery and the beginning of the Reconstruction. Her silence is utterly striking in the context of the cultural environment for African Americans during Reconstruction.

The function of silence in the Reconstruction period—silence as opposed to the allegedly constant (and often obligatory) singing of the slaves—is relevant here. As a poignant illustration, Lawrence Levine writes that “by the late 1880s the blacks in [Lydia Parish’s] southern New Jersey neighborhood—many of whom were escaped slaves or their descendants—‘began to pattern their behavior after that of the silent white folk, and from that time on, little of their singing was heard’” (203). In another example, Levine cites the words of Georgia Bryan Conrad. While in the south during her youth, “‘the Negroes were always singing,’” but later, in 1901, she writes, “‘Nothing is in greater contrast to that time than the quietness of the Negroes now’” (203). These scenes are further echoed in a variety of later works of blues literature; for example, Bebe Moore Campbell’s *Your Blues Ain’t Like Mine* (1992) opens with a white woman’s wishes to hear black songs as in years before, but “by then the song had seeped into the land like spilled blood, and its vanishing echo was just another shadow on her soul” (9). As Parish’s observation

above reveals, the observer was quick to attribute the absence of singing to Reconstruction-era acculturation. However, the silence she and others noticed was not likely to be a product of black acculturation, but also an indication of the new freedom of not having to sing before whites, as so many black Americans were previously required under threat of corporal punishment. Indeed, white-perceived silence of African Americans during the Reconstruction may have been a display of subtly resistive silence in the public sphere, counterposed, of course, with that period's little-documented germination of the more solitary, existential, solo-call-and-self-response blues music that emerged from private sectors of African America in the 1890s. This may be partially confirmed by the later development, noted by folklorist Bruce Jackson in the 1960s, where many young, black prisoners "refused to sing work songs because they considered them to be 'oldtimeyniggerstuff'" (Levine 217). In 1947, Alan Lomax similarly wrote of young black prisoners who regarded worksongs as "old fageyism" (Levine 217).

This historical observation and theoretical consideration goes to the point of understanding Esther's silence and how the representation of her silence functions within the otherwise musical performances of *Bailey's Cafe*. For Esther, when romantic songs speak of sex, she "cannot imagine what that is and I grow irritated by the songs. The music causes me to ache in a way I cannot understand" (98). Music is not Esther's connection. And she remains disconnected from Bailey's Cafe, carrying out her work as a prostitute in the dark quarters of the brothel's basement. And so the silence here, the lack of song, may in itself be Naylor's instrument. But if Esther's sexual slavery, escape, and post-escape entry into sexual servitude establishes a parallel between chattel slavery, Emancipation, and the awful treatment of partially freed African Americans through Reconstruction, then against what does Esther's silence protest? As with the recurring silence of Gayl Jones' protagonists Ursa in *Corregidora* and Eva

in *Eva's Man* (1976), silence here becomes strategic: rather than singing for, speaking to, and sleeping with men when required to, Esther's strategic silence is a subdued but nevertheless haunting means for undermining racial, sexual, hypermasculine patriarchal dominance. Moreover, while Esther does take employment in the brothel, she does so on her own terms, with hints that she takes the role of dominatrix and with the clear statement that if clients do not heed her rules, she will no longer perform her service. Finally, as if to amplify the impact of Esther's strategic silence, the maestro lets her tale come to an end without so much as one musical phrase of the vamp to interfere with its resonance. This is an instance of absence as strategic, where silence, as in the compositions of John Cage, is a rhetorical variation of sound.

Naylor's composition reaches its most complex, polyphonic, symbolically dense story with "Mary (Take Two)," centered on a pregnant virgin from Ethiopia who, as a child, underwent "purification rites." That Eve and Nadine join forces to narrate this portion of the novel is of special interest and demands intensive listening to their respective voices on the part of the reader (only the subtlest cues in the text signal who is speaking, but they do exist). Nadine anchors the action and dialogue taking place in Bailey's Cafe—the process of cutting open Mariam's vaginal sutures, as well as the instructive conversations that accompany the procedure—while Eve, of the delta dust, of the Edenic diaspora, the symbolic first mother, has the power to narrate Mariam's story, even though Mariam arrives at Bailey's Cafe from Ethiopia without knowledge of the English language.

Eve, with her knowledge of this transnational community's shared origins, the diaspora, and a range of African customs, offers instruction to Nadine and the other women in the cafe on the cultural rationale and history behind Mariam's circumstances. In translation, Eve channels Mariam's refrain that "*No man has ever touched me,*" repeated six times, and worries the line

twice more by channeling Mariam's mother in Ethiopia, saying, "Mariam insists that no man has ever touched her...And the girl repeats that no man has ever touched her" (154). Here, the technique of worrying the line stresses the unwillingness of Mariam to be the object of God's immaculate conception, while also developing a profound African reconnection as Eve educates the women in the cafe. As a means of enriching the connectivity between African America and Africa, this narrative event is underscored with an echoing soundscape that traverses the massive divide between Bailey's Cafe in the U.S. and the rural hills of Ethiopia. For example, when Eve argues that there was "no way for the girl to be lying [about her virginity], or the whole village would have heard her screams," she adds that "Echoes carry well in the green hills of Ethiopia..." (146), with the use of ellipses to carry those echoes.

This soundscape, resonating from Ethiopia to the U.S., brings together a community of African and African-descended women for the common purpose of literally and symbolically repairing black women's ownership of their reproductive agency. The ritualistic reopening of Mariam, an African girl at Bailey's Cafe, allows for the communal restoration of reproduction and symbolizes the repair of broken lines of maternal connection from Africa to America. As in Walker's *The Color Purple*, the parallels and juxtapositions of gendered and racialized practices in Africa and the U.S. extend to the disruption effected by forced dispersion in both continents. In *Bailey's Cafe*, the Beta-Israel of Ethiopia are represented like sharecroppers of the U.S. south: "They're outcasts in their own nation and only allowed to be tenants on the land," "ex-slaves" following new commandments issued for "the dispossessed" (Naylor 146).

The contrast between disempowerment represented through the Beta-Israel and practices of sexual domination in the U.S. serves as a powerful instance of *Bailey's Cafe's* pedagogical work, one that urges readers to defamiliarize hypermasculinity. This thread of the novel's

pedagogy is reinforced at the end of the chapter in the concluding vamp, which subtly inserts a comment about Sister Carrie's obsessive control over her American daughter's sexuality, thereby juxtaposing Carrie's American obsessions over sexual purity with the gory rituals of "purification" and mutilation the cafe women learn about in Ethiopia (160). The reclamation of women's sexuality and reproductive choice in this song—all achieved through the communal interactions of women working together with the help of Eve—parallels the powerfully influential roles played by women blues singers, as discussed by Hazel Carby and Angela Davis, for whom singing was also a vehicle for empowering disenfranchised listeners. For Naylor, that singing takes the form of Eve's leadership in saving Mariam's reproductive capacity and then functions to reclaim sexual agency, reproductive choice, and maternal possibilities.

It should not come as a surprise that the next song after this meditation on cultural sharing between Africa and the U.S. is a blues song. Nor is it a surprise that the final solo in the novel's jam is the only one explicitly titled *as* a blues. "Miss Maple's Blues" plays just after the novel's most poignant reconnection with Africa and the diaspora; significantly, this is a blues that resounds with nearly every justice-oriented issue addressed by, for instance, Gil Scott-Heron's brilliant spoken word performance of "Bicentennial Blues" (1976), serving to link socioeconomic oppression with the material disadvantages of forced dispersion. In Miss Maple's song, Maple navigates intersections of structural racism in public education, local business practices, the U.S. military, higher education, the federal prison system, and big business—all of which leads to his will to suicide.

Importantly, in the vamp that opens "Miss Maple's Blues," Bailey speaks of the music he tends to hear at the back of the cafe around Christmas time in order to subtly internationalize the blues about to ensue: "sometimes you'll hear the most beautiful music. A chorus of Christmas

carols. The blowing of a shofar. Ghanta bells. Jade gongs. Gong chimes. Or the silver sounds of Tunisian finger cymbals” (162). The international qualities of this song develop as Miss Maple relays his family history, which begins with his grandparents, neither of whom were American: his grandmother, who spoke English, Cuchan, and Spanish, married his grandfather, whose status as a former slave is at first left intentionally ambiguous, but who was actually a fugitive Texas slave. The narrative about Maple’s grandfather combats delusional myths about unity and equality in the U.S. by subtly riffing on established norms. For instance, while his grandfather was allowed to buy “all the *private* property in California that anybody wanted to sell him,” Maple states that “public property belonged to all of the *united states in America*, and it would take him another war, another thirteen years, and two more children to become a paper American” (169, emphasis added). The use of lower case letters for “united states” and the alternative preposition “in” instead of “of” helps to establish Miss Maple’s blues in the dominant tradition of blues before the 1950s: rather than issuing explicit protests on a regular basis, many blues more covertly called attention to contradictions and problems with the status quo through personal, sometimes existential expressions. On the other hand, Miss Maple’s blues complicates some perspectives on the blues itself: rather than espouse a robust American pride and adopt a conventionally masculinist gender role as a man of mythical sexual prowess, Miss Maple identifies with ethnic hybridity and over time finds women’s dresses very comfortable, thereby complicating the status of blues music as “American music” and subverting the often-gendered hierarchy of blues musicians.

As an affirmation of Scott-Heron’s claim that “the blues remembers everything the country forgot” (Scott-Heron), Miss Maple’s blues is a pedagogical project that functions like J. A. Rogers’ columns in the *Pittsburgh Courier* newspaper to reframe and reanimate African and

African American aspects of U.S. history. Endowed with the historically rich name of Stanley Beckwourth Booker Taliaferro Washington Carver Maple, Miss Maple uses the name as an opportunity to deliver history lessons. It is worth citing the entirety of Maple's opening lines—for the unique voice he brings to the text, for a model of how his historical work takes an instructional tone in the narrative, and for how his commitment to restoring black history plays a role outside and inside of Bailey's Cafe. "My name is Stanley," he announces:

My middle names are Beckwourth Booker T. Washington Carver. The *T* is for Taliaferro. Most people don't know that's what the initial stands for in Booker T. Washington's name, and they don't know that James P. Beckwourth was a scout who discovered the lowest point for wagon trains to cross the Sierras, getting the Beckwourth Pass and the town of Beckwourth, California, all thrown in for the effort. Someone like Sugar Man, who thinks he has the right to ridicule me for my choice of clothes, doesn't even know where the Sierras are, or that colored pioneers like Beckwourth existed, or that George Washington Carver did a lot more for the world than refine peanut butter. Whenever he licks a postage stamp this season to send out those misspelled Christmas cards to whoever has the misfortune of his knowing their address, he gives no thanks to Carver for it not falling off the envelope. That's because he's only been taught what we call American history. (165)

Maple establishes the roots of his own family legacy, casually reversing historical racial roles of post-Emancipation sharecropping and his role therein, by relaying his grandmother's dream about white gold in the desert and the purchase of the property that leads to his family's ownership of 3,000 acres of high-yielding cotton farms—an ultimate symbolic reversal of

America's history of racist agriculture. Maple relays how whites in the area learned of his grandmother's dream of white gold, assumed that gold metal was to be found, and purchased swaths of land only to realize in bewilderment that no gold was there. This led his grandfather to pay minimal prices for the land and to the establishment of a significantly sized, black-owned cotton empire. Here, the whites become the fools looking for nonexistent gold, while an African American family wins by cultivating cotton on abandoned land. Thus in a handful of casual, circumlocutious sentences, a massive implied narrative is told in the same way that a few blues lines can imply the epic.

As the novel nears its concluding scene on New Year's Eve, 1948, Maple goes to the back of the cafe, where anyone's self-individuated magic or demise can occur, with a full glass of champagne. Maple

steps off boldly into the midst of nothing and is suspended midair by a gentle wind that starts to swirl his cape around his knees. It's a hot, dry wind that could easily have been born in a desert, but it's bringing, of all things, snow. Soft and silent it falls, coating his shoulders, his upturned face. Snow. He holds his glass up and turns to me as a single flake catches on the rim before melting down the side into an amber world where bubbles burst and are born, burst and are born.

(216)

The hot wind has extended from the cotton fields of the west first attained through the vision and perseverance of his grandparents; the snow it carries signifies the fruition of his family's nearly unbelievable, epic legacy, its mergence with the champagne bubbles producing the unified vision of white gold to burst and be born. His dreams finally realized, Miss Maple's blues song affirms

Albert Murray's persistent reminders that the blues are not just songs of melancholy, but also of triumph.¹³

3.5 CONCLUSION

The pedagogical work of *Bailey's Cafe* thus occurs through a variety of perspectives and forms. By way of introducing himself, Bailey offers a history of segregated sports, black experiences of World War II, and profound lessons on how to listen. By virtue of her story and her ongoing experience with the women of the African diaspora, Eve shares her wisdom about diasporic origins and intercommunal connectivity among black people throughout the diaspora. And finally, Miss Maple implicatively, rather than didactically, demonstrates his ability to educate others about the contributions of black people living in the "united states in America" (Naylor 169). In these ways, the work of restoring historical memory is a pronounced but gradual process in *Bailey's Cafe*, where learning about the history of Africa and of African America becomes crucial to the development of a blues narrative. Naylor's endowment of Miss Maple with skilled narratorial delivery rich in circumlocution allows the projects of historical restoration and a thorough critique of racial capitalism to be achieved without any need to resort to allusive allegory, hyperbolic satire, or blatant protest.

"If life is truly a song," says Bailey, "then what we've got here is just snatches of a few melodies" (219). With this statement, the terminus of "Miss Maple's Blues" segues into the novel's conclusion, "The Wrap," where Bailey brings the solos together in a final commentary and narrates the birth of Mariam's child inside the doors of Bailey's Cafe. Consistently forging

¹³ See especially Murray's *The Hero and the Blues*, 23, 36, and 107; and *Stomping the Blues*, 68 and 254.

connections between song and experience, Bailey accommodates each theme from the jam in order to expound upon their larger significance, and he compellingly does so by thinking of diaspora and placelessness as the basis of the Bailey's Cafe blues community: "All these folks are in transition," he notes. They "come midway in their stories and go on." In this way, the novel accommodates the diversity of each narrative it contains without attempting to homogenize them. Without using the exact terms, the narrator is cognizant of *décalage*, of the unevenness of this diasporic community, its differences and disjunctures, and the impossibility of a perfectly composed ending to a score still in progress: "If this was like that sappy violin music on Make-Believe Ballroom," he says, "we could wrap it all up with a lot of happy endings to leave you feeling real good that you took the time to listen. But I don't believe that life is supposed to make you feel good, or to make you feel miserable either. Life is just supposed to make you feel" (219). The use of blues language in the conclusion amplifies the thematic developments already working in the novel: the raggedness and off-key pitches never culminate with a fantasy of harmonious resolution, but instead with the mingling of flexible pitch areas, a paradoxically gleeful dissonance, the imperfect but dedicated work of Brent Hayes Edwards' conception of the practice of diaspora. If the symbolism of the imperfect union taking place in the cafe were to be lost on readers, Bailey materializes it with a coda-like ending that effectively and meaningfully establishes imperfection and unevenness while still anticipating the continuing practice that lies ahead: "And that's how we wrap it, folks. It's the happiest ending I've got. Personally, I'm not really too down about it. Life will go on. Still, I do understand the point this little fella is making as he wakes up in the basket: When you have to face it with more questions than answers, it can be a crying shame" (229). By bringing the many voices of the novel together in "The Wrap," *Bailey's Cafe* establishes difference and uncertainty as inherent to the human condition,

furnishing an indirect pedagogy with lessons on navigating difference by working not only across it but also through it, on practicing not just by playing but also by listening, where informed play becomes a dedicated practice that aspires to what Paul Gilroy has valuably conceptualized as the politics of transfiguration.

When Naylor first released “Mood: Indigo” as a short story in the *Southern Review*—a single track anticipating the album, in a way—she offered a preface to *Bailey’s Cafe* that has not yet been printed in the published novel. At first glance, it would seem that jazz was a fundamental influence for Naylor, and yet, as the passage ensues, we realize that she could not separate jazz from blues. As she writes,

Content and structure always have been inextricably tied in my imagination; and so it came as no surprise, if an immense challenge, that the contents of *Bailey’s Cafe*, which addresses our perceptions of female sexuality, needed a musical framework for its birth...And while it don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing, I found that jazz didn’t mean anything either unless ‘underneath it all, through it all, there was just a tremor, a slight tremor of the earth moving.’ And as the earth moved, the earthiness of the blues was always there. (“Mood: Indigo” 502)

Naylor’s words lead to deeper consideration as to why it is that some narratives have “needed” the structures and forms of the musics of the African diaspora. The soundscape of Naylor’s work—as a novelistic whole and as a series of musical teaching moments—teaches listeners by inhabiting what Amiri Baraka names “the tradition”: the tradition of learning from black music, of translating black music into acoustic literary forms, and of instilling those forms with recovered, renewed, and reapplied lessons of African and African American cultural pedagogies.

4.0 BLACK ARTS, AURAL RIGHTS: AMIRI BARAKA'S CULTURAL PEDAGOGY

If you're a modern artist...you understand that you can learn from anything and anybody, see that the whole world culture is at your disposal...

Amiri Baraka
KGNU Boulder Radio Broadcast (1984)

*Think of Slavery
as
Educational!*

Amiri Baraka
Wise Why's Y's: The Griot's Song Djeli Ya (1995)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Years after the spotlight on *Dutchman* had dimmed, Amiri Baraka spoke of his struggle “to make it” as a writer: “I can’t,” he stated. “And the only explanation of that is that the content still disturbs people” (Melhem 194). The content of Baraka’s work does still disturb people. Bruce Bawer’s caustic counter-eulogy, published four days after Baraka’s death in January 2014, and the commentary it elicited offer a glimpse of this. Deeming Baraka’s poetry “lousy,” “aesthetically barren,” “morally repulsive,” “mindless black radical hate,” and the “worst stuff” he had read from a Norton anthology while he was in college, Bawer goes on to reduce Baraka’s oeuvre to “*real* racism, abhorrent, hideous, and repellent.” Denouncing him as talentless, Bawer sees nothing in Baraka’s work besides “a rainbow flag of prejudice: obsessively anti-white;

poisonously anti-Semitic; ferociously antigay; not to mention dripping with contempt for women and uniformly hostile to American society” (Bawer).

Published online, Bawer’s essay prompted a series of mostly anonymous replies, nearly all from readers who agreed with Bawer. Most were grateful for the essay and reveled in Baraka’s passing. Using terms slightly less masked than Bawer’s, some readers contributed supplemental racist commentary, as others celebrated Baraka’s death and condemned him to suffer in hell: “He was a despicable human being and I am sure he will not rest in peace, because the amount of hatred he possessed will send him in the opposite direction of Heaven,” posited one; “may he burn in Hades for a long long time,” wished another; “A worthless piece of crap who has finally gone home. Too [*sic*] Hell!” claimed another. One anonymous commenter echoed these condemnations by naming Baraka’s sins, speculatively associating Baraka with hate crimes and bloodshed: “Baraka was an instigator of hate crimes and as such he is responsible [*sic*] for plenty of black on society crimes. He has blood on his hands, except for doing the actual killing which he may have done and got away with it.”

Bizarre and distorted phrases such as “black on society crimes” suggest that ad hominem attacks on Baraka, for at least some of Bawer’s readers, are taken as opportunities to indulge in racist venting. Moreover, they reflect cultural resistance to objective interpretations of Baraka’s writing. That Baraka defended his own work, modified and apologized for certain statements, and, over the course of his career, underwent a series of changes in ideological mindset is either ignored or dismissed as insignificant in such comments—as in Bawer’s essay. Although the comments are not specifically linked with developments in Baraka scholarship, Bawer’s essay (which features a plug for his most recent book) proclaims an assault on multiculturalism and implies a variety of explanations as to why nuanced aspects of Baraka’s writing are overlooked.

The essay's comments are just as striking for their brash intimations of Baraka as more evil than artistic, for their lack of familiarity with the spectrum of Baraka's writing, and for their dismissal of his works, based on his early claims that he would later describe as narrow-minded. In such estimations of Baraka, the tales have become inextricably yoked to the teller.

Without doubt, the unabashedly rhetorical and frequently didactic appeals of Baraka's works have repelled and repulsed some of his readers, yet it is worth remembering that these qualities of his prose, poetry, and plays have also catalyzed the dissemination of persuasive recognitions of black diaspora cultural formation. The difficulty, the conflicts, the offensiveness and conflictedness of Baraka's writings, along with their pronounced concern with educational discovery and cultural teaching, as suggested by the epigraphs above, render them all the more suitable for analysis through a cultural pedagogical lens. Baraka's continuum of intense concern with the blues, in particular, evolves as a project to alter socially conditioned norms of musical experience, to reclaim aurality as a source of historical consciousness and an impetus of political activism. The contours of a shifting but nevertheless sustained pedagogy of intervention emerge most visibly with Baraka's 1963 *Blues People*—a history of music, a critique of culture, a theory of racial America—which stands today as one of literary scholars' most relied upon blues studies. By authoring that work, however, Baraka found himself in a challenging rhetorical situation, where competing versions of blues history allowed for flexibility—if not outright generalization—in the interpretation of the blues genre and black American cultural politics. Such flexibility necessitated critical interventions, and Baraka's blues writings effectively disinter layers of racial control in blues scholarship while furnishing ancillary perspectives frequently excluded in mainstream histories of the blues.

Just as significantly, Baraka's engagements with the necessary work of historiographical, critical, and aesthetic interventions have not only interrogated and reshaped written epistemologies; they have effectively reshaped how listeners listen. This chapter explores Baraka's commitment to altering socially conditioned listening habits by giving his writings fuller exposition and deeper consideration as rhetorical injunctions against cultural hegemony and injustice. The chapter charts the evolution of Baraka's blues writings; interprets his literary and critical use of blues music as a complicated conduit of historical memory and a force for social justice; and contextually and comparatively addresses key representations of violence found in his dramatic works. By analyzing continuities as well as shifts in Baraka's thinking about the blues—most notably present in his cultural criticism and historiographical writings since the 1960s—the sonic elements of his dramatic works emerge in compelling, provocative, yet under-appreciated ways. This is true of his canonical *Dutchman* (1964) and *The Slave* (1964), his critically neglected *Madheart: A Morality Play* (1968), and his all but forgotten *Boy and Tarzan Appear in a Clearing* (1980).

Without due consideration of Baraka's own theorizations of the blues—theorizations which inform his most strikingly audiovisual and racially specific representations of violence—the value of these literary contributions is at risk of being diminished. By reading Baraka's dramatic works through an optic informed by his own critical designs, we can more effectively recognize the ways in which those works render black music visual and racial violence aural, in what can be thought of as an infusion of black sound with graphic representations of performative, retributive, symbolic scenes of violence. These audiovisual scenes of violence coalesce through Baraka's use of literary blues techniques that position readers to “listen” while they look, that play on the senses in order to animate Baraka's cultural pedagogy of social

change. These techniques serve to disrupt an implied musical-racial imaginary that would otherwise relegate black music to the sphere of apolitical entertainment, sometimes serving to establish a diasporically rooted communitarian ethos, and always, by recalling historical injustice as the basis for contextualizing the revolutionary impetus of Baraka's dramas, striving to engage and inhabit the implied ahistorical racial imaginary of the audience.

In order to understand Baraka's often-troubling scenes of violence more fully, the literary blues techniques employed in his dramatic writing ought to be regarded as elements that are inextricable from his graphic strategies of representation. Despite opinions of Baraka that would have us treat his portrayal of violence as the promotion of violence, I seek to generate interpretive possibilities of these controversial representations in terms of their literary, rhetorical, and historiographical interventions. The foundations of Baraka's audiovisual scenes of violence are predicated upon the synesthetic recombination of sight with sonic memory. These scenes are often difficult to read, both for their complexity and for the stamina required to imagine such scenes of violence; however, through historical contextualization and by foregrounding the ideological and conceptual work of Baraka's historiographical and critical blues writings, there is a significant opportunity to rethink these often cacophonous soundscapes, revalue their sensory totality, and resituate them within African American literature's larger project of translating the musics of the African diaspora into literary forms.

4.2 HISTORY, APPROPRIATION, POLITICS

*(are we gathered to dig this?
electric wind find us finally
on red records of the history of ourselves)*

Amiri Baraka
AM/TRAK (1979)

Among the initial reviewers of Baraka's *Blues People*, Langston Hughes hailed the book as the first on jazz by a black writer, marking it as historically important for that very reason. It remains so influential perhaps because of Baraka's discussion of the blues in tandem with U.S. race relations and his tracing of the movement of African music into American society, establishing a working paradigm for literary scholars who became increasingly attentive to identity politics in the years thereafter. As Baraka writes in *Blues People*, "I want to use music as my persistent reference just because the development and transmutation of African music to American Negro music (a *new* music) represents to me this whole process in microcosm" (8). Blues music is, for Baraka, a useful optic on the positionalities of African Americans in the U.S., and he rightly finds it necessary to precede its emergence in the 1890s with the continuum of enslavement that had already existed in Africa—that came to be in a completely new country, culture, and society (1). Baraka names blues the parent of "all legitimate jazz" (17), an American music that could not exist if African captives had not become American captives. He creates a lineage for black music that has since become familiar in major and minor scholarly blues projects, with work songs of West African origin the most immediate predecessors of the blues (18). It is Baraka's valuable insight that the work song "took on its own peculiar qualities in America": first because the singers were not working their own land, but someone else's, which made America a *reference*—not one's lineage or ancestry or homeland; thus a distinguishing quality of the

African American work song is its navigation of religious suppression by white masters (19). In these ways, the work song “evolved” as a form that conformed to the tending of white men’s fields, an evolution that Baraka later reimagines in his dramatic works.

Baraka’s historiography also intervenes in the work of musicologists who ascribed inferiority to African musics because of their autonomy from Western musical scales (*Blues People* 24). For Baraka, the significant “retentions” of African music are not individual, isolated songs, but the essential rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic devices that were transplanted “almost intact” in the U.S. (27). He troubles the narratives of progress and economic thinking that have “made possible this dreadful split between life and art” (29). As Baraka writes, “The Western concept of ‘beauty’ cannot be reconciled to African or Afro-American music” (30), a problematic typified by Hegel’s perspective on African culture that is addressed more centrally in later works such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self* (1987). In short, Baraka established relative incommensurability between socially conditioned Western aesthetic preferences and African American cultural expression—just before the dawn of the Black Arts Movement, suggesting not only a precursor to the elaborations of Black Aesthetic discourse in the 1960s but also the establishment of a rift between racialized aesthetic sensibilities.

Beyond *Blues People*, Baraka’s many critical writings furnish valuable insights into his evolving—and always politically grounded—theorizations of the blues. Blues music for Baraka consistently serves as a touchstone for black identity formation and as the basis of all subsequent black musics, most notably discussed in his 1966 essay, “The Changing Same”: “its song quality is, it seems, the deepest expression of memory. It is the ‘abstract’ design of racial character that is evident, would be evident, in creation carrying the force of that racial memory” (*Black Music*

183). Indicative of the burgeoning Black Power ethos of the mid-1960s, Baraka intuits not just the collective memory function of the blues but also its progressive, revolutionary potential: “The Blues...is even descriptive of a plane of evolution, a direction...coming and going...through whatever worlds” (184). These past-conscious and future-oriented qualities of the blues do not for Baraka necessarily deny a blues rooted in the history of African American oppression; indeed, the blues necessarily extends from history and projects future potential.

One of Baraka’s controversial but enduring positions establishes the fundamentality of blues in jazz: “Without blues, as interior animation, jazz has no history, no memory,” he writes, qualifying the most important jazz players as “great blues artists,” as “blues people” (*The Music* 264). Similarly, in “The Jazz Avant-Garde” (1961), Baraka argues that the “*roots*, blues and bop, are emotion” (*Black Music* 72). This stress upon the emotional basis of African American musics reappears throughout his criticism, an argumentative stance Baraka revisited again and again as some Black Arts writers proclaimed the supreme expressive capacity of New Thing jazz music and attributed relatively little value to the blues forms preceding it. This is because for some Black Arts advocates, the blues “signified the benighted rural South: they were the cry of the slavery/sharecropping continuum, the sorrow-songs associated with what Baraka, in *Blues People*, had termed ‘the scene of the crime’” (Gussow 232). Maulana Karenga most famously denounced the blues in his 1968 essay, “Black Art: Mute Matter Given Force and Function,” proclaiming that “the blues are invalid; for they teach resignation, in a word acceptance of reality—and we have come to change reality” (2090). It is clear that Baraka did not take lightly these impressions of the blues as self-demeaning, anachronistic, and encumbering; for some of his contemporaries, the blues, especially in its less urban, more “downhome” rural forms, signified neither egalitarian progress nor the advancement of social justice.

The situation of Baraka's violent imaginary within the Black Arts Movement is, of course, crucial to recognize, especially in terms of the era's racially pronounced politics of cultural appropriation. One study of the racial tension surrounding the ownership of blues music, Adam Gussow's "If Bessie Smith Had Killed Some White People': Racial Legacies, the Blues Revival, and the Black Arts Movement" (2006), offers valuable contextualization. In the first place, Gussow argues that the Black Arts Movement "remade [black] literature as a blues-toned legacy—unabashedly invested in, and supremely conscious of, its own southern-born vernacular taproot, a jook-honed survivor's ethos of self-willed mobility, self-determined sexual personhood, and bittersweetly lyric self-inscription" (228). As Baraka's dramas demonstrate, Gussow is right to acknowledge the role of certain authors in reconceptualizing the blues as an optic on racial violence in the U.S. Gussow also reminds us that in the wake of the 1960s blues revival, which happened to coincide with the explosion of Black Arts and Black Power, the blues found itself newly imbued with generative symbolic capital even as it was infused with a postmodern, industry-based, biracial ambiguity (241). "White blues feeling" became increasingly dominant in blues societies, festivals, magazines, and instructional videos. In other words, the popular, musical mainstream of the blues circuit, including the music itself, transformed into a spectacle of whiteness in the 1960s and beyond.

The racial associations and implications of the blues had—and continue to have—pervasive consequences for scholarship pertinent to literary blues writing's multifaceted significations. Particularly as white blues aficionados came to dominate the commercial mainstream of blues venues, "black blues writers and cultural custodians, unable to prevent these proliferating appropriations, have taken their stand on the printed page" (Gussow 247). Thus by incidence of historical development, certainly insofar as the blues became aesthetically and

conceptually associated with symbolic acts of retributive racial violence, the Black Arts Movement stands as perhaps the most important period wherein literary blues writing evolved. The Black Arts Movement marks a significant development in blues representation, particularly in light of the previous periods when Jim Crow subjugation prevented most blues artists from singing openly about violent resistance against white oppressors. Not until the post-World War II period of blues production do voices of resistance become more prevalent in the blues lyrics themselves (Titon 1-12). Thus, Baraka's ethos of political and racial radicalization allowed the blues to be conjoined with an image and an ideology of revolutionary, retributive, and potentially violent resistance.

In a rhetorical situation that seemed to threaten access to blues epistemology, Baraka defended the blues as a basis of resistance to be channeled in African American literary expression. The sometimes cacophonous antiphonies of 1960s black radicalism, particularly concerning black cultural nationalism, required him to directly address the inequalities being forced upon the black community he sought to bring together in solidarity and to redeploy the blues as a means for addressing those inequalities. Baraka would years later continue to write in support of the blues tradition, defending it in "Blues, Poetry, and the New Music" (1987) as "the national voice of the African-American people. It is the fundamental verse form (speech, dance, verse/song) and musical form of the African/American slave going through successive transformations encountering various influences." Deeply cultural, "the verse forms," that is, the written forms of African American culture and language, persist "musically in various forms, and there is always an updated and contemporary form" (*The Music* 262). Here, Baraka returns to the ambiguously defined space of written blues, maintaining that despite the variation of its written forms, "the blues as verse form is always accompanied by a *music expressive of the*

particular period and socio-cultural realities of its creation” (263, emphasis added). For Baraka, then, blues writing must be politicized to be blues writing at all, and the distinctiveness of politicized blues writing lies in the specifics of its historical roots. In each new generation, “the new music is always rooted in historical certainty, no matter how disconnected from history it might sound to the casual or neophyte listener. But it *uses* history, it is not paralyzed by it!” (266). Most significantly, the “blues aesthetic” is “useful only if it is not depoliticization of reference” (“Blues Aesthetic” 101). For each generation, Baraka writes, the use of the blues “changes to reflect the level of the people’s productive forces and the social, political, and economic structure of those peoples’ lives” (102). What becomes essential for understanding Baraka’s critical and literary uses of the blues since the Black Arts era, then, is to situate their register as adaptive to the social, political, and economic changes sought by revolutionary black artists.

4.3 MUSICAL RE-COGNITION: AURAL RIGHTS IN BLACK ARTS POETRY

I write poetry to investigate my self, and my meaning and meanings. But also to invest the world with a clearer understanding of it self, but only by virtue of my having brought some clearer understanding of my self into it.

Amiri Baraka
“Gatsby’s Theory of Aesthetics” (1964)

Baraka’s prose criticism constitutes only a portion of his larger pedagogical project; the criticism in his poetry is a vital portion of it, as well, as suggested by the educative impetus communicated in the above epigraph. Much of Baraka’s poetry carries out the practice of Black Arts poets who “elevated poetry and performance above jazz criticism, or, at their best, figured out how to

embed criticism *in* poetry and performance” (Gennari 258). Before transitioning to Baraka’s dramatic texts, then, a few words are in order about certain Black Arts poets’ intense concern with the blues, history, and various forms of violence that are reflected in Baraka’s self-positioning as a poet who, across all genres, practiced poetics.

Though the formal innovations and performance aspects of this selection of poetry are compelling, I am less interested here in presenting an anatomy of form than in constellating those ideas held in poems that can be said to antecede, interanimate, and extend the formulations of Baraka’s pedagogical project (all of which goes toward the fuller analysis of Baraka’s dramatic works in the next section). My thinking here may be, in so many words, a reformulation and specific political contextualization of Roman Jakobson’s concept of the *poetic function*, in that Baraka correlates the musical with the historical as a means to stimulate readers’ “propensity to infer a connection in meaning from similarity in sound,” that is, as a strategy to put to rhetorical use the “mysterious affinity that binds together sound and sense” (Jakobson 60-61). I want to stress that Baraka’s critical handling of musical elements in this selection of poetry is less significant for its interaction with specific musical forms than it is for the ways in which it exceeds reconceptualization of the musical. He re-cognizes aural history through the musical as a basis for communitarian activism; that is to say, Baraka’s poetry functions to re-cognize the historical qua the musical in order to translate historical knowledge—including the instantiation of graphic violence as a catalyst of epistemological reformation—into participatory praxis.

Not all Black Arts writers were as invested in the blues as Baraka was, but some, such as The Last Poets, Sonia Sanchez, and Gil Scott-Heron, comprise a representative group of thinkers developing similar discourse on aurality—aurality formed through the experience of blues listening, in particular—as a means to recount and aesthetically instrumentalize black history.

This list is by no means exhaustive, nor is it intended to suggest that all Black Arts poets shared mutual concerns about blues music and the cultural politics of the genre; it is, however, intended to represent a pronounced intellectual and political interest of the period, specifically among writers who sought to reclaim black history through auralities that had long been threatened by the homogenizing culture industries which distorted or elided historical and contemporary tenets of black revolutionary thought. The following examples, even in their brevity, offer a substantive sample of the Black Arts Movement's reclamation of the right to listen and a viable basis for contextualizing Baraka's work of a similar nature.

For example, The Last Poets' "True Blues" (1971), which utilizes chanting and pronounced repetition, foregrounds the aural elements of the poem's recounting of black history. As each segment presents a critical development in historical and contemporary black oppression, every line of the poem is prefaced by the background chanting of "black black, to BLUES black black..." and begins with the phrase, "I sang the blues," as in the following excerpt:

I sang the **blues** on the slavemaster's plantation
helping him build his free nation
I sang the **blues** in the cottonfield
hustlin' to make the daily yield
I sang the **blues** when he forced my woman to beg
Lord knows how I wish he was dead
I sang the **blues** on the run
ducking the dogs and dodging the gun
I sang the **blues** hanging from the tree

in a desperate attempt to break free

I sang the **blues** when the sun went down,

cursing the master when he wasn't around... (*Vibes from the Scribes* 33)

Through the poem's entirety, the speaker "sang the blues" from the Middle Passage of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to slave auctions in the new world, through plantation slavery and the subnational marginalization enforced by segregation, during forced agricultural labor, at sites of lynching, in view of the raping of black women, throughout the exploitation of black soldiers, enduring the abuses of structural racism, escaping racist incarceration, and ultimately facing the death penalty. But in the end, the soundtrack of this sequence of tragedies is reclaimed, due in no small part to the rhythmical qualities of the sound recording and the subsequent, dynamic use of printing on the page. As a recording, the poem is spoken over the rhythmic chanting of "black black, black black to BLUES black black, black black to BLUES black black..." which punctuates the delivery of each line and crescendos in the final lines. On the page this chanting is lost, but compensated for in part through the use of variable font sizes and bold lettering to emphasize the slightly constrained yet threateningly explosive intonation heard in the speaker's vocal repetition of "blues." As the poem's history of subjugation continues, the speaker relates how the blues evolved to become a force of resistance in subtle, gradual, but powerful ways that are ultimately cultivated as the basis of a revolutionary identitarianism. The speaker, as he sang the blues, begins to "wish [the slavemaster] was dead"; he sang the blues while "on the run, / ducking the dogs and dodging the gun" and while "hanging from the tree / in a desperate attempt to break free"; he sang the blues to disseminate subversive consciousness, "cursing the master when he wasn't around"; he sang the "blues black," he sang the "blues blacker," and he sang the "blues blackest"—a process of identity cultivation—until he sang "BOUT MY SHO NUFF

BLUE BLACKNESS!” The Last Poets thus recognize the blues, as we have seen in Baraka’s criticism and as we will see in his literary works, as a chronicle of black history, a force of resistance, a source of black identity, and an evolving constituent of black self-determination that, as the form and delivery of the poem suggest, needed to be aggressively asserted.

As another point of connection with Baraka’s literary efforts, albeit far more invested in black feminist conceptualizations of black power, Sonia Sanchez’s *A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women* (1974) treats the blues as a touchstone for entering a supernatural yet politically grounded history—and future—of black womanhood, beginning with the cosmic introduction, “QUEENS OF THE UNIVERSE,” and proceeding through epochs of “Past,” “Present,” “Rebirth,” and “Future.” It examines uncertain senses of place experienced by black women—emphasizing uprootedness, arrested spiritual growth, and timidity of voice—in order to promote the need for reconnection to historical-ancestral sources of self-discovery:

there is no place
for a soft/black/woman.
there is no smile green enough or
summertime words warm enough to allow my growth.
and in my head I see my history
standing like a shy child
and I chant lullabies
as I ride my past on horseback
tasting the thirst of yesterday tribes

Expressing a fraught and uncertain sense of place, contextualized by threats of hypermasculinity and American cultural hegemony, the first lines effectively establish the speaker’s imperative to

access more substantive and edifying cultural resources, those to be discovered through listening. In one sense, it is *in silence* that the speaker only *sees* her history, a partial account of her/story contained in childhood memories as a “shy child.” In another sense, the reference to history “standing like a shy child” can also be read as history itself standing in a silent and awkward fashion, history as an unrealized resource for self-empowerment that is, in its silence, deficient in the partialness and partiality of ocularity. For both meanings, it is upon the introduction of the sonic, the chanting of lullabies—soft though they may be—that the speaker accesses a deeper historical consciousness signified by “yesterday tribes.” Thus by foregrounding placelessness and generating historical access through sound, these lines motivate the speaker’s necessary reclamation of aural rights, particularly when she lingers in the sound of the black woman’s voice as a resource of ancestral connection and self-realization: “hearing the ancient/black/woman” enables the speaker to transform into that woman, “me, singing...hay-hay-hay-hay-hay-ya-ya-ya / hay-hay-hay-hay-hay-ya-ya-ya.” This moment in which aurality exteriorizes as orality generates a deeper level of identification that precipitates fuller transformation of the speaker’s self-conception, aurality thus mobilizing the ancestrally edified voice:

and my singing
becomes the only sound of a
blue/black/magical/woman. walking.
womb ripe. walking. loud with mornings. walking
making pilgrimage to herself. walking.

In these ways, Sanchez, like Baraka, represents the occupation of aural history to articulate a critique of the U.S. cultural dominance, which necessitates the reclamation of aural rights in

order to achieve self-determination and sociopolitical change from within a black community; however, Sanchez's vision of self-determination and sociopolitical change are clearly suggested to be empowered by black women's leadership, whereas Baraka's formulations of gendered leadership, as we will see in *Madheart*, are far more conflicted.

Gil Scott-Heron's "Bicentennial Blues" (1976), a deeply retrospective spoken-word poem, emerged in the waning years of the Black Arts Movement and stands as an illuminating parallel to Baraka's project of aural reclamation. In Scott-Heron's meditation on the blues, the poem is less concerned with blues songs as musical artifacts than with the blues as a sentiment, a chronicle of black experience, and an aural presence in black consciousness: "The blues is grown, but not the home. The blues is grown, but the country has not. The blues remembers everything the country forgot." These lines suggest that the transgenerational maturation of the blues quickly exceeded that of its national habitus. Speaking of the U.S. bicentennial in 1976, the poem establishes the landmark date as an occasion for historical reckoning: "It's a blues year and America has got the blues. It's got the blues because of partial deification of partial accomplishments over partial periods of time. Halfway justice. Halfway liberty. Halfway equality. It's a half-ass year." Introducing the poem in the live performance recording, Scott-Heron identifies himself as a bluesician who, in occupying the blues and attempting to define "certain means and modes related to the blues," had become "afflicted with...the bicentennial blues," hearing in the blues a soundscape that resonates with 200 years of America's traumatic vestiges—chattel slavery, Jim Crow, entrenched inequality—a soundscape that goes unheard in a sociopolitical mainstream predicated on the econometric justification of the elision of justice

and—as Scott-Heron’s lines echo—an uncritical, materially neglectful celebration of multiculturalism.¹⁴

Following from this brief exposé of Black Arts poets’ interest in the relationships between blues, history, violence, and politics, there are several particularly salient interview statements and key poems to examine and incorporate as heuristics for the interpretation of Baraka’s dramatic texts. It is important to recognize, as did the late D. H. Melhem, for one, the “fluid sense...of exchange” between Baraka’s plays, his poetry, and his prose. Melhem asked Baraka in a 1981 interview, “Do you see them as distinct genres, or would you say your poetry is now being absorbed into your drama and prose?” (Melhem 192). Baraka’s response reveals above all else a poet’s ethos: “you have to utilize the poetic as much as you can in all the forms,” he said, “because the poetic to me is just an intense sense of language, an intense concern with language...I think that you have to be concerned with that, whether you write a novel or a play or an essay” (192). Asked if he could cite one typical poem—a poem of his that would say to people, “That’s what I’m all about” (191)—Baraka named his 1980 “In the Tradition,” an epic poem concerning African American cultural and political history. Beyond cataloguing with stunning capacity the expressive contributions of black musicians, political figures, and literary authors, “In the Tradition” captures the urgency of the rhetorical situation in which Baraka found himself, as it actively recovers the blues as an epistemological time capsule and as a revolutionary force for sociopolitical change. It stands as a vital articulation of the significance of the blues in Baraka’s career, anchored by jazz and blues references throughout.

¹⁴ “Bicentennial Blues” found new life not only in rereleases of Scott-Heron’s albums, but also as a sample in popular 1990s hip hop artist Warren Griffin’s “Do You See,” in the video for which Griffin lip syncs Scott-Heron’s words as his own in what can be viewed as an uncredited borrowing and, at the same time, a political gesture to extend the ethos of “Bicentennial Blues” into the mainstream of popular hip hop.

The first word of “In the Tradition” is, in fact, “Blues,” the simultaneously memorializing and progenitive word of the poem’s musical-historical invocation. It begins, “Blues walk weeps ragtime / Painting slavery” (302), ushering in Baraka’s sweeping encapsulation of black music’s political significance that, in relentless reprisals, comes to infuse the African American tradition with blues music and blues people: “What is this tradition Based on, we Blue Black Wards strugglin / against a Big White Fog, Africa people, our fingerprints are everywhere / on you America, our fingerprints are everywhere” (305). In its closing lines, the poem “concludes” with a return to one of black music’s great historical and political refrains, which is to say, to the call to action manifested in various black musics:

ours is one particular

one tradition

of love and suffering truth over lies...

in the tradition, always clarifying, always new and centuries old

says

Sing!

Fight!

Sing!

Fight!

Sing!

Fight! &c. &c.

booshee dooooo doo doooo dee

doooo

dooooooooooo!

DEATH TO THE KLAN!

(“In the Tradition” 165)

This poem—which is dedicated to saxophonist Arthur Blythe and which, in live performance, takes Baraka more than thirteen minutes to read even at a sometimes-breakneck speed—is a stark instantiation of the poet’s commitment to an evolving political aesthetic, which evolved somewhat in accordance with his own transitions from Beat poet, to black cultural nationalist, to Third World Marxist.

“In the Tradition” is likewise significant within Baraka’s oeuvre as a formal effort that complements his achievements as a dramatist. As Baraka scholar William J. Harris writes, this is the poem that “most successfully brings together his white and his black avant-garde traditions” in a form that “is uniquely New World” (113). A manifestation of Baraka’s epistemological infusion of black life into American culture—and vice versa—the poem signifies a peak of his commitment to advancing a black poetics across the genres of his writings. Advancing such a poetics, for Baraka, appears to have involved a series of thought experiments centered on musical listening practices. These manifest as significant testaments to Baraka’s interest in teaching others to listen with the ardor and fortitude he believed were necessitated by the past and required for progress in the future. These elements are delivered in Baraka’s *AM/TRAK*, the development of which teaches readers to become listeners who occupy aurality in order to more immediately experience—and put to use—history. Baraka first relays the aurality of history through a response to the music of John Coltrane:

Trane,

Trane,

History Love Scream Oh

Trane, Oh

Trane, Oh

Scream History Love

Trane. (*Transbluesency* 189)

AM/TRAK as a title is itself a play on becoming so intimate with sound as to inhabit it, as in “I am the musical track,” and, with its pun on Amtrak trains, “I am the train/Trane.” Most interestingly, *AM/TRAK* makes it expressly clear that the process of “becoming” the music is achievable not in a formal educational setting, but instead through the pedagogy of culture accessible by allowing sustained listening to generate understanding of the past and conceptions of “brighter,” or in this case, “electric,” futures: “This was Coltrane’s College. / A Ph motherfuckin d / ...who hipped us to electric futures” (*Transbluesency* 192). The goal of accessing history through music that so pervades Baraka’s work is poignantly announced as *AM/TRAK* expresses an intimate reciprocity between the listener and the listened to:

There then came down in the ugly streets of us

inside the head & tongue

of us

a man

black blower of the now

The vectors from all sources—slavery, renaissance

bop charlie parker,

nigger absolute super-sane screams against reality

course through him

AS SOUND! (*Transbluesency* 193).

The expansive scope of Baraka's poetry is a reminder to observe throughout Baraka's dramatic writings his belief that, regardless of readers' genre expectations, "poetry is the fundamental concern" (Baraka qtd. in Melhem 192). That Baraka's works are so intergenerationally reciprocal urges us to attend more closely to the interanimation of his historiographical, critical, and poetic writings, specifically those manifestations of his life-long immersion in the blues that so influentially inform, structure, and aestheticize his dramatic works. While it has long been clear that the blues for Baraka has represented an optic on social transformations resulting from the African diaspora and from emancipation in the U.S., less understood are his dramatic applications of blues music, where the blues frequently precipitates spectacles of symbolic violence that such transformations could not have anticipated or prevented.

4.4 AURAL CONDITIONS: BARAKA'S BLUES IN DRAMATIC PRACTICE

I carry some words, some feeling, some life in me. My heart is large as my mind this is a messenger calling, over here, over here, open your eyes and your ears and your souls; today is the history we must learn to desire. There is no guilt in love.

Amiri Baraka
"Numbers, Letters" (1964)

But listen, though, one more thing...Don't make the mistake...of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or maybe they'll begin to listen...and all of those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious and sane, and they'll murder you. They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations.

Amiri Baraka
Dutchman (1964)

The foregoing heuristics of Baraka's dramatic blues writings, generated as they are from his own critical and poetical works, allow for meaningful analysis of the dramatic texts considered here, and it seems that in some ways the written play—even as a static text usually intended to be sonified qua production, rather than through reading alone—offers unique opportunities to analyze the formative relationship of the blues to literary soundscapes, in particular. After all, the drama in its written form demands that the *reader* imagine the voices of the characters and the music of its soundtrack with far less contextual details typically supplied by, for instance, the novel. And with the creation of characters who are in fact blues musicians in other African American-authored plays with similar concerns as Baraka's, such as August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1985), there are abundant opportunities for the playwright to pen blues sounds—a practice of dramatic delivery communicated through the dialogue of the characters themselves. (Granted, the opportunity to discuss blues writing in the works of Baraka and Wilson is particularly inviting: the former is a prolific and influential writer of blues cultural history, fiction, poetry, and criticism; the latter cites Baraka and the blues as his two greatest influences.)

In the case of a play that is more frequently experienced through reading than performance, arguments can be made for the relevance of the aforementioned poetical aspects of Baraka's plays, as well as certain narrative devices that amplify the movement of Baraka's poetics through these dramatic works. The dramatist's inscription of a cue on the text of the play itself will often have been intended as a signal to literally play music, but such cues function dually: for the performance technicians and/or performers, it requires the search for such a song and the playing of that song as a soundtrack during the performance, thus functioning in terms of plurimedial combination; for the reader, however, it is a case of intermedial reference that, fortunately through its description, requires the reader to recall from her sonic memory some

music that she may be able to associate with the description itself. In these ways, the written drama's use of musical reference can be thought of as extra-diegetic in the performance setting, but because of the absence of other aural or visual cues at the instant of the reference, it may become an intra-diegetic reference for the reader. Thus, I approach Baraka's dramatic writing in the same way that an audience of readers could experience it.

Baraka's combination of musical soundscapes with specific references, vernacular speech, motifs, and to some extent verse forms goes toward his larger pedagogical project of establishing the blues in particular as the cultural pulse of black communitarianism; subsequently, these uses of the blues enable Baraka to advance a more forceful defense of black culture itself. Baraka deploys the blues as a counterpoint to dominant icons of white popular culture, especially icons that symbolize the potential of mass culture to further destabilize and destroy the cultural roots of black community formation and sociopolitical resistance. For instance, in his 1968 *Black Fire* ritual drama, *Madheart: A Morality Play*, Baraka positions the blues against seemingly innocuous figureheads of mass media, including but not limited to pop jazz singer Tony Bennett (18); fictional heroes Batman and Robin (19); television character Peter Gunn (18), whose theme song found circulation in jazz and blues; and, indeed, against all television music (10). The blues holds the potential to defeat what Baraka intimates to be the aesthetic and intellectual hegemony of classical musicians—Beethoven (18), Mozart (19), and Stravinsky (19)—along with the dominant cultural construction of white physical beauty held intact by the canonicity of, for instance, white sculptures (18), the popularity of congolenes (18), and black women's preference for blond wigs (20). Establishing the blues as a rallying cry for black collective resistance, Baraka counters these elements with sonic and historical force.

From the outset of *Madheart*, then, blues music is inextricably opposed to the play's only white character, a "female with elaborately carved white devil mask" (1), and her ethos of compulsory suffering. The play opens immediately with the appearance of the white female devil figure, accompanied at first by a music of her own: "DEVIL LADY: You need pain. (*coming out of shadows with neon torch, honky-tonk calliope music*) You need pain, ol nigger devil, pure pain, to clarify your desire" (2). With these lines, the play commences with an immediate, audiovisual antagonism against the blues, here taking the forms of an artificial neon torch—polluting, as it were, the otherwise pure blackness of the shadows—and of course the "*honky-tonk calliope music*," a music of distinctly oppressive whiteness, machinated in the form of a calliope to signify the systemic nature of white cultural hegemony. But Baraka uses the blues to destabilize and defeat the white calliope. Hardly comprising a soundtrack for the sake of entertainment or arbitrary point of reference, the blues is projected as a historically specific cultural building block that holds the potential to forge community resistance against dominant institutions of white political and economic power personified by the white DEVIL LADY. Through the play's dialogue, she comes to personify the symbolic capital of white purity embodied in figures ranging from nineteenth-century Queen Desideria of Sweden and Norway (12), to the F. W. Woolworth Company (6), whose retail stores became the site of the February 1, 1960 Greensboro sit-in and subsequent protests in other cities of North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Alabama, Florida, Wisconsin, and New York.

It is clear that Baraka was adeptly cultivating a literary space in which emblems of cultural hegemony could be disrupted by the historical and aesthetic interventions of the blues. *Madheart's* reference to F.W. Woolworth, for instance, harnesses the symbolic status of a capitalist retail icon that would homogenize cultural sensibilities, while simultaneously drawing

from the unprecedented influence of the Woolworth protests that forever inscribed that retailer's history with black Americans' pursuit of social equality. In these ways, Baraka's literary uses of the blues, engaged as they are in what should be remembered as a battle for cultural survival and political empowerment, serve to conjoin the aesthetics of blues musicality with the communitarian ethos that would allow black culture to flourish—even under constant threat of commercial distortion, erosion, and appropriation.

Baraka's aforementioned estimations of the power of the blues *as a verse form* are manifest in various segments of the plays' dialogues. When these instances surface, there is a persistent inscription of the blues verse form into scenes of violence *and* into scenes of community development, corroborating Baraka's critical estimation of the form as retributive *and* formative. Perhaps this is because the distinctive feature of the blues verse form is repetition with difference: a line is stated, then repeated with a slightly different emphasis, enabling the blues verse form to *cite itself* in a gesture that is both a return to and projection of lyrical meaning. In *Madheart*—the literary anthologization of which urges us to consider it as a printed document to be accessed by readers—a “slow, insinuating, nasty blues” drowns out the calliope honky-tonk music, while also drawing readers' attention to the blues verse elements enmeshed in the subsequent dialogue. Channeling “the beautiful writhe of the black spirit-energy sound” (*Black Music* 159) described in Baraka's 1966 essay, “The Burton Greene Affair,” a choir of blues VOICES commences to wail: “Rock. Rock. Love. Me. Love. Me. Rock. Heaven. Heaven. Ecstasy. Ecstasy. Ooooahhhhummmmah-ah-ahoooooh. Let love. Let rock. Let Heaven. All love. All love, like rock...” (*Madheart* 3). A versification of the passage becomes apparent through brief consideration of blues verse forms. What makes the conventional blues verse form unique is not simply the repetition of a line in the customary AAB pattern; it is repetition with

difference, or worrying the line, along with the *resolution* of some problem in the third line. In the traditional blues stanza, a problem is stated, then restated in a different formulation, and finally resolved (at least to some degree).

Thus the latent line breaks in Baraka's passage, as shown below, reveal his dialogue's incorporation of the blues lyrical style, replete as it is with rhyme patterns and an improvisatory break akin to the composition and performance of the blues verse form:

Rock. Rock. Love. Me. Love. Me.

Rock. Heaven. Heaven. Ecstasy. Ecstasy.

[Ooooahhhhummmmah-ah-ahoooooh.]

Let love. Let rock. Let Heaven. All love. All love, like rock . . .

Beyond the rhyming of "Love. Me" with "Ecstasy," and the likelihood that the second line is "worrying" the first in its substitution of "Heaven" and "Ecstasy" for "Love," it is the resolution afforded by the third line that is most significant here. First, the words of lines one and two are broken into single grammatical units; there is no cohesion, no correspondence, between these units, other than their happenstance coexistence within the space of a lyrical line. "Rock" is at once an imperative *to rock* and a symbol of solid(ar)ity, thereby serving to initiate movement—rocking—and to call upon the blues as a source of black communal strength, the basis for "Love." Rocking enables an idealized communitarianism, a secularist "Heaven" that symbolizes the transcendence of ideological enslavement wherein the experience of "Ecstasy" can flourish. The wailing—"Ooooahhhhummmmah-ah-ahoooooh"—proceeds from these units of communal *potential* and functions as the synergism of a blues performance. The wailing inspires the resolution, which is, for Baraka, also a revolution, articulated through the conjunctive phrases "Let love," "Let rock," and "Let heaven." The utilization of the most significant qualities of the

blues verse form thus results in a powerful resolution of the problematic of community *fragmentation* as symbolized by the periods between each word of lines one and two. The third line is amplified, as it were, by the sensual moan of the blues, offering *a syntactical logic of progress* by conjoining those words with commas and the repetition of “Let” as an enabling verb, arriving ultimately at the resolution that “Love” should, in this context of revolutionary Black Arts and politics, stem from the blues’ roots as an expressive form of African American communitarianism.

Thus the blues in this iteration signifies Baraka’s version of black musical insurrection: the blues is mobilized in *Madheart*, expanding into blues and retributive violence, when an “insinuating” tone hastens the killing of the white devil by the **BLACK MAN**: “*the white woman lies in the middle of the stage with a spear, or many arrows stuck in her stomach and hole*” (5). This act of blues violence entails phallogentric retribution with intensely misogynistic overtones that would seem to find little resolution among Baraka’s black women characters. As **THREE BLACK WOMEN** enter the scene, “*humming now softly,*” one of the sisters utters tentative pangs of mixed identification with, and even love for, the **DEVIL LADY**: “it could be me, that figure on the floor...I hate so. I am in love with my hatred.” But the **DEVIL LADY** is a polysemous figure: the sister admits, “Yet I worship this beast on the floor, because—.” The sister is interrupted by the **BLACK WOMAN**: “Because you have been taught to love her by background music of sentimental movies. A woman’s mind must be stronger than that” (8). The attack on the **DEVIL LADY**’s maternity—her stomach and thus her womb as well as her vagina—has eluded critics for some time, yet Fred Moten, for one, is justified in regarding Baraka’s “overdetermined visualization of woman” as “oblique, vague, malleable, interpretable, assignable in the process of more fixed signification.” And he agrees that Baraka’s writing from the 1960s was “intimately

concerned” with black women as symbolic of “a mystery that signifies origin, the unfathomable site of an imaginary return—to the mother, to Africa” (118). Moten’s deliberation on maternal Africanity, on the African continent as motherland, suggests one way of thinking about a subject’s partial or near-total psychospiritual detachment from Africa; this renders the combination of the verbal with the musical as a specific means of imaginatively and spiritually restoring connectivity with the maternal homeland. If the black woman for Baraka signifies an imaginary or spiritual return to maternal origins, the protective womb of the African homeland, then the grotesquely violent invasion and destruction of *Madheart*’s white **DEVIL LADY** with symbolic spear and arrows signifies an imaginary perpetration of diasporic detachment, the dispersion of white solidarity and hegemony, and the symbolically retributive denunciation of white maternity’s future capacity for reproductive generation.

With the association of the **DEVIL LADY** with “honky-tonk calliope” music, the murder of the white devil woman both physically with weapons and musically with blues, and finally the complication of the **SISTER**’s empathy with the white woman by linking that empathy with the musical scores of a film industry complicit with racial stratification, this black-white murder scene develops at least four symbolic layers. First, the white devil woman figure and her white devil music are imbued with a machinated, systemic, enduring racial antagonism. Second, the white muse (with a play on the word “calliope”) becomes targeted—only now in the context of black revolutionary theatre—for murder. Third, black music symbolically enables her spectacular, graphic, matricidal murder: it is no coincidence that the white devil music suddenly changes into a “*slow, insinuating, nasty blues*” before the **BLACK MAN** kills the white devil figure, where he remains “*standing just a few feet away from the skewered white woman...gesturing with his hands, at the prone figure, like he is conjuring or hypnotizing*” (5).

Fourth, the black **SISTER**'s sympathies for the **DEVIL LADY** are linked to a white-dominated, complicitly racist media industry whose sentimental soundtracks only distract its audience from the reality of white oppression, reiterated as the **SISTER** says, "my dead sister reflection. Television music. Soft lights and soft living..." (10). Thus in *Madheart*, one cannot tune out the central and symbolic roles of its musical cues. The play's polemics hinge on the blues, precipitating the revolutionary act of murdering the white **DEVIL LADY**, the act of retributive murder by the **BLACK MAN**, thereby instantiating what the **BLACK MAN** perceives as the necessity for black women to abandon their aspirations toward whiteness and embrace black solidarity.

As alluded to in the discussion of Sonia Sanchez in part two, Baraka's positioning of black males as archetypal patriarchs, leaders, and sexual icons would appear to stand unquestionably opposed to a communitarian ethos predicated upon gender equality, yet the blues element of that positioning needs to be thoroughly considered. This is by no means an attempt to justify the numerous, obviously misogynistic elements of Baraka's plays, and yet Baraka's installation of the black alpha male can certainly be contextualized, disambiguated, and revealed as surprisingly dynamic—indeed, perhaps even to the point of detecting the author's own ambivalence surrounding hypermasculinity.

The **BLACK MAN** of *Madheart*, as we have already seen, vindicates black culture by slaying the symbol of white cultural hegemony, the white **DEVIL LADY**, to a blues soundtrack, but he also emerges as an iconic (if not stereotypic) male blues singer, complete with exaggerated sexual prowess. As in much of *Madheart*'s dialogue, the use of blues vernacular, imagery, rhyming, and repetition with difference links this leading character to the blues tradition, further pronounced by the singer's direct address to his audience. As the **BLACK MAN**

says with notable irony, “Women, assemble around me. I’m gonna sing for you now, in my cool inimitable style. About my life. About my road, and where it’s taking me now. Assemble, sweet black ladies, ignorant or true, and let me run down the game of life” (10). The command to “assemble” is repeated, while the terms of address for the audience—the black women—are varied within that repetition. His preface announces the prominent themes of blues lyrics: a singer’s first-person account of personal experience, of traveling, and of the unexpected twists in the “road” of “life” that are central to the blues as a form of improvisatory music making and an ethos of improvisatory living.

By establishing the **BLACK MAN** as an iconic blues singer, Baraka pays homage to the community-forming influence of early blues singers, while also corroborating the ethos of fellow Black Arts philosophers, such as Larry Neal, who sought to retain and reinvigorate the status of the singer of the blues as a significant community figure, “the voice of the community, its historian, and one of the shapers of its morality” (Neal 425). Baraka’s play thus anticipates the work of scholars including Lawrence Levine, Christopher Small, Angela Davis, William Barlow, and Clyde Woods, who, as I discuss at greater length in Chapter 4, have amply demonstrated how blues music served to educate and unite dispersed audiences. It is often forgotten that the “men and women who performed the blues were sociologists, reporters, counselors, advocates, preservers of language and customs, and summoners of life, love, laughter, and much, much more” (Woods 17). It is out of this tradition that Baraka’s singer subsequently asks, in his moment of vindication, for “the audience [to] think about themselves, and about their lives when they leave this happening. This black world of purest possibility” (*Madheart* 11). In this way, the blues singer’s address is not only intra-diegetic, but directed to the audience of viewers or readers, implicating them in the play’s efforts to imagine the possibilities for revolutionary black

leadership and community formation—including possibilities understood as viable, as well as unviable.

Baraka has overtly dramatized the sexual prowess of his “bluesman,” but what this dramatization reveals is, in fact, a cautious, if not sensitive, navigation of the uncertain place of hypermasculinity in Baraka’s conception of revolutionary black culture. Were Baraka to insist unequivocally upon hypermasculinity as the driving force of black revolution, why is it that plays such as *Madheart* represent—recurrently—the failure of “the alpha male” to revitalize black cultural practices or to establish himself as a community leader? The leadership roles of Baraka’s **BLACK MAN**, it seems, are far more ambiguous in these plays than one might assume. One of the more troubling aspects of blues lyricism, situations of misogynist violence, surfaces in Baraka’s plays as a source of uncertainty about gender and leadership.¹⁵ *Madheart*’s **BLACK MAN** blues singer has a relationship with the **BLACK WOMAN** that resonates with blues lyrics chronicling alternative conceptions of “love”—conceptions that did not ignore historical and contemporary actuality of violence. As folklorist Michael Taft suggests, love as a theme in many blues lyrics functions as a vehicle for expressing the “worries and fears that accompany a fundamental change in the lifestyle of a culture”; the love theme often serves as a reflection of “the disruptions going on in contemporary African American social relationships” (196). Thus Baraka’s **BLACK MAN** is not necessarily a symbol of successful male leadership; rather, he

¹⁵ Baraka provides some background to his thinking about relationships in his autobiography, revealing how the lyrics of the blues shaped his early understandings of how men and women interacted: “The lyrics of the blues instructed me,” he writes. They “[e]xplained what the world was and even how men and women related to each other, and the problems inherent in that. Even later so basic a communication as ‘Work with Me, Annie,’ then ‘Annie Had a Baby (Annie Can’t Work No More),’ could just about sum up some aspects of life in the black ghetto part of the Western Hemisphere” (*Autobiography* 50).

appears to represent a necessary coping with violent impulses that threaten the ability to enter into dialogic, egalitarian relationships with women of the black community.

This problematic finds poignant dramatization in the following interaction, which, as Angela Davis might remind us, is characteristic of and highly telling about the nature of domestic violence in blues lyrics:

BLACK WOMAN: (*Laughs*) ...You better get me back, if you know what's good for you...you better.

BLACK MAN: (*Looking around at her squarely, he advances.*) I better?... (*A soft laugh*) Yes. Now is where we always are...that now... (*He wheels and suddenly slaps her crosswise, back and forth across the face.*)

BLACK WOMAN: Wha...What...oh love...please...don't hit me. (*He hits her, slaps her again.*)

BLACK MAN: I want you, woman, as a woman. Go down. (*He slaps again.*) Go down, submit, submit...to love...and to man, now, forever. (*Madheart 17*)

This exchange strikes one as a perversely gratuitous indulgence into gendered violence for the sake of gendered violence. And, taken out of context without historical reference to the blues culture in which Baraka was ideologically and aesthetically immersed, it would stand as just that. Continuing on through this exchange, however, allows for the disinterment of a traumatic undercurrent that mustn't go unnoticed:

BLACK WOMAN: I've seen you humbled, black man, seen you crawl for dogs and devils.

BLACK MAN: And I've seen you raped by savages and beasts, and bear bleach shit children of apes.

BLACK WOMAN: You permitted it...you could...do nothing.

BLACK MAN: But now I can. (*He slaps her, drags her to him, kissing her deeply on the lips.*) That shit is ended, woman, you with me, and the world is mine...

BLACK WOMAN: I...I submit. (*She goes down, weeping.*) I submit...for love...please love.

(*The MAN sinks to his knees and embraces her, draws her with him up again.*

They both begin to cry and then laugh, laugh, wildly at everything and themselves.) (17-18)

This passage recounts histories of racial subjugation, rape, reproductive control, and disenfranchisement in order to articulate these two characters' will to end that history, which leads them to "*cry and then laugh.*" The phrase recalls Langston Hughes' touchstone aphorism that defines the blues as laughing to keep from crying, indeed, but it also functions to restore the depth of the blues' historical origins. More significant than *Madheart's* aphoristic references to blues tropes, then, is its exemplification of blues writing as a means to reckon¹⁶ with and recognize historical and contemporary problematics of African diaspora community formation.

As another significant point of comparison, Baraka's attention to history and the blues resonates with but differs from the work of novelist and literary scholar Gayl Jones, who associates blues less with historical memory than with the absence of memory. Blues storytelling has no "sense of fullness," Jones says, "[a]nd maybe that's all part of the theme...Is there any

¹⁶ *Reckon* seems a useful term for Baraka's engagements with the history and cultural potentialities of the African diaspora, in particular. Its connotations underscore the rhetorically embroiled nature of his cultural projects; for example, "to go over a matter or contentious issue *with* someone" but also the necessarily assertive, even didactic aspect, "to have it out or settle the score *with* someone" ("Reckon" 5), while still retaining the most common iterations: to give an account of, recount; to tell; to describe; to take into account or consideration; to be of a specified nature, quality, importance ("Reckon" P3a; 7a; 6a).

memory?” (xxvi). Where Jones sees the narrativity of the blues as an incomplete patchwork of memory, Baraka’s plays, by contrast, utilize the blues to offer a restored and reframed historical sensibility. In Jones’ quintessential blues novel, *Corregidora* (1975), the depiction of Ursa Corregidora can be seen to caution against listening ahistorically—that is, listening uncritically to a static version of history and thus becoming susceptible to generational trauma—while Baraka’s plays amplify a broader history of trauma to remind us of its potential to disrupt black communitarianism. The above scene from *Madheart*, then, hardly signifies an ideal, but instead functions to promote communitarian values while simultaneously representing the fatal outcomes of ignoring them.

Baraka, in navigating the complexity of such violence, articulates the difficulty of maintaining a community of men and women devastated by slavery and racial violence; moreover, he does so in the blues tradition of foregrounding themes that were otherwise banished from popular music, such as “extramarital relationships, domestic violence, and the ephemerality of many sexual partnerships” (Davis 3). Davis’ call to rethink domestic violence in blues lyrics, if carried into Baraka’s plays, corroborates the embedded possibility that Baraka’s representations do not condone violence. Indeed, the resolution of the above scene is not an agreement to enact harm. The **BLACK WOMAN**’s question about whether “there’s any chance” for the other black women characters is met with the play’s final call for a committed, if still imperfect, black communitarianism: “**BLACK MAN:** They’re my flesh. I’ll do what I can. (*Looks at her*) We’ll both try. All of us, black people. (*Curtain*)” (22). This scene can be read as part of Baraka’s ugly but nevertheless substantial treatment of a dire social problematic articulated in blues dialogue.

As we transition to *Dutchman*, Baraka's most canonical dramatic work, it is worth comparing another of his original blues-informed plays from the post-Beat period with a later, yet nearly forgotten play from the early Marxist period. Approaching these in relation to *Dutchman* and *Madheart*, we gain a keen sense of the revolutionary shift in Baraka's register of the blues, while also recognizing the shared cultural sensibilities that unite all four plays. The period markers of Baraka's chronologically varied ideological stances, while useful, are in themselves insufficient to chart this shifting register of the blues that becomes subtly manifest throughout the variations of each play. For instance, Baraka's use of the blues cultivates a highly conflicted form of rebellion in *The Slave*, wherein main character Walker Vessels speaks of "Old, old blues people moaning in their sleep, singing, man, oh, nigger, nigger, you still here, as hard as nails, and takin' no shit from nobody. He say, yeah, yeah, he say yeah, yeah. He say, yeah, yeah . . . goin' down slow, man. Goin' down slow" (*Slave* 45). Compare this "slow" pace and this pronounced element of endurance in *The Slave* with the sensibility of acceleration that precipitates revolutionary action in *Boy and Tarzan Appear in a Clearing*,¹⁷ where the African workers are "chanting and singing...A fast blues, with puffing work rhythms sprung by piercing ratatatat scream horn." As the workers produce these blues, they begin to question: "What it is this work and labor [?] What it is this sweat and strain [?] Where it is bux and luxury [?] Where it is a better life [?] Who it is get rich off our muscle [?]" (*Boy and Tarzan* 34). In the tradition of African American worksongs and subsequent blues musicking, these blues-as-worksongs express the beginnings of a revolutionary, resistive group consciousness. The music catalyzes the workers' recognition of a labor system that is antithetical to even notional egalitarianism, one in which the workers gain nothing, as bosses exercise control over all revenue. Thus the blues in

¹⁷ For a useful review of the original production of *Boy and Tarzan Appear in a Clearing*, see Mel Gussow's *New York Times* review, "Theater: 'Boy and Tarzan,'" October 15, 1981.

Boy and Tarzan articulate the demand for social justice that by the play's conclusion have evolved into a scene of the workers' liberation: "outside we see crowds of Blacks walking down the street, dancing down the street, singing down the street, They are singing an African freedom song, 'Uhuru Uhuru Uhuru Uhuru Uhuru. The wealth must belong to the workers and peasants!'" (*Boy and Tarzan* 61). Going back to *The Slave*, the blues represent age-old resilience, to be black and "hard as nails," the durability of the past and the past as a resource for the present; entering Baraka's Marxist period, the blues in *Boy and Tarzan* shift in signification, representing an embryonic yet generative awareness of present oppression and future possibilities that matures into a full-fledged, future-gear, African-led workers resistance movement.

In *Dutchman*, we see Baraka's early but also highly sophisticated use of blues music as a rhetorically active component of symbolic acts of violence. This continuity running through his blues plays reflects the verisimilitude of Baraka's literary oeuvre as an expression of his theory of the blues continuum, but the racial politics associated with Baraka's blues thinking offer challenging interpretive problems. It is unambiguously clear that in *Madheart*, the blues-compelled murder involves a black male killing a white female, and in *Dutchman*, the opposite occurs; however, this reversal entails a series of interactions constituting one of Baraka's most complex and instrumental uses of the blues as a genre situated within a history of racial violence.

The subtle blues references in *Dutchman* coincide with its often-noted symbolism, constituting deep layers of representational meaning. Early in *Dutchman*, Lula's manipulative nature becomes apparent not just through the overt symbolism of her voracious, seductive apple eating, but also through the sound of her "humming snatches of [a] rhythm and blues song" while she finishes the apple (*Dutchman* 12). Given the immense transracial popularity of the

rhythm and blues genre, Lula's humming of a characteristically African American music would seem innocent enough at this stage of the play. With consideration of the continuum of black musics running through the play as a whole, however, we gain a clear sense that Lula's humming is riddled with provocative and politically charged overtones of white cultural cannibalism—a metaphor further substantiated by her appetite for the flesh of the symbolic apples.

Lula's humming is only the beginning of ongoing hints that an active politics of white cultural cannibalism are central to *Dutchman*. When Lula mockingly inquires whether plantations were surrounded by wire, Clay's response acknowledges the immense irony of Lula's ignorance—not just by invoking images of concentration camps, but by scathingly reorienting historical memory of the plantation as a culturally whitewashed fantasy playground: “Plantations didn't have any wire. Plantations were big open whitewashed places like heaven, and everybody on ‘em was grooved to be there. Just strummin’ and hummin’ all day” (*Dutchman* 29-30). Lula does not seem to fully grasp Clay's bitterly sarcastic retort. When Clay offers his sardonic quip, “and that's how the blues was born,” he is not merely jesting about the blues having emerged in close relationship to plantation power; he articulates the extremeness of white blues listeners' audacity in romanticizing the oppressive roots that shaped the blues' evolution. Lula maintains her flippant dismissiveness: “Yes, yes. And that's how the blues was born” (30). Reading Lula's demeanor as a broader signification, her dismissiveness and failure to acknowledge with any seriousness or accountability the racialized cultural world around her speaks to the literal prevalence of a white inability to recognize the irony of white appropriations of black cultural expressions rooted in a history of racial domination.

Lula's unrelenting jabs are often mere surface gestures that mask the calculated rhetoric of her racist agenda. It is at this moment in the play (and likewise in the film) that Lula's

disregard for the seriousness of the sociohistorical origins central to the blues also marks the most dramatic turn of the play, when Lula's attempt to feign dismissal of the racial politics of African American music precipitates her most severe breakdown. As if the totality of her self-deception is beginning to register, she begins to "*make up a song that becomes quickly hysterical. As she sings she rises from her seat, still throwing things out of her bag into the aisle, beginning a rhythmical shudder and twistlike wiggle, which she continues up and down the aisle*" (*Dutchman* 30). As her psychotic episode ensues, she repeats with an inflammatory childishness, "that's how the blues was born. Yes. Yes. Son of a bitch, get out of the way. Yes. Quack. Yes. Yes. And that's how the blues was born. Ten little niggers sitting on a limb, but none of them ever looked like him" (30). At this moment she points tauntingly at Clay "*with her hands extended for him to rise and dance with her,*" taunting: "And that's how blues was born. Yes. Come on, Clay" (30). Despite Lula's apparent madness, her "white devil" capacity for exploitation does not escape her: she uses her own unnerved, fractured identity as a weapon against Clay, who up to this point has remained remarkably calm in the face of Lula's tactics of manipulation.

Just as the "blues origins" commentary marks the tipping point for Lula's deteriorating composure, so too this conversation has caused for Clay's breaking point, leading Clay to unleash his most bitter vituperative against Lula, a verbose attack that unquestionably stands as the play's most extreme lexicon of retributive violence:

If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul. Just straight two and two are four. Money. Power. Luxury. Like that. All of them. Crazy niggers

turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane. (*Dutchman* 35)

The blues in *Dutchman* is thus established as a stand-in for murder, an expression of the would-have-been libratory act of killing white people. The blues embodies that force of as yet unreached black liberation to such an extent that Clay recognizes the potential for white hegemonic neocolonial authority to overrun black expressive power, thus degrading his blackness to an essentialized subservience that, for Clay, is preventable only by murder: “Don’t make the mistake...of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or maybe they’ll begin to listen...and all of those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious and sane, and they’ll murder you” (36). Clay makes it explicit that blues people, black Americans construed in the white imagination as mere “plantation” singers, will enact these revolutionary murders. The human beings reduced by whites into racial epithets, “ten little niggers sitting on a limb,” will murder and will have “very rational explanations” for it: “They’ll cut your throats,” Clay declares, “and drag you out to the edge of your cities so the flesh can fall away from your bones, in sanitary isolation” (36).

Baraka’s literary reconstitution of hypervisual violence goes “bone-deep into the sunken ark of bones,” where listening “*is* seeing,” not replacing sight but becoming “the ensemble of the senses” (Moten 67). Clay, as a target for racial violence, is an ironical invisible man, whose human dignity is ignored by Lula as she plots to make his invisibility permanent through racially motivated killing. Indeed, it is precisely after the moment that Lula forces Clay into the realm of visibility that Lula targets him as a threat to be eradicated. As with so many of *Dutchman*’s key moments, this scene hinges on the blues as much as it does on highly legitimated threats of

retributive violence, and these expressions of violence are inextricably interwoven with a racially charged sociohistorical precedent put into place by the summoning of blues history.

4.5 CONCLUSION

It would be a mistake to oversimplify Baraka's efforts by neglecting these interpretively generative and aesthetically innovative representations of violence. Instead, it seems more productive to think about Baraka's uses of symbolic violence as forms of anti-violence: problematic though they are, there is some virtue to these representations, not least for the work they do to advance the blues as an archive of justice-oriented social thought. There is virtue to what these representations do with the blues that, in earlier contexts of more extreme racial subjugation, the practitioners of the blues were restricted from doing by themselves.

Recalling Bruce Bawer's denunciation of Baraka's writing as "morally repulsive... mindless black radical hate," it is noteworthy that nothing so caustic appears to have been written about one of Baraka's most prominent students, August Wilson, who described himself as a follower of Baraka, particularly concerning his politics, which he aspired to rearticulate in his prize-winning dramatic works. Certainly, Wilson has never been so controversial as Baraka, but the way scholars tend to address the great cultural learning moment of Wilson's formative years—his late-1960s' discovery of Baraka's blues-infused dramas, which constitutes one of Baraka's most visible cultural teaching moments—is particularly instructive about how Baraka's influence is already being remembered. As it is often told, Baraka's works inspired Wilson to pursue the theater in the 1960s and 70s; however, those works are scarcely cited, and Baraka himself becomes a fleeting influence from a quiet subplot in the story of Wilson's rise to American greatness. Sometimes, the story includes passing references to the Black Arts

Movement, but it usually transcends any detailed historical or intellectual context, emphasizing the essence of influence, instead, and opting to consign the rhetorical situation in which Baraka was so vigorously active to a fleeting occasion of radicalism that happened to spur Wilson to write his plays.

This tendency is most apparent in the 1994 edited collection, *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, where Baraka's influence is mentioned in but two brief statements (Nadel, et al 125; 131). Such peculiarly inadequate attention to Baraka, and the Black Arts Movement more broadly, is evident throughout the 2007 *Cambridge Companion to August Wilson*, as well, with the notable exception of Christopher Bigsby's impressive reconnaissance. In "August Wilson: The Ground on Which He Stood," Bigsby does justice to the Barakian impetus of Wilson's transition from poet to playwright, albeit with more interest in biographical efficiency than interpretive consequence:

The key moment came with the emergence of Black Power and its cultural wing, forcefully led as it was by a man who had abandoned his 'slave name,' LeRoi Jones, for a new one, Amiri Baraka. Here was a man determined to found exclusively black theatres, to raise the consciousness of a black community alternately relegated to the margins of history and now invited in on condition that it relinquished precisely what was most distinctive. (Bigsby)

For Wilson, Baraka's vision represented the revolutionary mission of black theatrical production, its community-specific designs, and its rhetorical work to negate the marginalization of black expressive culture (that which was "most distinctive"). It is decisively understood that Baraka's "spiritual outlook" and "deep lyricism" led Wilson to envision a theatre that "would stage the lives of 'blues people'" (Bigsby), but Wilson did not retreat from the commercial mainstream of

American theater as Baraka did. Especially compared to such graphic representations of racial violence in Baraka's plays that have contributed to his divisive place among scholars, the media, and the public, the relative palatability and popularity of Wilson's works (along with his attainment of Pulitzer Prizes, the Tony Award, and a host of production opportunities) have engendered a far more glowing, celebratory, canonistic body of scholarship and public opinion on Wilson.

There is no truly satisfactory means for concluding this meditation on Baraka, though the most satisfaction may come from the hope that Baraka might be forgiven by some who profess so much hatred toward him (ironically enough, because they regard him as hateful), but also from the recognition of how effective Baraka was as a cultural pedagogue. So, by way of conclusion, perhaps it is best to recall in brief the presence of Baraka's blues ethos that finds expression in Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Like *Madheart* and *Dutchman*, *Ma Rainey* finds its pedagogical center in homicide, but like the violence in Baraka's plays, Wilson's violence is symbolical and, most importantly, cautionary in the same way that ahistorical listening constitutes the cautionary element in *Corregidora*, *Dutchman*, and *Madheart*. Rather than an black-white or white-black murder, as has been the case in Baraka's plays, Wilson's murder scene is most immediately viewed as black man killing black man. The violence of Wilson's play introduces a potential contradiction to the concept that blues music has been cultivated literarily in order to imaginatively recover community-building principles, a project that we have seen Baraka so keen to work on. In Wilson's play, the murder of one blues player by a fellow blues player at the culmination of the dramatic action seems completely antithetical to such a concept; however, there is a pronouncedly Barakian, blues-based pedagogy of this play

that seeks to offer lessons to the black community (and to whites exercising control over the black community).

Wilson's lessons begin with an epigraph included in the published edition of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, the lines borrowed from blues musician Blind Lemon Jefferson: "They tore the railroad down / so the Sunshine Special can't run / I'm going away baby / build me a railroad of my own." Just as in Baraka's dramatic uses of the blues, Wilson establishes the importance of black cultural ownership is immediately established with this blues lyric. More than expressing the virtue of black cultural ownership in itself, the lyric embraces ownership as pivotal to direction and destination, suggesting that the play to ensue will concern black communities' acquisition of power in the present to take control of the communities' futures. Following the Jefferson lines, Wilson generates a community-specific dedication to African Americans and a community-forging description of the blues. As he writes, "It is with these negroes that our concern lies most heavily: their values, their attitudes, and particularly their music. It is hard to define this music. Suffice it to say that it is music that breathes and touches. That connects. That is in itself a way of being, separate and distinct from any other. This music is called blues" (xvi). How interesting it is that Wilson does not depend entirely upon the actions and statements of his characters to allow this definition of the blues to emerge organically throughout the play; this statement can and should be thought of as a lesson from the playwright that permeates the drama.

With this definition in mind, and the moments of pedagogy that take place over the course of Wilson's play, readers come to understand that it is not necessarily the music or its makers that have resulted in violence, but their subjection to forces of racial and commercial control. If blues is a music that "connects," that is "in itself a way of being," then racial control over that music is also the control over black communal connectivity. White control over black

culture is therefore discussed by blues musicians, who stand as guardians of African American community principles: “As long as the colored man look to white folks to put the crown on what he say...He’s just gonna be about what white folks want him to be about” (Wilson 37). Thus when band-member Toledo attempts to educate his fellow bluesmen about their African heritage, about the politics of colonialism, and about assimilation, he echoes the playwright’s epigraph and philosophical orientation of the play. The murder of Toledo is not a condemnation of the “evil” ways of blues subculture, but does render the play a cautionary tale about the dangers of abandoning diasporic heritage, representing the profound reach of Baraka’s legacy. The fact that it is Toledo who is murdered—Toledo, the symbolic core of the blues’ Africanist presence—thus may be read as a symbol of the danger of obscuring the African influence in the blues, which is to say, in black American life.

Whereas Wilson’s plays seek to delight and instruct, Baraka’s plays (which, as we have seen, are rarely delightful, if ever at all) are as significant for the ground they laid for Wilson as they are for their unique ability to arrest and instruct, their capability of obliging readers to reckon with the extremes in which they so riskily linger. Yet Baraka’s works, in their forceful enactments of experimentation and their commitment to justice, pose vast and valuable interpretive problems that demand uncomfortable engagement with “political incorrectness,” and in so doing, offer rewards. Wilson’s is a softer cultural pedagogy whereby readers enjoy some relatively comfortable endowing of cultural wisdom, while in Baraka’s interventionist cultural pedagogy, the lessons must be earned and understood amidst the vitriolic antagonisms that surround his life and work. It is a productive discomfort, and, as with teachers who we admire for their ability to recover pedagogical failures as opportunities, Baraka’s “aesthetic” and

“moral” failures might more productively be viewed as pedagogical efforts, some on target, some gone awry, but nevertheless intended to produce change and worthy of continued study.

To return to this chapter’s most pointed inquiry, I want to reiterate my claim that Baraka’s historiography, criticism, and creative writings offer a significant contribution to rethinking the blues imaginary as an audiovisual site of great symbolic power, one that is often associated with communitarian pursuits of justice, but most certainly a site that had to be reclaimed from cultural erosion and accessed through the assertive constitution of aural rights. His symbolic uses of racial violence as instances of anti-violence necessitated the synesthetic visualization of the blues, one of black music’s most aesthetically pervasive and ancestrally significant traditions. Baraka thus acted to reanimate and redeploy blues music to create a series of productive soundscapes that permeate his writings. These actions and the texts that chronicle them offer a poignant lens on the spectrum of twentieth- and twenty-first-century blues literature, for Baraka’s collected blues writing has facilitated the interanimation of visuality and aurality, effectively reconstructing aesthetic expectations and re-cognizing the relationships between blues history, criticism, and representation.

5.0 “THE WISEST WAY TO BE HEARD”: JIMI HENDRIX AND THE PEDAGOGY OF DELIBERATION

Take the energy and the feeling of the blues...and shape these into an art that stands for the spiritual helpmate of the Black Nation. Make a form that uses the Soul Force of Black culture, its life styles, its rhythms, its energy, and direct that form toward the liberation of Black people. Don't go off playing Jimmy Hendrix or something like that.

Larry Neal

“Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation” (1969)

You have to hear some things by yourself.

Jimi Hendrix

Interview with Sue C. Clark (1969)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Band of Gypsies—Jimi Hendrix’s late-career recording and performance project with African American bandmates Billy Cox and Buddy Miles—stood out as a departure from the whiteness of Hendrix’s previous band, The Jimi Hendrix Experience. But the Band of Gypsies’ 1969 emergence was not widely regarded as a declaration of racial separatism or black solidarity, partly because its formation had not stemmed from any explicitly stated relationship to contemporaneous politics of Black Power, and largely because Hendrix held a reputation as a musician who worked in the rock idiom with white band members.

On the one hand, then, Hendrix and the Band of Gypsys were viewed as racially and musically different from the Experience. On the other hand, Hendrix and the Band of Gypsys were not (and are not) regarded as participants in the Black Arts Movement, let alone as precipitants of Black Power activism or ideology. My perspective is that the Band of Gypsys emerged from and participated in the pronounced ethnoracial aesthetics and discourses of the Black Arts and Black Power movements, and that Hendrix's impetus to "teach" his audience was at the root of their participation. I propose, moreover, that during this late period of Hendrix's career—and especially with the Band of Gypsys—his music took form as a pedagogy of ethnoracial deliberation.

In terms of ethnoracial identity, and individuals' own determination of what constitutes African American identity in particular, Hendrix's oeuvre differs from the cultural figures studied in other chapters of this dissertation—Jean Toomer, Amiri Baraka, August Wilson, *The Last Poets*, Gloria Naylor, and the range of blues narrative authors. Hendrix, unlike these figures, did not write or speak extensively about African cultural heritage, kinship, diasporas, or diasporic communities, let alone large-scale practices of diaspora such as black cultural nationalism or classical black nationalism. Yet despite the subtlety of his involvement in black cultural politics of his time, I maintain that the intentions, vision, methods, and aesthetics of his cultural pedagogy merit consideration of Hendrix and the Band of Gypsys as participants in and contributors to the Black Arts Movement. In Hendrix's late-career statements, lyrics, recordings, and performances, he communicates and exemplifies processes of deliberation that are, in theory, characteristic of what Brent Hayes Edwards terms the practice of diaspora. For Hendrix, this includes implicit and explicit deliberation over the parameters of communitarianism, the challenges of cultivating interethnic affinity, the potential of what Huey Newton termed

revolutionary intercommunalism, and the possibilities of what Tommie Shelby refers to as pragmatic—rather than classical—black nationalism.

As a creative cultural teacher, Hendrix took music as his primary form of communication, even as he recognized that music “can be misinterpreted” (qtd. in Roby 285). His music was pedagogical, but rarely didactic. His pedagogy was artistic and subject to broad interpretation, and yet it was hardly neutral. This grey area between Hendrix’s art and intentions have led many in his audience of fans, critics, and cultural historians to take interpretive ownership over Hendrix’s musical ideas at the expense of collecting and scrutinizing Hendrix’s words, musical expressions, and performance gestures. In this chapter, I take a different approach by drawing from primary and secondary sources in an archive of audio, video, and print media, and by referencing Hendrix’s recorded perspectives as comprehensively as possible.

The nature of such a mixed archive—from vagaries and nuances in historiography to discrepancies and impasses in biography—leads me to consider theoretical and critical issues surrounding Hendrix and the Band of Gypsys, as well. I collect and utilize evidence from history and biography to conduct close listening analyses of concert performances and audio recordings and to theorize the intersections of aurality, race, music, performance, and pedagogy that underpin Hendrix’s work with the Band of Gypsys. Stressing the importance of close listening analysis and critical theory in this study allows for closer examination of expressive details that fans and critics of Jimi Hendrix’s life and music appear to have either dismissed, overlooked, or forgotten, but that listeners today can recuperate and reconsider as meaningful aspects of Hendrix’s cultural pedagogy.

5.2 HENDRIX AMID BLACK ARTS AND BLACK POWER

Rock. Rock. Love. Me. Love. Me. Rock. Heaven. Heaven. Ecstasy. Ecstasy. Oooooahhhummmah-ah-ahoooooh. Let love. Let rock. Let Heaven. All love. All love, like rock...”

Amiri Baraka
Madheart: A Morality Play (1969)

You don't have to keep screaming "love" in order to convince people it's necessary.

Jimi Hendrix
“The Last Hendrix Interview” with Keith Altham (1970)

Hendrix was not celebrated as a Black Arts contributor, as were so many musicians during the Black Arts Movement. Influential writers of the Black Arts Movement respected and commemorated musicians such as Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk, and Archie Shepp. Yet other major authors, such as Larry Neal writing in *Ebony*, disparaged Hendrix's music as the antithesis of liberatory Black Nationalist cultural production. In the passage below, Neal more than intimated that Hendrix neither respected nor understood black culture, suggesting instead that he was exploiting it. As Neal wrote,

Take the energy and the feeling of the blues...and shape these into an art that stands for the spiritual helpmate of the Black Nation. Make a form that uses the Soul Force of Black culture, its life styles, its rhythms, its energy, and direct that form toward the liberation of Black people. Don't go off playing Jimmy Hendrix or something like that. Respect and understand the culture. Don't exploit it. (Neal 57)

Following from Neal, in subsequent cultural criticism and history up until the present, Hendrix has hardly been associated with the Black Arts. Scholars including Steve Waksman, Paul Gilroy, and Greg Tate have considered the relationship of Hendrix's work to black political culture of his time, but in the popular imagination and across critical anthologies, Hendrix is largely absent from discussions of the Black Arts Movement.¹⁸

The place of Sun Ra in Black Arts discourse offers a compelling point of comparison. Ra was memorialized in the same arts community that virtually ignored Hendrix, even though the two musicians articulated similar political and philosophical orientations. Ra, very much like Hendrix, “eschewed the guns, advanced weaponry, and the Panthers’ vision of colonial space, positing instead a contrasting notion of black consciousness and a different, utopian end for social change” (Kreiss 60). Despite Ra’s ideological impasses with the Black Panther Party,¹⁹ he was valorized in Black Arts Movement poems and literature. His poetry was included in the definitive collection of Black Arts writings, *Black Fire* (1968); he was referenced frequently by influential Black Arts writers such as Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal; he performed with his Arkestra at Black Arts events in Harlem as early as the summer of 1965; and, with Baraka, he recorded a performance of Baraka’s play, *A Black Mass* (1968). In short, although Sun Ra did not occupy the same cultural spaces as Jimi Hendrix and although he had more contact with major Black Arts figures than Hendrix did, the two musicians nevertheless had in common

¹⁸ As Waksman writes, “Hendrix’s decision to play rock music as opposed to a ‘blacker’ style such as jazz, soul, or even straight electric blues clearly contradicted the presiding notions of musical authenticity held by adherents to the black aesthetic” (177). His “music, his performance style, and his career all force a reconsideration of the meaning of cultural tradition as defined within the Black Aesthetic movement” (177).

¹⁹ In 1971, Bobby Seale invited Sun Ra and his Arkestra to a house owned by the Black Panthers. Ra’s biographer John Szwed writes, “an ideological split within the Panthers resulted in the Arkestra being evicted from their house.” As Ra recounted, “we got kicked out by Eldridge Cleaver or somebody” (330).

several key commitments to music, race, and politics that leaders of the Black Arts and Black Power movements (and many critics in the decades since) did not seem to acknowledge. (At least until the Panthers ejected Ra from a Party residence in Oakland, California; in 1972, Ra created his film *Space Is the Place*, part of which is set at an Oakland black youth center.)

Typical criteria for excluding Hendrix from Black Arts circles include Hendrix's relatively limited attention to race politics in song lyrics; his apparently insufficient public commitment to causes for social and racial justice; his popular association primarily with the rock genre (rather than jazz, soul, or funk); and, perhaps most widely observed, his musical collaboration with white band members Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding of The Jimi Hendrix Experience. Hendrix also objected to the idea of an all-black commercial recording enterprise, explaining that it would be the same thing as restricting membership on account of "being Catholic or something" (qtd. in Burks). Hendrix was clearly interested in gaining control over the production of his own music, but his endeavor was to maximize his creative control regardless of racial solidarity. Hendrix's perspective that restricting racial membership was largely a barrier to creativity and production did not align with prevalent calls for black political, cultural, and entrepreneurial solidarity.

Albeit with less prominence, typical criteria for including Hendrix as an important figure in the Black Arts and Black Power movements do surface in a variety of scholarly and popular sources. These include Hendrix's rare but significant connections with the Black Arts Movement and Black Panther Party; his occasional contributions to causes for social and racial justice; and his infrequent but noteworthy concert asides about race politics. Biographers have depicted the Black Panthers as threatening to Hendrix, and while Party members purportedly labeled him a "white nigger" and pressured him for financial contributions, Hendrix's unofficial involvement

with the Panthers does appear in a number of documented instances. These include Hendrix's verbal dedication to the Black Panther Party during the Band of Gypsies' 1969 New Year's Eve concert at the Fillmore East, his stated appreciation for black political resistance in interviews, and accounts of Hendrix purchasing *The Black Panther* newspaper.

Hendrix was also connected to the Black Panther Party's chapter in Seattle, Washington, the city where Hendrix was born. Hendrix donated funds to help establish a Panther-run medical clinic, one that Panther cofounder Bobby Seale stated was the most effective of all the Black Panther Party's sickle cell anemia testing centers (it operates today as the Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center). When Hendrix performed in Seattle, he asked the Panthers to organize his security, even as he was discrete about his interactions with the Party. And shortly before his death, Hendrix had offered to play a benefit concert in support of the Seattle Panthers' breakfast program:

A few months back, when Jimi was in Berkeley, some local people asked him to do a Black Panther benefit show. Jimi dug the idea. And his advisors did too—IF they could make a film of Hendrix relating to the radical community. They felt this would even further enhance the value of their “property”—Jimi Hendrix...Though Jimi wanted to, “contractual obligations” prevented him from doing the benefit. (*Rebel Yell*)

Despite such “contractual obligations” that have prevented concrete answers as to whether Hendrix would have made any such film “relating to the radical community,” Hendrix was in fact seeking to diversify his audience by engaging more African American listeners. Along with a rather ill-received performance in Harlem shortly after Woodstock, Hendrix recorded with Jalal Nuriddin of The Last Poets, the influential black nationalist trio. And, of course, he formed the

Band of Gypsies with two African American musicians, Billy Cox and Buddy Miles, with whom he recorded the 1970 *Band of Gypsies* album and video footage.

As we know, groups such as the Black Panthers did not view these acts as in solidarity with their militant racial ideologies and political agendas. As Seattle Panther Elmer Dixon stated in a recent interview, “Jimi was thinking like decades ahead of most people. So, it was natural to have white members in his band because...he embraced multiculturalism back in 1969” (“Star Spangled Hendrix”). When Hendrix announced that he was looking to recruit “three *soul* sisters, regardless of whether they’re Italian or Irish or whatever, so long as they got feeling” (“Jimi Hendrix Has A Brand New Bass,” emphasis added), Hendrix was not simply being “multicultural.” Indeed, at a moment when “soul” was heavily racialized as a black musical genre, cultural slogan, vernacular quality, and vehicle for social empowerment, Hendrix was rethinking “soul” as affective (“they got feeling”) and transracial (“whether they’re Italian or Irish or whatever”). This instance of Hendrix’s negotiation of cultural zeitgeist at a moment of prevalent radicalism is but one of many whereby Hendrix establishes a platform for the pedagogy of his music and performances. In order to more effectively develop a portrait of the pedagogy of Hendrix’s music and performances, the foregoing criteria for excluding or including Hendrix in Black Arts discourse need focused contextualization and reconsideration, beginning with the significant career changes that accompanied Hendrix’s departure from England to the United States in June of 1967.

5.3 SIGNAL TO NOISE RATIO: HENDRIX, MEDIA, AND THE POLITICS OF RACIAL IDENTIFICATION

A couple of years ago all I wanted was to be heard. "Let me in" was the thing. Now I'm trying to figure out the wisest way to be heard.

Jimi Hendrix
Interview with Ritchie Yorke (7 September 1969)

Hendrix returned to the United States amid a series of tipping points in African American political life, including such pivotal events as the widely publicized Sacramento protest of May 2, 1967; the interracially explosive "Free Huey" campaign following Huey Newton's incarceration on October 28, 1967; the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968; and, within this timeline, the Black Panther Party's proliferation in membership, organization, and media presence.

At a moment of heightened public awareness of black militant politics, interviewers queried Hendrix about his racial perspectives, commitments, and involvements. By 1970—with King assassinated; Newton imprisoned; and Party membership depleted to less than one thousand members after arrests, killings, defection, and the FBI's "campaign of dirty tricks," including "counterfeit Panther documents [and] fake denunciations of various Panthers as police informants" ("The Odyssey of Huey Newton" 38)—Hendrix made it clear, with qualifications, that he was opposed to guerrilla warfare. Despite entering the conversation later than leading political and cultural activists, he nevertheless stated that he felt "part of what [the Black Panther Party was] doing"—in "certain respects." He qualified his statement, explaining that "everybody

has their own way of doing things...in their attempts to get personal freedom. That's all it is" (qtd. in Burks 28-29). While Hendrix offered partial support for the Black Panthers' goals of self-protection and political freedom through solidarity and resistance, his refusal to wholly identify with the Party—combined with recurrent statements about transcending racial categories, rather than about empowering the black community—tended to overshadow his commitments to black political imperatives and related cultural initiatives.

Moreover, Hendrix's public image was closely managed for the majority of his career. It was subject to the priorities of those media outlets where he appeared, leaving his comments about black cultural politics relatively unavailable to the public during his lifetime. Recent archival access, however, avails more nuanced perspectives on Hendrix's historical and political sensibilities, as when Hendrix hypothesized, "I wish they'd had electric guitars in cotton fields back in the good old days," because a "whole lot of things would have been straightened out." He continued, "Not just only for the black and white, but I mean for the cause!" (qtd. in Roby 251). Yet as with the minor treatment of Hendrix's enthusiasm for justice in critical and popular discourse today, his political commitments and racial viewpoints were not significant aspects of his representation in the mainstream media: he was, and typically remains, a guitar icon whose sense of cultural identity was linked most explicitly with white counterculture. This media tendency is exemplified by Hendrix's appearance on the *Dick Cavett Show*, where although most of Hendrix's preferred topics were discussed, justice was not (Roby 201).

Meanwhile, in Hendrix's less-circulated statements, overtones of revolution come through with clarity: "We was in America," said Hendrix. "We was in America," he repeated. "And it's time for another anthem and that's what I'm writin' on now" (qtd. in Roby 252). Hendrix's call for a new anthem was directed at an America divided not just by race, but by what

Hendrix viewed as pervasive stalemates between generations: “The easy thing to cop out with is sayin’ black and white. That’s the easiest thing. You can see a black person. But now to get down to the nitty-gritty, it’s gettin’ to be old and young—not the age, but the way of thinkin’. Old and new, actually” (qtd. in Roby 252). To the extent that he was frustrated by what he regarded as oversimplified mentalities and politics dividing generations, Hendrix espoused a perspective parallel to Black Panthers’ and Black Arts figures’ impatience with and critiques of strategies of passive resistance (one of the key differences between Black Power activists and their Civil Rights contemporaries). As for the source of Hendrix’s impatience, some biographers suggest it stemmed from his multiple experiences with anti-black racism in the United States. As Lauren Onkey writes,

Hendrix’s race was emphatically *not* invisible on his American tours. In Dallas, the Experience was threatened with violence if they played “The Star-Spangled Banner”; they were refused hotel rooms in Tuscaloosa because there were too many white women around Hendrix; and Hendrix knew that he could not enter many restaurants down South. (202)

While these experiences of racism likely played a significant role in the development of Hendrix’s perspectives on race and racism, Hendrix’s maneuvering within racial discourses and the media industry’s managerial dictates largely prevented his personal racial philosophies from reaching most of his listeners, including the black Americans he sought to engage.

The stark difference in audience responses between his performances at Woodstock and Harlem, for instance, suggest his music’s lack of cross-racial appeal following his post-Chitlin’ Circuit career—including his music with the Band of Gypsys. The split between his Harlem and Woodstock audiences “revealed the racial polarization of the times” (Onkey 191) as much as

they reveal the limits of Hendrix's aesthetic appeal and commercial success among African American audiences:

At Woodstock, Hendrix was an undisputed star, the highest paid of all who performed there. He was one of very few musicians of color playing for an adoring but predominately white audience. In Harlem, by contrast, he faced a small, primarily black, and somewhat hostile audience that was largely unfamiliar with his music. (Onkey 191)

Hendrix's limited "crossover appeal" was due largely to his central position in the rock genre, which, in Hendrix's words, led "Black kids [to] think the music is white now, which it isn't. The argument is not between black and white now. That's just another game the establishment set up to turn us against one another" (qtd. in Onkey 205). Here and throughout his career, Hendrix would resist racialist tendencies Karl Miller identifies in *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (2010), where music develops "a color line" (2) due to the reduction of complex musical interplays into generic categories that align with racialist preoccupations, despite the fact that musicians interspersed musical styles through and across such categories without necessarily limiting themselves to any single racial group. In other words, Hendrix resisted racial categorizations that tended to align with musical genres, and he did so when others were using music expressly as an instrument of racial solidarity. Furthermore, because Hendrix was aesthetically and performatively located within the rock idiom that had already for years been building on white musicians' appropriation of African Americans' blues music, his homages to the blues were at odds with Black Arts critiques of the genre. It is well known that resistance to the blues arose from writers such as Franz Fanon, Maulana Karenga, and Haki Madhubuti, among other Black Arts writers, for whom the blues signified, in the words

of Adam Gussow, “the cry of the slavery/sharecropping continuum” (232). In 1968, Karenga famously denounced the blues as “invalid; for they teach resignation” (2090), even as Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka defended the blues as the epistemological force in subsequent black musics while promoting the blues aesthetic as effective when transgenerationally politicized.

Hendrix’s approach to the blues was not explicitly conceived as or performed under the auspices of what Neal and Baraka believed would facilitate revolutionary black solidarity. Instead, Hendrix conceptualized the blues as a “spiritual-blues thing,” a “part of America,” the basis of “electric church music—a new kind of Bible you carry in your hearts, one that will give you a physical feeling” (qtd. in Henderson 214). Hendrix’s bandmate, Buddy Miles, promoted the Band of Gypsys as a solidaristic collaboration among African American brothers in the decades following Hendrix’s death, such as in his *Live at the Fillmore East* DVD interview. Yet at the time, Hendrix’s blues music was established as part of the wider movement of 1960s counterculture to the point of becoming genrefied as white rock. From the perspectives of the Black Panthers and Black Arts figures, Hendrix’s imperatives to musically transcend racial and even generic categories appeared “as a sign of integration into the dominant ideology” (Kato 88-89). Hendrix’s relationship to the blues and its pedagogy, then, is complicated, to say the least, particularly insofar as his blues renditions are difficult to regard as part of a project, like Neal’s or Baraka’s, of envisioning the blues as part of an epistemological continuum suited for diasporic connectivity, let alone black cultural and political revolution.²⁰ Thus while today Hendrix’s

²⁰ On the question of diasporicity as it relates to blues epistemology and blues pedagogy, Hendrix’s oeuvre offers a qualifying example of the blues as a genre invested in diasporic community formation, insofar as his approach to the blues is communitarian, inclusive of but not exclusive to listeners who have ancestral connections to African diasporas. I do not believe that Hendrix’s blues runs against my argument about the pedagogical aspects of African American literary blues narratives—for the fact that this is musical performance, not a narrative deliberation that proceeds from blues infrastructures, macrostructures, forms, and subject matter,

musical innovations continue to trouble genrefication, his historical and rhetorical situation within a predominantly white genre and within the white constituency of 1960s counterculture continues to obscure the complexity of his relationship to black politics and aesthetics. As Elmer Dixon, a co-founder of the Black Panthers' Seattle chapter, explained in 2010, it was commonly asked whether Hendrix was "black enough" ("Star Spangled Hendrix").

From commentary about early Experience concerts to the recent release of Vivid Entertainment's pornographic video, *Jimi Hendrix: The Sex Tape* (2007), discourse surrounding Hendrix and blackness all too often reveals "the constitutive relationship between authenticity and spectatorship in the production of black manhood" (Cruz 66). While the question of Hendrix's blackness was asked among black people, many of Hendrix's white audience members perceived Hendrix's race in terms of stereotypes, as evidenced by the words of Eric Clapton, who ungraciously stated, "Everybody and his brother in England still sort of think that spades have big dicks. And Jimi came over and exploited that to the limit. Everybody fell for it...I fell for it" (qtd. in Waksman 197). Albert Goldman wrote the following in 1968: "Last time I saw Jimi Hendrix onstage, he was playing SuperSpade. His Afro-Annie hairdo looked like it was plugged into his [Sunn] amp" (85). To Goldman, Hendrix represented a "New Negro from the North [who] had the motions of a great black snake" (85). Hendrix seemed to have "revived the primitive form," even as Goldman wrote that "Jimi Hendrix is essentially one with the white pop scene wherever it is most advanced," concluding that "Hendrix's blackness is only skin deep" (87).

as in the literary blues writings I have analyzed. Hendrix's blues and his cultural pedagogy have, however, led me to consider how the blues in musical production merges with the forms of other genres and what the implications are of blues hybridity in the oeuvre of Jimi Hendrix.

The very question of “how black is Jimi Hendrix” manifests conflicting assumptions about blackness, including the idea that there is a set of stable, agreed upon criteria for identifying cultural articulations of blackness. The divergences in commentary about Hendrix’s racial status—from Larry Neal and Elmer Dixon to Eric Clapton and Albert Goldman—points to what Paul Gilroy has called “the antagonism between different local definitions of what blackness entails and to the combined and uneven character of black cultural development” (“Sounds Authentic” 115). Gilroy recognizes that Hendrix moved listeners’ sensoria “away from the basic stereophony of his first recordings towards the raging would-be three dimensionality of the later work” (“Bold as love?” 123), even as he has suggested that Hendrix “failed to be an African American because he initially had to move to Europe to earn a living as a musician and because his characteristic mix of good-humored politeness and assertiveness didn’t conform to conventional notions of what it was to be black in America at the time” (Caywood). These statements suggest an appreciation of Hendrix’s evolving musicianship, mixed with recognition of the difficulty surrounding Hendrix’s status as an African American musician: Hendrix is an icon of the music world, but not an icon of African American music. Ultimately, Gilroy offers a useful resolution to common preoccupations that underpin Hendrix’s “mixed” status as such, arguing particularly in the case of Hendrix,

the creative opposition in his work between blues-rooted tradition and an assertively high tech, futuristic spirituality distills a wider conflict...between contending definitions of authenticity that are appropriate to black cultural creation on its passage into international pop commodification. (“Sounds Authentic” 115)

What is most important about Gilroy's multiple analyses of Hendrix's symbolic status is how, like Hendrix's own gestures toward the complication of racialism, they defamiliarize prescriptive conceptions of blackness by stressing that black "authenticities" exist culturally in relation to a wide range of audience expectations. Historically speaking, those expectations arose from an audience that included media managers, Black Panthers, and white hippies, and the variations in Hendrix's performance of black male stereotypes affirm Hendrix's awareness of such audience expectations. As he reflected on his experience with The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Hendrix's frustration with such (primarily white) audience expectations is clear: "the main thing that used to bug me was that people wanted too many visual things from me. I never wanted it to be so much of a visual thing" (qtd. in Roby 286). His primary goal was for "the music to get across, so that people could just sit back and close their eyes, and know exactly what was going on, without caring a damn what we were doing while we were on stage" (qtd. in Roby 286). As live footage of the Band of Gypsys performances demonstrates, toward the end of Hendrix's career he had begun to abandon such audience-serving performativity in favor of cultivating a sonic environment removed from spectacles of race, gender, and sexuality.

Because racial discourse and especially discourse on blackness so profoundly mediates interpretations of Hendrix's life, music, and sociocultural influence, it is worthwhile and important to deconstruct what may be called, in this context, the politics of blackness. Most of the secondary works cited in this chapter have some immediate correlation or reference to the work of Jimi Hendrix in particular, but fewer are committed specifically to the work of a project specific to the deconstruction of blackness. To supplement these primarily Hendrix-specific projects with critical race theory more explicitly, I want to turn to the work of Tommie Shelby and extrapolate his work on black solidarity and black identity into the terrain of Hendrix

scholarship. In this brief sidestep to Shelby's influential book, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (2005), I aim to cull a working vocabulary for understanding the racial pressures and expectations—but also opportunities—that surrounded Hendrix's career.

I turn specifically to Shelby's work for several reasons. First, its argument deftly integrates analytic philosophy and cultural studies in order to account explicitly for some of the views that, based on my research, often lie implicitly in the swath of ideas that constitute Hendrix's philosophy. Second, Shelby's approach to collective identity theory in terms specific to blackness is a meaningful and viable reprise of Kwame Appiah's work on racialism (especially *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* [1996]), in large part because of Shelby's meticulous attention to the politics of culture involved with ethnoracial identifications with blackness and investments in black solidarity. Third, in Shelby's analysis of different modes of blackness, he demonstrates that the criteria for locating individuals on a "spectrum" of blackness are contradictory and—as Hendrix's case illustrates—counterproductive to the visualization and pursuit of social justice, which in the present study is an important model to better interpret Hendrix's highly complex relationship to Black Arts and Black Power. Ultimately, Shelby's analysis provides a practical linkage between the evolution of Hendrix's pedagogy of deliberation and that which Shelby terms pragmatic—rather than classical—black nationalism.

For Shelby, thin blackness has become a vague and socially imposed category of "racial" difference that serves to distinguish groups according to visible, inherited physical characteristics and a particular biological ancestry. Thin blackness refers to people whose physical appearances are similar enough to be said to share a familiar set of phenotype traits, who meet certain

genealogical criteria, and who have ancestors of similar profiles. There is little room for personal choice when it comes to criteria for thin blackness: if one matches up with these criteria, they will likely be identified and/or self-identify as black (Shelby 208). By contrast, while thick black identity often includes the thin component (such as in the racist mode), it also requires something more than just appearance and African ancestral lineage. Thick blackness can be adopted, altered, or lost through individual action. For Shelby, there are five common modes of thick blackness: racist, which presumes a genotype of blackness; ethnic, which equates blackness with shared ancestry and common cultural heritage (this is different from a “must-have” racial genotype); national, which equates blackness with certain places of citizenship, or with a territorial origin, such as an ancestral homeland; cultural, which determines blackness by beliefs, values, conventions, and practices that are associated with blackness, which means that cultural blackness is not necessarily tied to biological or racial conceptions; and finally kinship, which is a derivation of the other modes that is distinguished by nomenclature (brothers and sisters of the same family, for instance) (Shelby 209-212).

With these concepts of thin and thick black identities—especially when used in the context of a mixed race icon such as Hendrix—a foremost consideration is the choice of identification. Some may fit the thin profile, but not prefer to be characterized as such for any variety of reasons. However, even if one chooses not to self-identify as black, this does not dissolve the sometimes constraining or enabling social realities that are created by the fact that others may insist upon ascribing such an identity to those they regard as black. This leads to questions of “black authenticity” (e.g., someone’s designation as an “Uncle Tom”) that presume the viability of “degrees of blackness” (e.g., someone or something is considered “not black enough” or “whitewashed”) (Shelby 215). Ultimately, then, although individuals have little

choice whether to identify as black in the thin sense, individuals can decide what significance to attach to their blackness. This includes, for instance, the decision to participate in a form of racial justice activism, black cultural nationalism, or any sociopolitical involvements with Black Nationalism. On the other hand, individuals can espouse thick black identities for reasons that are not consciously political, for adopting a mode of thick blackness does not necessarily mean one does so as a *political* move toward black solidarity (Shelby 215-216).

Following from Shelby's delineations of modes of blackness, his critique of collective identity theory surfaces with clarity, and this is where we begin to recognize how Hendrix's personal sense of self did not conform to collective identity theory. It can be said that there are persons who meet the criteria for thin blackness who also have available a black identity that is thicker than thin blackness, and any such persons must positively affirm and preserve an identity of thick blackness if collectively they are to overcome their racial oppression through group solidarity. Of course, Shelby is not advocating the modes of blackness for the purposes of determining whose blackness is more authentic; rather, he is identifying how such models across generations are ideationally problematic. Under the racist conception, for instance, so-called "racial purity" is not determinable. So, if ethnic or cultural identities have been adapted more commonly among collective identity theorists, Shelby argues that of the various ways of affirming that identity, "the best way to honor the heroic efforts previous generations of blacks is to continue their struggle for racial justice and black liberation" (218). Ultimately, Shelby argues that there is little reason to suppose that black people must share a collective identity in order to exhibit, as a group, robust solidarity. One does not have to possess a black cultural identity—indeed one does not have to be black at all—to appreciate "the value of racial equality, to condemn racism, or to abhor poverty" (Shelby 221), as was the case with Jimi Hendrix. While it

is sometimes easier to trust those with whom one shares a cultural identity, trust can be facilitated in other ways, as well; for instance, by “openly making efforts to advance the cause of black liberation” (Shelby 222), as did Hendrix, albeit sometimes in subtle ways. To further complicate claims that a shared collective identity is necessary for the pursuit of justice, Shelby asks a very important question: who ought to define the boundaries of what is included in and excluded from black culture? There will be no consensus on what constitutes authentic black culture; furthermore, gender, class, and generational differences will complicate any attempt to sustain a common black ethnocultural identity (Shelby 227). However, Shelby argues that most black people have (or should have) a vested interest in racial equality, regardless of their cultural identification, and because of the common classification of so many as thinly black, African Americans ought to identify with others, despite differences, on the basis of the possibility of experiencing anti-black racism.

The delineation of different modes of black identification and the critique of collective identity theory allows Shelby to distinguish key differences between classical and pragmatic nationalism—and to question the viability of each. Again, these distinctions illuminate Hendrix’s complex relationship to Black Power. According to a model of classical Black Nationalism, black Americans unite and work together because they are a people with their own ethnoracial identity; as a cohesive national group, blacks have interests that are best pursued by their seeking group autonomy “within some relatively independent institutional framework” (Shelby 202). By contrast, following pragmatic Black Nationalism (pragmatic as in practical, applied, meant to modify the current order rather than separate from it), black Americans unite because they suffer a common oppression and turn to black solidarity to create greater freedom and equality. Shelby characterizes pragmatic nationalism as a less radical, more progressive model, while classical

nationalism is more radical in its skepticism about whether equality can be attained, and thus turns to black solidarity as a means of working toward self-organization (202). In Shelby's analysis, classical nationalism is limited: "Classical nationalism is often merely a defensive and rhetorical posture that is taken up," Shelby writes, "so that its proponents and the group they take themselves to represent are seen not as merely reacting to white dominance but as asserting the equal right of African Americans to collective self-determination alongside other national groups" (29). And because certain versions of pragmatic nationalism are not plausible, Shelby seeks a plausible version of pragmatic nationalism, one that eschews collective identity theory, which he believes is flawed and unnecessary.

For Shelby, collective identity theory constrains individual freedom—the core of Hendrix's personal philosophy—and is ultimately self-defeating. What Shelby calls for is what Hendrix enacted culturally: a form of solidarity independent of collective identity theory, one based on common experience or observation of injustice and the commitment to ending it. Just as Hendrix so frequently intimates or states outright, Shelby wants to move beyond racial, ethnic, cultural, or national identities (206), which limit the struggle against racial domination and the disenfranchisement of black people. Ultimately, then, Shelby's model of transracial and trans-institutional solidarity—albeit more concrete and more substantively elaborated compared to Hendrix's—serves as a parallel to the philosophy Hendrix expresses throughout his concatenation of statements on race. Shelby writes,

I believe that the contemporary sociopolitical context calls for trans-institutional black solidarity—a form of group unity that does not depend on organizational separatism but rather extends across social organizations within which blacks (could) participate. No doubt, maintaining some black-only or black-controlled

organizations is still useful and has its place within the larger social reform effort. Such institutions foster a shared sense of social responsibility and trust among blacks; they offer opportunities for public debate and building consensus; they provide contexts for black youth to develop a strong sense of self-worth; they demonstrate that blacks are capable of independent achievement; and they provide vehicles for resistance and self-defense when interracial solidarity breaks down. Yet it is equally important that these autonomous organizations be supplemented with greater black participation in multiracial associations that are sympathetic to black political interests. (137)

In this view, there is intrinsic linkage between social justice and the sociocultural politics of blackness. In the same way that Shelby argues that “black Americans should not embrace black cultural nationalism as a component of their public philosophy” (162), Hendrix took a position of publicly distancing himself from ideologies, institutions, and organizations founded on tenets of black cultural nationalism. I believe this is crucial: Hendrix was able to maintain commitments to social justice—for instance, by discussing his donation to the Martin Luther King Memorial Fund as a form of public opposition to the Ku Klux Klan (Roby 298)—even as he did so in apparent contradiction to modes of thick black identity prevalent in the 1960s and 70s. We can see how Hendrix’s ethos of transracial solidarity relates to culturally prevalent conceptions of blackness advanced in Black Power ideologies and the Black Arts Movement, leading not to the question of Hendrix’s relationship to a racial or cultural definition of blackness, but instead to questions about Hendrix’s unique, under-recognized, revisionary articulations of those ideologies in the form of his cultural pedagogy.

Hendrix's view on what Shelby outlines as pragmatic Black Nationalism comes into focus in a striking December 1969 interview—just weeks before the Band of Gypsys' New Year's Eve concert—when he stated that the Panthers should not kill, but scare. He explained that the evils of racism necessitated organized forms of opposition, even if only in the form of harassment: “You have to fight fire with fire” (qtd. in Roby 150), he said, and reasoned that the need for groups like the Panthers was in fact fundamental due to a lack of political efficacy, the presence of oppressive organizations (including government and the Ku Klux Klan), and the need for assertive, collective activism. The interview is so striking not least because of Hendrix's rarely communicated sense of political urgency:

You have to do something—not frustrated like throwing little cocktail bottles, you know, here and there, breaking up a store window. That's nothing, especially in your own neighborhood. You should have people like the Black Panthers who are trained, commanders, only together, like the National Guard—not to fight maybe, but to harass. (150)

Hendrix recognized that someone had “to make a move,” and he acknowledged that “we're the ones that are hurting most as far as peace of mind and living is concerned” (150), the “we” in that sentence referring to black Americans. Because Hendrix so frequently evoked transracial affinity in his comments, this statement about black Americans' “peace of mind” and “living” stands out as one of his more explicit statements about black ontologies and social politics.

Less publicly but still pointedly, by 1969 Hendrix was also becoming serious about being recognized as a record producer, beginning with a Black Power-influenced LP, the Buddy Miles Express' *Electric Church* (1969). Hendrix wrote that “it would seem to be honestly fair for my name alone to appear as producer...I know a name on an LP jacket sounds like a small tut, but

one of my ambitions is to be a good producer” (qtd. in Roby 115). This is one minor but indicative facet of what many consider to be Hendrix’s developing commitment to black aesthetics and politics in his late career, along with his growing interest in jazz, his desire to collaborate with Miles Davis, his formation of the Band of Gypsys, and his qualified alliances with black causes that have been taken by some as “evidence that he was seeking a way to assert his blackness” (Mahon 254). As we have seen, Hendrix was reluctant to articulate any singular manifesto about his racial politics, or he was restricted from doing so, and so although his lyrical compositions during the late period offer relatively few insights into his thinking about socioracial dynamics and the pedagogy it informed, we can nevertheless see how Hendrix did begin to make pedagogical use of his cultural power and creative control as a performing artist, sound engineer, and media icon.

Commercial stakes were obviously at play with the *Band of Gypsys* project, including Hendrix’s contractual obligation to produce an album within a limited timeframe, yet popular assumptions about Hendrix’s commercial status have precluded appropriate analysis and theorization of what may have been happening pedagogically with the Band of Gypsys. Closely listening to and closely looking at Hendrix’s strategic differentiations in the Band of Gypsys’ archival rehearsals (*The Baggy’s Rehearsal Sessions*), albums (*Band of Gypsys* and *Live at the Fillmore East*), and concert video footage (*Band of Gypsys: Live at the Fillmore East*) reveals an ethos rooted in black political and philosophical culture. It is an ethos akin to Jean Toomer’s “universal man” theory: one predicated upon self-realization, racial transcendence, and individual agency rather than upon militancy or exclusionary black solidarity.²¹

²¹ Toomer’s post-*Cane* poetry expresses an alternative ethos of transcendence to that of *Cane*, with pronounced concerns about divisiveness within the United States:

The symbol of Universal Man—

The implicit alliances between Hendrix and his contemporaries become clearer upon clarifying the ways in which black political views of the Black Panther Party and of various Black Arts figures modified or disavowed ideologies of separatism. Leading activists disagreed on key principles, adjusting or even overhauling their ideological standpoints. The ideology of the Black Panthers was hardly univocal. For instance, Eldridge Cleaver’s “revolution now” perspective, in which the Panthers were to lead masses of armed people in a revolution, stood in stark contrast to Huey Newton’s priorities of supporting, educating, and edifying poor and working-class black communities (Fredrika Newton xiii). While these kinds of discrepancies became clear in the years following the prominence of the Black Panther Party, the late-1960s proliferation of “threatening” images of armed revolutionaries played a significant role in defining black political culture in the popular imaginary. Despite the fact, for instance, that the familiar photo of Huey Newton, below, was taken “at the behest” of Eldridge Cleaver, who “sought to make a militant public statement about the Party and its leader” (Fredrika Newton, xi), the image of Newton with a rifle in one hand—and a spear in the other—commanded, and commands, viewers to dwell on violence instead of what Newton was clearly invested in: a culture in which all Homo sapiens would be recognized with dignity. Such images helped constitute the rhetorical situation to which Hendrix would, throughout his late career, respond. To do so publically, for a figure as popular as Hendrix, was to perform acts of cultural instruction—intentionally as well as unintentionally.

Must outgrow clan and class, color,
Nationalism, creed, all the fetishes
Of the arrested and dismembered,
And find a larger truth in larger hearts,
Lest the continents shrink to islands,
Lest human destiny abort
And man, bristling against himself, explode.

(“The Blue Meridian” (1936) in *The Collected Poetry of Jean Toomer* (1988))

Following from Hendrix's observation that "the black kids don't have a chance too much to listen—they're too busy trying to get their own selves together" (205), and recognizing that Hendrix did seek to engage more African Americans with his music, he was particularly well-positioned to educate his multiracial audience of listeners. As such, the question of intention is partially answered by the fact that Hendrix became increasingly aware of his opportunities to interrogate racial imaginaries before the public's ears and eyes. Contrary to his black militant contemporaries, who were actively organizing resistance to white oppression in order to confront racism, Hendrix played African American musics as radical expressions of counter-hegemony while simultaneously dissolving racial issues per se into the popular discourse of a largely white counterculture. Furthermore, while Hendrix was clearly invested in building channels of cultural communication throughout black America, he was also pronouncedly committed to celebrating freedom, and especially individually realized freedom, as the chief precipitant of progressive possibilities. Even the "misspelled" title and band name, band of *gypsys*, resists self-homogenization by refusing to use the standard plural form of the noun *gypsy* (i.e., *gypsies*). To put this another way, Hendrix identified the band as a coming together of each gypsy—three independent, individual gypsies—but not a band wherein "gypsies" neutralized or modified the identity of any given member.

Such symbolism, however, was and is muted by more assertive symbolic cultures of Hendrix's time. Hendrix's artistic celebration of freedom, combined with his status as a symbol of unhindered socioeconomic mobility, represented a clear conflict with the Black Panthers' political reliance upon violence—symbolic violence, threats of violence, and occasional acts of violence. At the same time, some of Hendrix's core values corresponded with Huey Newton's theory of intercommunalism, which marked a shift away from Black Nationalism and toward

alliances with progressive communities around the world—black communities, but also progressive peoples from, for instance, political segments of China, Korea, and Vietnam (“Speech” 171). Hendrix’s words and actions, especially coming from a media figure whose degree of popularity was reached through revenue streams made possible by capitalist consumerism, hardly suggest a shared interest with Newton in overthrowing capitalism and redistributing wealth to disenfranchised communities around the world. Further, Newton interpreted any welcoming of “hippies and yippies” to be a blow to the Black Panther Party (Newton xx), while Hendrix, of course, had been spectacularly involved with proverbial hippie culture. And while Newton’s version of “revolutionary love” was in part based on intraracial love, it was, like Hendrix’s devotion to love, rooted in the pursuit of humane social change. Hendrix’s more explicit promotion of love across races suggests that Hendrix’s belief in intercommunalism per se was predicated on an insistent acceptance of forward-looking, freedom-seeking individuals who were personally invested in transforming reality.

In this last sense, Hendrix anticipated what would become the fundamental premise of Newton’s treatise on intercommunalism, published in 1971 just five months after Hendrix’s death. As Newton stated, “We, the Black Panther Party, believe that everything is in a constant state of change, so we employ a framework of thinking that can put us in touch with the process of change” (“Intercommunalism” 181). Following from Newton’s definition of what he saw as an “age of reactionary intercommunalism, in which a ruling circle, a small group of people, control all other people by using their technology” (187), there is striking commonality with Hendrix’s desire not for immediate revolution, but rather for cultivating what Newton described as “a culture that is essentially human and would nurture those things that would allow the people to resolve contradictions in a way that would not cause the mutual slaughter of all of us”

(187). The process of developing such a culture would involve, in Newton's term, revolutionary intercommunalism, and it is clear that Hendrix was invested in that process through his utilization of music as a pedagogical praxis—first for the effect of the listener's intrapersonal dialogism and individual transformation, and subsequently for wider cultural and social change. Hendrix, while utilizing certain forms of the “technologies” of national and imperialist capitalism by virtue of working in the for-profit recording and performance industries, was revolutionizing technologies of musical reproduction, and through this revolutionizing was restructuring the possibilities of working within a commercial sphere of musical production that some black cultural nationalists might have delimited as yet another technology of capitalism. Rather than fight from outside, Hendrix worked from within.

Even more compelling is how Newton's model of revolutionary intercommunalism links with Hendrix's pedagogical model of discovery, whereby listeners are enabled to “awaken some kind of thing in their minds” (qtd. in Roby 203). Newton puts it another way in his response to psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson's question: must “dispersed communities” work out internal differences before taking part in intercommunalism? Newton's reply:

They [dispersed communities] are part of intercommunalism, reactionary intercommunalism. What the people have to do is become conscious of this condition. The primary concern of the Black Panther Party is to lift the level of consciousness of the people through theory and practice to the point where they will see exactly what is controlling them and what is oppressing them, and therefore see exactly what has to be done—or at least what the first step is. One of the greatest contributions of Freud was to make people aware that they are controlled much of their lives by their unconscious. He attempted to strip away

the veil from the unconscious and make it conscious: that's the first step in *feeling free*, the first step in exerting control. It seems to be natural for people not to like being controlled. Marx made a similar contribution to human freedom, only he pointed out the external things that control people. ("Intercommunalism" 191)

When Newton speaks of teaching people about "what is controlling them and what is oppressing them," his gesture toward the use of Socratic teaching to guide the people toward recognizing the oppressive forces of white capitalist imperialism is hardly subtle, and, by implication, it is more specific than Hendrix's goal of awakening "some kind of thing" in the minds of the people. In Hendrix's music, however, are directives of a more specific nature than Hendrix would ever declare in his statements of cultural-pedagogical philosophy.

These intersections between Hendrix's philosophy and that of prominent Black Power figures, along with Hendrix's aforementioned insistence on the individuality of each "gypsy" in this band of African American musicians, suggest Hendrix's progressive willingness to incorporate divergent conceptions of blackness and to work in reciprocity with the different aesthetic preferences and political ideologies aligned with those conceptions of blackness. On this point, it should be stressed again that the philosophies of Hendrix and Newton, for instance, are hardly one and the same, but that significant linkages do emerge between them. As an important example where Newton's philosophy of intercommunalism actually exceeds Hendrix's pursuit of individual freedom, for instance, the prediction Newton makes about intercommunes of the near future is a telling instance of how his sense of identitarianism clashes with Hendrix's. In the passage below, Newton responds to Erikson's question: "In the ultimate intercommune do you see separate, geographically defined communities that have had a specific history and a

unique set of experiences? Would each community retain some kind of separate identity?”

Newton replies,

No, I think that whether we like it or not, dialectics would make it necessary to have a universal identity. If we do not have universal identity, then we have cultural, racial, and religious chauvinism, the kind of ethnocentrism we have now. So we say that even if in the future there will be some small differences in behavior patterns, different environments would all be a secondary thing. And we struggle for a future in which we realize that we are all Homo sapiens and have more in common than not. We will be closer together than we are now. (“Intercommunalism” 191)

Here, Newton anticipates a closeness between human communities in the same way we would expect Hendrix to; however, where Newton predicts and partially suggests the necessity of a “universal identity,” Hendrix pursues the enablement of individualisms that can thrive without resorting to the kinds of chauvinism Newton is rightly disturbed by. In a context of black cultural politics wherein alternative forms of radicalism became a standard of measuring Hendrix’s own cultural praxis, one of Hendrix’s enduring teaching moments involved his work to maintain his unwavering commitment to individual freedom while also modeling the possibilities of how that individual freedom could function even more productively through intra-racial reciprocity.

The Freirean association is noticeable: Hendrix modeled self-determination qua the performance of personal transformation to symbolize a state of social progress predicated upon individual freedom. To transition from Hendrix’s involvement in black cultural politics to an analysis of his cultural pedagogy, we can turn to a noteworthy moment from the 1969 interview cited above: its conclusion, in which Hendrix makes public his commitment to using music as an

instrument for social justice. He makes that commitment public, however, as an ultimatum: people will have to start listening. After noting that one of his current songs in the making was dedicated to the Black Panthers, Hendrix speaks of his personal responsibility as a musician and activist: “I’m doing the best I can. Everybody’s just gonna have to get off their ass. All I can say is common sense. *We’re gonna use our music as much as we can. We’re gonna start if people will start listening*” (qtd. in Roby 150, emphasis added).

5.4 LEARNING FROM THE BAND OF GYPSYS

My whole life is based around [music]. So quite naturally it comes to be even more than a religion. And so what I learn, through the experience of it, I try to pass on to other people, you know, through our music, so it won't be so hard for them to go around.

Jimi Hendrix
Interview with Flip Wilson (10 July 1969)

Hendrix crafted his music as a means for changing the consciousness of his audience. In the most basic sense, his craft was rhetorical: he used language (verbal and musical) purposively to alter the affective states and sociocultural ideas of his listeners. Espousing ideals predicated on individual discovery—rather than generalized, generic, mass instillation—Hendrix’s music extends beyond the rhetorical, evades the didactic, and becomes innovatively pedagogical. The performative dimensions of Hendrix’s pedagogy—in particular, his demonstration of the ability to navigate the politics of ethnoracial identitarianism through improvisation, body language, and responsiveness to audience expectations—illustrate the impetus to not only persuade, but also to motivate changes in the listener’s consciousness, facilitate the erasure of psychosocial barriers, and stimulate individual awakenings that lead to personal and social change.

In so many ways, Hendrix was cultivating a method to teach with sound just as Paulo Freire was theorizing pedagogy “as the practice of freedom” (Freire 81). Freire deplores pedagogy that “inhibits creativity” (83). He deems oppressive any pedagogy that denies “people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (84). Education as a practice of freedom, by contrast, “bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation” (Freire 84). With different terms and mediums than Freire, but aligned in principle, Hendrix crafted his music to provide for listeners a creative basis for transformative aurality: “We plan for our sound to go inside the soul of the person,” said Hendrix, “and see if *they* can awaken *some kind of thing* in their minds, ‘cause there’s so many sleeping people” (qtd. in Roby 203, emphasis added). For Hendrix, the pedagogical responsibility of Freirean “inquiry and creative transformation” belongs to the students, not the educator: it is the pedagogue who attempts to provide adequately organized and methodologically appropriate stimuli to the students so *they* can awaken in themselves *some kind of thing*.

The ambiguity of the phrase “some kind of thing” is dangerous and brave on Hendrix’s part, dangerous due to the risks of encouraging such broad interpretation, and brave because of Hendrix’s confidence that his music, even without the guidance of any kind of rubric or statement of educational philosophy per se to guide the audience’s interpretation, would in fact lead to positive change. As a premise of his pedagogy, leaving the onus of relatively undirected discovery to the students is a striking departure from conventional educational sensibilities that tend to be driven by administratively and politically regulated learning outcomes. For a teacher to lead his students to some ontological place elsewhere from wherever they are—but to no

epistemological destination in particular—is even a deviation from the Socratic method, which despite its presentation as organic dialogue has, as its impetus, a socially determined lesson or moral destination or learning outcome in mind.

Hendrix knew that musical listening is a powerful catalyst for individuals to initiate and sustain that process, and in preparation for the Band of Gypsys performances, he began to adjust his sound signature by expanding his technological repertoire. In these concerts with the Band of Gypsys, Hendrix for the first time used a unique combination of sound effects to manipulate the output of his electric guitar signal. Beyond his customary use of the Fender Stratocaster and four-stack of Marshall amplifiers, he produced a distinctive soundscape with a Fuzz Face stompbox to generate sounds resembling electric fuzz; a wah-wah pedal to replicate qualities of the human voice; the Octavia to double and recouple octaves of the original notes being played; as well as a Uni-Vibe pedal to simulate what often resembles a Hammond electric organ. As has been noted by multiple Hendrix scholars (Wilkenfeld, et. al), Hendrix’s use of this array of technologies with the Band of Gypsys combined with his effort to include a larger black audience resonates with the philosophy of jazz musician Sun Ra, who believed in the potential of technological agency as a means “to both use and reinvent the tools of white society” (Kreiss 61) and favored a technological, utopian model of black consciousness in his vision of social change. Sun Ra and Huey Newton felt that black Americans might be “left behind” as technology continued to change. Hendrix, always working against self-antiquation, took up new technologies—and even had them designed specifically for his musical performances and recordings—in the context of black performance with the Band of Gypsys in order to model the potential of technological innovation.

Hendrix's use of sonic technologies is not easily summarized as an assertion of black identity, however, and it is not so easily yoked with contemporaneous assertions of thick black identity. Steve Waksman is partially correct when he notes that Hendrix "put forth not simply a demonstration of his own talent but a particular conception of blackness embodied in his own person" (Waksman 169), but the very term "embodied" points to the ways in which Hendrix's physical presence, including his racial appearance, dictate even for critics who are aware of Hendrix's "particular conception of blackness" that the designation of blackness relies upon phenotype as much as or more than social orientation, political inclination, and cultural production. What Waksman and others are on the cusp of articulating is that Hendrix's use of technology in this pronounced ethnoracial context represents his pedagogy of deliberation: his negotiation and exploration of various sonic modalities that simultaneously aligned with and ventured away from ethnoracial identitarianisms and the aesthetic traditions associated with them.

This comes into view with consideration of Hendrix's earlier performance strategies, which relied upon pronounced physical acts, sexual gestures, and gimmicks such as behind-the-back guitar playing, playing with the teeth, and burning the guitar, which taken together evoked for some the legacy of minstrelsy, what Gilroy terms "neo-minstrel buffoonery" (*Black Atlantic* 93). With the Band of Gypsys, Hendrix's presentation as a technologically engaged performer disallows, if not opposes, these strategies. They represent a departure from certain audience expectations of black male performer stereotypes and a shift toward a less visual, more aural occupation of the listeners' sensoria. This shift in performance style seems as much a development of Hendrix's evolving aesthetic sensibility as much as it was an audience-oriented adaptation to ensure that his contributions as a cultural teacher would be realized—despite socio-

racially conditioned expectations of spectacular performativity. Hendrix frequently resisted static categories, going so far as to change the titles of songs so as to unfix preconceived notions of what those songs had to be and to allow those songs to become what Hendrix wanted them to be in any given rhetorical situation.

The following statement furnishes yet another level of understanding Hendrix's rationale to so insistently resist categorization. As Hendrix stated, "What I don't like is this business of trying to classify people. Leave us alone. Critics really give me a pain in the neck. It's like shooting at a flying saucer as it tries to land without giving the occupants a chance to identify themselves. You don't need labels, man. Just dig what's happening" (qtd. in Roby 197). At first blush, this seems like an ordinary rearticulation of 1960s counterculture vernacular, tinged with one of Hendrix's typical space-age references. But here Hendrix presents an important strain of his pedagogical purpose, as well. First, he resists again what Karl Miller describes in *Segregating Sound*: the processes by which a "fluid complex of sounds and styles in practice" become "reduced to a series of distinct genres associated with particular racial and ethnic identities" (Miller 2). Hendrix is opposed to classifying people in terms of musical genre, and the simile of "shooting at a flying saucer as it tries to land" suggests his frustration over his audience's inability to allow Hendrix's music to settle into an existing territory. When Hendrix says he felt as if he were among aliens being shot at before having "a chance to identify themselves," he indicates the severity of the situation, the difficulty of teaching advanced material, so to speak, to an audience expecting exaggerated displays and gimmicks instead of meaningful, audience-oriented lessons. The teacher barely walks into the classroom before the students have already closed their minds to new ideas, and so, as part of his adaptation to pedagogical difficulty along

with his own philosophical and aesthetic evolution, he introduces new technologies to facilitate a more dynamic, if not more assertive, pedagogical presence.

Such a technologically engaged presentation involved, in the first place, the restriction of the performer's body: Hendrix's use of stationary devices (stompbox and pedals) required relative immobility. While in the Band of Gypsys concerts Buddy Miles presents as perhaps overly eager to engage the audience with clap-alongs and call-and-response, Hendrix is markedly removed from the physical and dutifully absorbed in the use of his arsenal of sound effects. For instance, during the filmed portion of the concerts on January 1, 1970, Hendrix can be seen performing with very little of the physicality he was so known for in earlier concerts. He only lightly sways his body, achieving a non-performative effect. After forty minutes of performing with minimal body movement, it is only when Hendrix plays the Experience-era track, "Foxy Lady" (1967), that he makes any gestures toward his well-known phallic guitar moves. These gestures come across as flippant, comical, even sardonic, suggesting that this older song most would associate with an earlier performance style, one honed and performed with white musicians and evoking explosive response from Hendrix's predominantly white audience, is the only song where Hendrix is finally compelled to perform that which some regarded in terms of neo-minstrelsy.

Despite Hendrix's clear intentions to remove elements of the spectacular in his performances, to distance his body from the sound, and to present an aural experience to his listeners that would pedagogically facilitate the transformation of consciousness, interpretations of his performances continue to assume a mythical degree of interfusion between the sound of his guitar and his bodily phenotype. Bruce Clarke resorts to familiar tropes of Hendrix lore,

intimating that Hendrix's pedagogical use of technology is undetectable without relying upon the image of Hendrix's body as technological itself. As Clarke writes,

If the pioneers of cybernetics and information theory studied the formal parallels between electronic circuitry and organic systems, Hendrix showed how to couple the electric guitar and its amplification and sound-processing technologies *to the body in performance*, communicating his own cybernetic fusion to his actual live and virtual mediated audiences. Playing on the cutting edge of this human-machine interface, Jimi's rock persona embodied the "Body Electric" seen in the poetic ether a century earlier by America's first rock prophet, Walt Whitman. He transformed that romantic body into *a cybernetic body* sustained by the potentially infinite singing. (Clarke)

These references to "coupling" devices and their sounds "to the body in performance" essentialize the black body as a part of the technology itself, as opposed to recognizing Hendrix's mastery of the technology through artistic innovation, physical dexterity, and the pedagogical intention of applying that mastery for the benefit of his listeners. The idealization of Hendrix as a "cybernetic body" that transformed Walt Whitman's "romantic body" replaces the evolution of Hendrix's diasporic past and ethnoracial present with an icon of canonical poetry, while also granting Whitman's body the status of a human being—yet delimiting Hendrix's agency, legacy, and physical abilities in large part to his so-called "cybernetic fusion" with the technological.

Commemorating Hendrix in terms of the physical—even if "cybernetic body" is an attempt to honor the musician—neglects Hendrix's own wishes, desires, inclinations, words, and actions, while also preventing fuller awareness of his pedagogical projects. Hendrix regretted that audience members expected a spectacle more than they sought an opportunity to listen and

learn. As Hendrix said of audience expectations for black male performance, “I got out of that because I felt I was being too loud, visually,” which led to his valid concerns that “maybe too many people were coming to look and not enough to listen” (qtd. in Roby 319). So significant were these concerns that Hendrix observed how his own “nature just changed,” after which he “went and hid for a while” (319). That Hendrix was compelled to hide away from his own image suggests that criticism, even now, too often fails to engage in analysis outside of romantic commemorations. More importantly, that Hendrix’s contributions to Black Arts and Black Power discourses continue to be obscured by such commemorations suggests a continued need to rethink the circumstances of his career, the innovations of his music, and the interplays between his cultural pedagogy and the social history of black sociocultural movements.

Hendrix even went so far as to suggest that he would scale back not only the performativity of his concerts, but even the number of live gigs (Roby 288). This inclination to be less visual and less physically present before his audience, combined with his concerns that “maybe too many people were coming to look and not enough to listen” (qtd. in Roby 319), offers important insight into the ways in which Hendrix’s participation in the Black Arts movement: he had to find strategies to engage and teach a massive audience comprised largely of people who, in Hendrix’s mind, were not hearing his music at all or who were hearing the music and gazing at its performance without truly listening.

One of the most significant aspects of Hendrix’s performances with the Band of Gypsys is his strategic interruption of racial assumptions yoked to the historical minstrel imaginary. Playing with African American musicians Miles and Cox, Hendrix’s abandonment of so-called neo-minstrel buffoonery was not just a departure from audience expectations, but a disruption of what Eric Lott theorizes in terms of musical repetition. For Lott, listening to musical repetition

enabled blackface minstrelsy's interpellation of the white and black American racial imaginaries. Lott thinks of musical repetition within the performance of a composition, but also the audience's repeated viewing of multiple shows, asking, "What racial antecedents did [blackface minstrelsy] organize and put on offer? Why did audience pleasure often take the form...of repeated returns to the minstrel show?" (174). The cultural exchanges taking place in the minstrel sphere were highly masculinist, a parallel to the predominantly male pattern of white identification with and expropriation of black music after minstrelsy. White minstrel performers reveal "a kind of commerce between men" that "facilitated the cultural expropriation central to blackface minstrelsy" (Lott 49). Proceeding from Leslie Fiedler, Lott agrees that for those men born "theoretically" white, "we are permitted to pass our childhood as imaginary Indians, our adolescence as imaginary Negroes, and only then are expected to settle down to being what we really are: white once more" (qtd. in Lott 53; from Fiedler, *Waiting for the End* [1966]). Following from this lineage, Lott suggests that "white male fantasies of black men undergird the subject positions white men grow up to occupy" (53). Hendrix's late-career resistance to the construction of such fantasies served to initiate processes of unlearning, of bearing out and moving away from the lessons taught through generations of repeated performances of racial dynamics.

Blackface minstrelsy revealed more about whiteness than its viewers supposed, and as readers of American culture in generations since, minstrelsy's palimpsest emerges as the force of black performance stimulates cross-racial desire. Hendrix's early stage performances exploited popular imaginaries of black hypersexual masculinity, and had he continued in this way, his image might have remained in position to be caricatured and ridiculed as a minstrel subject. For minstrel audiences, the black body and the song of the black body are inscribed with labor as

well as potent sexuality (Lott 117), aligning black men with black and white working-class women in what Lott calls a “bourgeois cultural fantasy” wherein these figures make for “a thrilling and repellent sexual anarchy” (Lott 122). Thus the earliest white appropriations of black music in America were hardly limited to musical borrowing, but were in fact predicated upon interplays of race, class, gender, and sexuality. If Hendrix’s work with the Experience evoked the kinds of racial feeling common among minstrel audiences, his later decisions served to mediate those feelings. His pedagogical work with the Band of Gypsys, his initiative to reduce the presence of his physical act, and his turn toward studio work as his greatest investment all acted to modify the means by which his audience would receive pleasure, “experience,” and the impetus for liberation and transformation.

For those in the teaching profession, one of the most frustrating classroom experiences one can have is the unnerving experience that students are not listening, not paying attention, and consequently not learning as deeply as the educator hopes. When this happens frequently enough, some pedagogues will maintain a variety of diversions to distract students and themselves from their own insecurity. They may mask their insecurity over mediocre or poor teaching abilities with didactic patronizing, curricular rigidity, and self-protecting teaching strategies such as non-dialogic lecturing. They may substitute the practice of self-reflection with the habit of criticizing institutional regulations and levels of student literacy, perhaps even blaming students as inept to the point where pedagogy becomes stultified as a prolonged reaction to students’ apathy, inability, or generational sensibility. For others, the teacher works harder to find ways to get people to pay attention, to guide students toward allowing themselves to listen well enough to then guide themselves, ultimately, to a more aware and dynamic state of conscious engagement with the content and the world around them.

Like these teachers, Hendrix sought to cultivate a learning environment in which listening's potential could more fully be realized, a learning environment that he came to theorize as the electric church. As a cultural pedagogue, however, his usage of the word church signified nothing like a physical or institutional space. He clarified: "Yes, I have said that I am electric religion—because it is all about religion, not Christianity. It was the Christians who started most of the wars in this world. I see in front of me a universal religion, containing all beliefs, containing the essence of them all" (qtd. in Roby 298). The electric religion/electric church theory underpinned Hendrix's late-career initiatives to enable listeners to arrive at a post-identitarian, extra-bodily, non-sectarian aurality. As a theory enacted in pedagogical praxis, Hendrix's conception of the electric church would require recordings and performances that taught listeners to not obsess over the body, as in rituals of sacrament, image worship, and crucifixion involving the body of Jesus Christ. Hendrix disavows the bodily element of worship, cultivating a soundscape for his electric church members to transcend those areas of visual focus and to facilitate transformative aurality independent of corporeal tethers. By intending to have his audience forget about his physical presence and the materiality and visuality of musical performance, he sought *not* to "embody" the sounds he produced, but to lead his listeners to embody the sound fully enough to absorb its educative elements.

In soundscaping the electric church as a space of learning and transformation, Hendrix realized that musical innovation—even to the point of being "mind-blowing"—wasn't enough to arrive at significant transformative outcomes. Hendrix's description of the sound of the electric church resembles descriptions of the Band of Gypsys' music, insofar as Hendrix was trying to make the music "so loose and hard-hitting so that it hits your soul hard enough to make it open." He felt that electric church music, serving like "a shock therapy or a can opener," would become

his methodology for opening minds to the point where listeners would have “a new kind of Bible you carry in your hearts, one that will give you a physical feeling” (Henderson 214). Here, Hendrix further instantiates his goal of facilitating musical embodiment for his listeners, as opposed to being the frontman whose body would be inevitably yoked to the music. Moreover, the fact that Hendrix compares the electric church music to a Bible that listeners would carry in their hearts reinforces the pedagogical impetus of Hendrix’s music. As Hendrix said in the last months of his life, “The term ‘blowing someone’s mind’ is valid. People like you to blow their minds, but then we are going to give them something that will blow their mind, and while it’s blown open *there will be something there to fill the gap*. It’s going to be a complete form of music” (qtd. in Roby 286, emphasis added). This statement adds to the portrait of Hendrix’s pedagogical impetus as well, demonstrating his intention to open listeners’ minds and redirect their state of consciousness in a sustained way—rather than just an immersive aesthetic experience for the sake of pleasure. To what point of realization he does not suggest, but what his comment further demonstrates is his willingness to adapt his pedagogy, to accommodate desires to be awestruck by finding ways of stimulating listeners in dramatic ways. As he would also explain about the electric church as a space for a “complete” form of music, his goal was to write and record music “so that the listener can be taken somewhere,” in the first place, but more importantly, to “open up a new sense in people’s minds.” Hendrix reasoned that music’s importance was not just to open minds, but in fact to eventually become a mode of communication that would render antiquated “the pop and politics crap,” which Hendrix described as old fashioned and due to be replaced: “Pretty soon I believe that they’re going to have to rely on music to get some kind of peace of mind, or satisfaction, direction, actually, more so than politics...” (202). As he would phrase it in August 1970, “When there are vast changes in

the way the world goes, it's usually something like art and music that changes it," he said. "Music is going to change the world next time" (qtd. in Roby 286).

All of this would seem to be linked to Hendrix's general educational vision, and not specific to the Band of Gypsys, but Hendrix's statements about the electric church take on unique dynamism in the context of his later career and the Band of Gypsys performances in particular. While Hendrix did not often reflect openly about the racial dynamics of listening, his vision of the electric church became intimately linked with the African American experience—and the possibility of using electric music as a form of salvation for young African Americans. When Hendrix commented that "[a]lmost anyone who has the power to keep their minds open listens to our music" (qtd. in Henderson 214), it might seem that he was speaking out of self-adulation, audience critique, audience concern, or perhaps even some combination of the three. However, as he continues, he indicates his concern over young African Americans specifically: "Black kids think the music is white now, which it isn't," he said. "The argument is not between black and white now. That's just another game the establishment set up to turn us against one another. *But the black kids don't have a chance too much to listen—they're too busy trying to get their own selves together.* We want them [black kids] to realize that our music is just as spiritual as going to church" (qtd. in Henderson 214, emphasis added). Hendrix's pedagogy takes on revolutionary dimensions in this comment as he suggests, in the first place, that African American youth had been rendered deaf to his musical teaching because of racial preoccupations aligned with segregated genres; second, he implies that black youth, being "too busy trying to get their own selves together," have been socio-politically precluded from musical experiences that awaken new cognitive and/or psycho-spiritual dynamism; third, and perhaps most antagonistic, Hendrix implicitly negates the black church as a site for mind-opening experience as he suggests

“our music is just as spiritual as going to church,” when clearly, as Hendrix believed, black youth were not “truly” listening despite regular church attendance.

From Hendrix’s perspective as cultural pedagogue, his recognition that black youth in particular had been unable to open their minds to Hendrix’s music necessitated, for Hendrix, new methods for providing black youth with musical pathways to post-Christian auralities. He sought to do this by redirecting black youths’ sense of spirituality away from institutional religion and toward the pedagogy of electric church music, which demonstrates Hendrix’s commitment and inclination to contribute to discourse on black music and religious culture. This ethos has striking parallels with, for instance, Amiri Baraka’s critique of the black church as a counterproductive and hypocritical diversion from political and cultural progress in his spoken word poem, “Dope.” Also in line with Baraka is Hendrix’s use of blues-based music to establish an alternative tradition to black Christianity, the electric church, which extrapolates the extra-religious alterity of blues culture for its expressive capital musically and symbolically. What this discursive parallel between Baraka and Hendrix represents is the largely unspoken contest of the secular and the religious in Hendrix’s educational philosophy, where the blues forms the electric church in opposition to institutionalized religion as the religiosity of black music finds a space to thrive in secular iterations, and where a sociocultural competition between institutionally religious instruction and cultural pedagogy enters into broader discursive battles over the epistemological origins and possibilities of black music at a time of black music’s hyper-politicization.

Bringing Hendrix’s electric church theory back to the Band of Gypsies performances and recordings, Hendrix’s subdued physical presence in creating an electric church soundscape is reinforced by his diminished vocal presence. Like a teacher whose vocal presence in the classroom serves to enable and facilitate as opposed to restrict and control, Hendrix’s voice

becomes remarkably understated, allowing listeners to embody the music, rather than focusing on Hendrix as the bodily site of vocal production. In the *Band of Gypsies* concerts, Buddy Miles furnishes nearly all of the vocal improvisations, and it is Miles's voice that provides most of the soul aesthetic qualities that Hendrix resists. Likewise, nearly all audience participation—clapping, singing along, call-and-response—is initiated by Miles, not Hendrix. This de-emphasizes Hendrix's voice as anything but the preacher's voice in these performances, establishing it instead as one of facilitation. This informs the pedagogical dimensions of Hendrix's concept of the electric church, as well, as Hendrix did not demand audience participation, but rather developed a soundscape to create a *context* for “participatory worship, learning and communion without regard for denomination or demeanour” (Murray 161). And while Hendrix's relatively understated vocal presence in these recordings positions him more as orchestrator than frontman, his choice of words is significant. During the Fillmore East performances that would lead to the creation of the *Band of Gypsies* album, Hendrix introduced the song “Voodoo Child” as the “Black Panther National Anthem” in the second January 1 show. While this would have seemed like an unusual claim, considering that Elaine Brown had already written the Panther national anthem released in April 1969, Hendrix's choice to introduce the song in this way represents his awareness of black politics and his desire to make a cultural contribution to the ways in which black politics were being conceptualized in cultural production.

Hendrix also used word choice in subtle yet significant ways to distance his pedagogy from categories associated with the racial politics of musical genre, even changing the title of the track “Power of Soul” (as it was originally going to be listed on the album) to “Power to Love.” That same song is titled “With the Power” on later tapes, some of which were released

posthumously when Hendrix's preference to use the word "love" seems to have been ignored. In concert, Hendrix does not introduce the song as "Power of Soul," either, but instead speaks with indecision about the title. This stands as an act of deliberation with Miles, whose vocals present a pronounced investment in *soul* with force of expression that recalls Stephen Henderson's concept of the *mascon*: "a massive concentration of Black experiential energy" (Henderson). In an apparent act of resistance to the "Power of Soul" title, Hendrix utters not the words "power of soul," but rather the option of two ambiguous titles: "Crash Landing" or "Paper Airplanes."

Continuing to limit the degree to which this song (and the Band of Gypsys' iconography itself) would be identified with the soul genre, Hendrix disrupts the repetition of Miles' vocals. Although Miles repeats the lines, "With the power of soul, anything is possible," interestingly, during the second repetition of this line, Hendrix steps to the microphone—but cuts off the line by saying only "with the power..." He stops with that, leaving out the word soul, and steps back from the microphone. As the song nears its end and Miles repeats the line, "With the power of soul, anything is possible," Hendrix *again* disrupts the repetition by singing instead, "With the power of *you*, anything you wanna do." Here, Lott's theory of race and musical repetition *within* a given performance gains further traction. In *Love and Theft*, Lott cites Richard Middleton to distinguish between musematic and discursive repetition. Musematic repetition is based on the repetition of short units (musemes). Discursive repetition is based on the repetition of longer units, usually musical phrases, which are mixed in with contrasting units in a hierarchical framework; harmonic progressions give such repetition the more "narrative" character of written music like Tin Pan Alley. Proceeding from this distinction, Lott suggests that "nineteenth-century black secular song forms were usually (but not always) musematic" (174). This is especially important when Lott summons Freud's observation that sex's dependence upon

physical repetition “results in miniature forms of the self’s extinction...a process evoked musically, of course, by heavily incantatory patterns of repetition” (184). And this is where it all comes together for Lott:

I submit that *musematic repetition* in the minstrel show was linked in purely formal terms to blissful, “unraced” moments of ego loss, and *discursive repetition* to ego-preserving feelings of racial mastery and self-assurance. The surface details of minstrel song types bear out this speculation, the “blacker” structures immersing white in boundary-crossing affairs of racial Otherness and the “whiter” folk or ballad structures making opportunistic use of the black mask. (184-5, emphasis added)

The implications of Lott’s submission find extension as Hendrix’s intrudes upon the repetition of *soul* as mascon. The combination of the phenomena of racial absence and racial mastery becomes troubled by Hendrix’s insertion of terms that are at odds with soul music’s ethos of thick black identity. In other words, Hendrix not only disrupts the repetition of racial performances by modifying his performance style in his later career, but also intrudes upon the kind of musical-lyrical repetitions that Lott theorizes were so figurative in shaping racial consciousness in the era of blackface minstrelsy. Hendrix’s work in this case is thus a manifestation and interrogation of how these kinds of repetitions shape listeners’ racial imaginaries: Hendrix assists listeners in unlearning the fantasies and misrepresentations evoked by repetition and race, challenging the contradictory experiences of simultaneous racelessness and racial power that may have prevented his audience from listening in the way Hendrix hoped they would.

For the final album cut, Hendrix selected this soul-eliding version of the song and titled it “Power to Love.” In this way, he resists the racialist genrefication linked to the soul genre, a prominent marker of collective identity and its associated requisites of thick black identity. By opting out of soul at this critical juncture in black cultural politics, Hendrix adapts his pedagogy: he performs a model of negotiation, offering by example a strategy for simultaneously collaborating within a racially marked group (the Band of Gypsys) while maintaining his personal emphasis on a transracial message of self-empowerment—“with the power of *you*”—as opposed to what, on the surface, might have otherwise been interpreted as racial exclusionism. By negotiating the nomenclature that would shape audience expectations of race and genre, Hendrix seemed to be cultivating sounds of black-identified genres while simultaneously expanding them into a transracial pedagogy. Hendrix thus demonstrated the ability to perform his identification with black music and black culture more broadly while disallowing categorization in a predominately black genre. Given the soul directions that Buddy Miles would continue to pursue after the Band of Gypsys and despite encouragement from Hendrix’s former roommates and occasional associates, Taharqa Aleem and Tunde Ra Aleem of the Ghetto Fighters, to go soul, this act of lyrical and performative improvisation constitutes a bold instantiation of Hendrix’s pedagogy of deliberation.

Looking to the Band of Gypsys’ “Machine Gun” from this perspective, the song can be said to have been framed and delivered in such a strategic fashion as to guide listeners toward what Huey Newton sought: “for people to liberate themselves from external controls, they have to know about these controls. Consciousness of the expropriator is necessary for expropriating the expropriator, for throwing off external controls” (“Intercommunalism” 191). Having been disturbed to learn that a disproportionate number African Americans were at war in Vietnam,

Hendrix's dedication of the song to "soldiers" in the United States, along with the lyrics describing "his family" being torn apart, have been suggested as references to black political struggle and, following the kinship model, the black community more broadly. Some critics, such as Bruce Clarke, take "Machine Gun" less in terms of black politics and more conventionally in terms about war in Vietnam:

Hendrix distilled this form of guitar attack in his monumental performance of "Machine Gun" on New Year's Eve, 1969, the day the sixties turned into the seventies. Here, after the first set of verses, at the beginning of the main instrumental break, Jimi condensed the horror of jungle warfare into a long-sustained, perfectly tuned, single-pitched scream of feedback, its octaves split by the Octavia and eerily lashed by the jungle helicopter-like rotations of the Uni-Vibe. (Clarke)

But this reading stops short of what Hendrix was able to do pedagogically with his introduction to "Machine Gun." Clarke situates his reading of the song in terms of "the horror of jungle warfare" without acknowledging how Hendrix was also turning the gun on his audience, so to speak, not killing, but scaring—just as Hendrix had earlier suggested groups like the Panthers should do. In an interview, Hendrix spoke about the cathartic benefits of attending musical performance, stating how "you can get it out of your system then by watching us do it, making it into a theatrics instead of putting it into the streets" (qtd. in Roby 202). When he dedicates "Machine Gun" to soldiers fighting at home in Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York, the music and lyrics become Hendrix's opportunity for teaching ways of utilizing cultural production as a source for displacing hazardous and potentially counterproductive personal and social actions. This is one form of Hendrix's Black Art.

Hendrix's rehearsals and performances with the Band of Gypsys resulted in a variety of recordings that did not appear on the 1970 *Band of Gypsys* album. The New Year's concerts alone included forty-nine songs—yet the *Band of Gypsys* album holds only six tracks. Hendrix's pedagogical craft, in this case, is hardly limited to the performances themselves, because Hendrix, as producer for the *Band of Gypsys* album, had significant control over the contents and editing of the final product. Hendrix knew the album itself would be the source by which his larger, worldwide audience would come to learn from the Band of Gypsys collaboration. In fact, Buddy Miles and Billy Cox played no role in the mixing or song selections. Hendrix's sound engineer for the album, Eddie Kramer, at Juggy Sound Studios in New York (Hendrix was then also recording with the Band of Gypsys at the Record Plant), recalled that Hendrix was bothered by Miles's vocals, which led to the editing out of much of Miles's vocal improvisations, rendering the album even less vocal-centric and, given Miles's propensity for soul sounds, less soul-like.

Hendrix's selection of the tracks to be included on the 1970 album is telling. Comparing the track list of the album with the four concert sets, one arrives at a sense of how curated, in fact, this “live” album actually is. As mentioned above, it was clear that Hendrix wanted to limit the vocal presence of Buddy Miles on the album, yet at the same time, the album would come to hold very little of the Experience-era tracks that were played during the Band of Gypsys concerts. While this was likely due in part to Hendrix's contractual obligation to generate an album with some new material, the elision of Experience songs also represents Hendrix's goal to include those tracks which held the most pedagogical potential for his audience. The resulting album curated by Hendrix is a careful selection of songs that present Hendrix's pedagogy. As Hendrix would say, his whole life was based around music, becoming for him even more than a

religion to the point where he was moved to share that which he had learned. Hendrix's performances are too frequently read in terms of the spectacular. Rarely are Hendrix's desires to share, to teach, to make offerings to his audiences considered amid the constant adulation and admiration of his physical presence, musical virtuosity, and iconic legacy. Once music had become more than religion for Hendrix, he found a sort of calling not only as a performer, but as a teacher. As he said, "And so what I learn, through the experience of it, I try to pass on to other people, you know, through our music, so it won't be so hard for them to go around. Like for instance all this violence, people runnin' 'round through the streets, you know" (qtd. in Roby 208). Hendrix empathized with others who face daunting social struggles. He found himself in a position to teach, to share knowledge and experience, as a form of liberation. Musically, it was often in the subtlest of ways that Hendrix tried to help his listeners while also being strategically careful to contest homogenous conceptions of African American identity, stressing the importance of cooperation and self-transformation over separatist group mentality. In this way Hendrix appears as a Afro-futurist educator whose pedagogy was predicated on the values of deliberation and the facilitation of transracial solidarity. As Greg Tate has said about Hendrix, "I consider [Hendrix] a supersignifier of Post-Liberated Black Consciousness. Someone who tried to *show by example* what life as a Black Man without fear of a white planet might look like" (Tate 80-81).

5.5 CONCLUSION: HENDRIX IN THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

Having seen Jimi Hendrix' new LP "Band of Gypsys" advertised in the MM, I went to buy it. / Listening to it I had a shock. New LP! I could have sworn it was Redding and Mitchell having a poor record session, when they just started out. Even Jimi's guitar playing was well off form. What, was he playing it with his teeth again? If Jimi's going to change his group, let's see him get someone original. Both Cox and friend were so much like Redding and Mitchell. / I have all of Hendrix' LPs, but this one stays in the shop where it belongs.

Michael McQuiggan
"Hendrix Shock," *Melody Maker* 1 (27 June 1970)

Music doesn't lie. I agree it can be misinterpreted, but it cannot lie. When there are vast changes in the way the world goes, it's usually something like art and music that changes it. Music is going to change the world next time.

Jimi Hendrix
"Hendrix Today" with Roy Hollingworth
Melody Maker (5 September 1970)

These final epigraphs characterize the rhetorical situation out of which Hendrix's project emerged, a situation which reflects some audience members' inability to interpret what this new project was, what Hendrix was doing with this sound and what changes he believed it could lead toward. Hendrix strove to balance two kinds of music: the blues, which he regarded as "a reflection of life," and "sunshine music which may not have so much to say lyrically but has more meaning musically" (qtd. in Roby 320). In an interview just after the Band of Gypsys New Year's performances, however, Hendrix indicated his desire to get back to the blues more intensively. Speaking with journalist Al Aronowitz after the Band of Gypsys concert, Hendrix said, "Earth, man, earth...I want to bring it down to earth. I want to get back to the blues, because that's what I am" (qtd. in Fricke). Even as he balanced aspirations to create "sunshine

music” with blues elements that reflect “life,” his later works and words indicate a commitment to the blues as a means for negotiating the face-to-face realities of politically turbulent social experience and the race politics that, although not always explicitly apparent in his music, were a vital presence and notable artistic influence in the years before his death. Whether or not Hendrix’s entire oeuvre balances the blues and sunshine music—what he intended to be a radiant and elevated mode of musical communication—his pedagogical achievement with the Band of Gypsys merits close listening, observation, and interpretation of this work as an important musical and performative constituent of the Black Arts Movement.

As a self-recognized cultural leader, Hendrix’s pedagogy grew from his ability to occupy, understand, and address contextual factors shaping the ways in which his performances were being received by listeners and viewers. In his adaptation of strategies for composition, performance, and recording that would ultimately constitute what he believed could be the “wisest way to be heard,” he was able to discern in performance and recording contexts Freire’s conception of a “reality in process, [of a reality] in transformation” (Freire 83), and to adapt his pedagogy accordingly. For Hendrix, who engaged such a wide audience across oceans and borders and ethnoracial orientations, his contextual awareness was necessarily as malleable as it was dynamic. At the very least, it involved comprehending certain aspects of the identities and expectations of his audience, intervening therein, and using musical performance as a site to demonstrate acts of deliberation over the cultural and political difficulties of ethnoracial identity—a category which, for me, suggests an ontologically legitimate and socially relevant form of a reality that actively undergoes the Freirean process of transformation. Approaching this music as a deft and sensitive performance of cultural pedagogy, we come closer to the

disinterment of Hendrix's project of cultivating intercultural and interethnic affinities in Band of Gypsies performances and recordings—and in the afterlives of those records.

Of course, Hendrix's music was not exclusively tied to concerns about his audience's varying degrees of racial conditioning. As in previous chapters, where we have seen black music attached to varying sociocultural questions within the sphere of African American cultural pedagogy, Hendrix was deeply invested in the possibilities of listening and in negotiating the complex ways in which listening itself became complicated by sociocultural factors. As a musician, of course, Hendrix's pedagogical praxis is necessarily differentiated from those of literary authors. Jean Toomer sought to teach what he himself had been taught through the experience of black music, and he drafted a literary architecture based on musical listening and ethnomusicological participant observation to simultaneously model his own learning while also creating a space in which readers could experience what Toomer discovered as the pedagogy of black southern sound. Gloria Naylor sought to reorient listeners to discover lost or forgotten or unheard lessons of the African diaspora, and she developed a narrative pedagogy predicated upon the flexibility and diasporicity of the blues musical genre. Baraka wanted poems that kill, an aesthetics that could not be avoided, a black art that would open the eyes and ears and minds of the black community and of white oppressors, and for Baraka this often involved the dramatic use of music and violence in didactic forms of cultural pedagogy. In all of these cases, cultural figures seek ways to reshape mentalities via listening, to present or induce auralities of learning through transformation, reorientation, and deepened understanding. As a musician, Hendrix sought similar outcomes, and he used black art to enable his audience to reach them. Hendrix's concern that not enough people were listening revolved around two chief groups of listeners: black people who were not open to his music; and his largely white counterculture audience, who

were attracted to his music but whose minds were not open to receiving it fully. Hendrix had a series of messages he wanted to convey to a very large audience, and his challenge was to convey them as widely as possible despite racist genrefication that made the pedagogical task so daunting. By recognizing the ways in which Hendrix negotiated the politics of ethnoracial identity through a pedagogy of deliberation, his contributions to Black Arts and Black Power discourses become audible.

6.0 TOWARD A THEORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL PEDAGOGY

Reading and interpreting diverse cultural “texts” are equivalent to constructing and learning symbolic lessons embedded in a continuous process of our experiential, both intellectual and ethical, growth.

Inna Semetsky

“Sem-analysing events: towards a cultural pedagogy of hope”
(May 2007)

Listening is henceforth linked (in a thousand varied, indirect forms) to a hermeneutics: to listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred, or mute, in order to make available to consciousness the “underside” of meaning (what is experienced, postulated, intentionalized as hidden).

Roland Barthes

“Listening” (1974)

I’m glad I understand that while language is a gift, listening is a responsibility.

Nicki Giovanni

Racism 101 (1995)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the introductory chapter, I proposed the term African American cultural pedagogy for consideration and conceptualization in contexts of cultural history and critical theory, literary and rhetorical criticism, and performance studies. The subsequent chapters adopted a cultural pedagogical approach to a variety of literary and cultural expressions, contextualizing a series of

African American cultural texts to foreground their sociohistorical roles as educationally invested, pedagogically effective works of lyricism, narrative, poetry, dramaturgy, and musical performance.

Having presented case studies involving key examples of cultural pedagogy at work, one of my preliminary goals in this final chapter is to clarify and elaborate upon the concept of cultural pedagogy. This is necessary because cultural pedagogy is terminologically similar to, but conceptually distinct from, related phrases that indicate theoretical discourses, institutional orientations, praxes, and disciplinary commitments that are, to varying degrees, removed from the concept of cultural pedagogy. Cultural pedagogy, as the case studies in the foregoing chapters illustrate, indicates pedagogies as they take form in, are found in, and continue to be practiced in cultural expressions outside of educational institutions and formal classroom settings. Cultural pedagogy is not the art of teaching students in classroom settings, but rather how cultural texts, practices, and performances offer their own unique forms of educational methodology.

In nomenclature, *cultural pedagogy* appears similar to a variety of terms used today, namely culturally relevant pedagogy, critical pedagogy, critical media literacy, and public pedagogy. In some regards, cultural pedagogy overlaps with these, but there are key differences that need to be clarified. These terms indicate a set of theories and methodologies of relevance and applicability in their own right, and in making space for cultural pedagogy, I mean not to criticize them, but rather to present cultural pedagogy as it relates to a number of disciplinary applications in critical inquiry. In order to clarify what cultural pedagogy signifies in terms of aurality, in the context of African American studies, and how cultural pedagogy might be taken up interdisciplinarily, I want to briefly address each of the aforementioned terms, including

extant usages of cultural pedagogy itself. After doing so, my goal is to reiterate and further elucidate certain African American cultural producers' notable investments in *aurality as a locus of transformational learning*, while also establishing a platform for a working definition of cultural pedagogy.

I make these terminological distinctions here in order to elaborate more concretely some criteria for appreciating and constellating important cultural pedagogies found within the wide trajectories of African American cultural history. These cultural pedagogies are differentiated in style, genre, intention, and practice, but they are linked ideologically and historically in several ways. They coexist as pedagogical bases of resistance to oppressive racialist social structures. They correspond as negotiations of identitarian models of political solidarity and social communitarianism. They coincide as endeavors to utilize cultural pedagogy as a way to facilitate affinities across and within different models of identitarianism. Finally, they stand as pedagogically reflexive mediations of cultural production in explicit or implicit relationship to the sociopolitical dynamics of diasporicity.

6.2 CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Culturally relevant pedagogy concerns curriculum and classroom teaching methods; it indicates pedagogical practices that seek to empower students “intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings 17-18). It is a method that grants degrees of priority to standpoint epistemologies—students’ perspectives—by utilizing “the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the teacher’s lessons and methodology” (Coffey). Culturally relevant pedagogy differs from the concept of cultural pedagogy in that it is rooted in institutional academics, classroom

interactions, and curriculum design, whereas cultural pedagogy is the articulation of pedagogical methodology through cultural texts and practices themselves.

6.3 CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical pedagogy includes a wide-ranging set of approaches to pedagogical theory and classroom pedagogy as they are mediated by or function in relation to educational institutions and the social, economic, political, administrative factors that shape the parameters of academic learning. The critical pedagogue “understands that there is no such thing as an objective education because society is moving in a particular direction and claims of neutrality can therefore be interpreted as going along with what already exists” (Malott L [50]). Thus, critical pedagogy is “interested in providing students with the critical thinking skills they need to understand where power lies and how it operates,” which includes the authoritarian power of educational institutions themselves. As a self-reflective, pedagogical branch of critical theory, critical pedagogy “challenges students and teachers to be aware of their own position in the larger structure of power and the role they are supposed to play in reproducing it” (Malott L [50]). Stemming from the Frankfurt School and emerging prominently in the work of later figures including Paulo Freire, Raymond Williams, bell hooks, and Henry Giroux, critical pedagogy establishes one of the fundamental premises of cultural pedagogy: the core recognition of the fact that learning occurs outside of academic settings as frequently as (and often more frequently than) within them. Moreover, for many individuals, non-academic learning can be as long-lasting as (and often more long-lasting than) classroom lessons. To draw from Williams’ thinking about the pedagogy of mass culture, “For who can doubt, looking at television or

newspapers, or reading the women's magazines, that here, centrally, is *teaching*, and teaching financed and distributed in a much larger way than is formal education" (15).

6.4 CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

Critical media literacy is an extension of critical pedagogy into all thing multimedia, insofar as the objective of critical pedagogy in a multimedia context is to enable students to critically engage with the socio-politically formative roles of media culture—especially in relationship to corporate powers and the socioeconomically oriented ideologies they sponsor. From a critical media literacy perspective, “media culture is a form of pedagogy that teaches proper and improper behaviour, gender roles, values, and knowledge of the world” (Kellner and Share 371-372). In the words of two leading scholars in critical media literacy, Douglass Kellner and Jeff Share, “Individuals are often not aware that they are being educated and constructed by media culture, *as its pedagogy is frequently invisible and unconscious*” (372, emphasis added). If *literacy* involves “the skills and knowledge to read, interpret, and produce certain types of texts” and provides “the intellectual tools and capacities to participate in one’s culture and society” (Kellner and Share 369), then *critical media literacy* involves the skills and capacities to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information, and power; the abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies in media texts; and the competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts (Kellner 372). Critical media literacy and its related classroom pedagogies are, once again, rooted in teacher-student scenarios and curriculum design, where the objects of study are multimedia texts. Said texts are often scrutinized—and rightly so—for their articulation of harmful stereotypes and for the ways in which they reinforce dominant values of the status quo.

Critical media literacy's chief tenets are instrumental and essential in the digital age, in that they are largely involved with the recognition of the *negative* impacts of media's inherently pedagogical roles. This tendency to focus on harmful media is notable in the words of Michael Parenti: "The media exercise an influence on public consciousness. In that respect they are more akin to education than to industry, as their offerings should be as much a matter of public concerns as the quality of our education" (qtd. in Weiner 129). The critique of power in the media is most frequently situated as a project for teachers and their students. Precursors to critical media literacy, such as James Berlin's rhetorical approach to academic instruction, ask students to "see not only the rhetoric of the college essay, but also the rhetoric of the institution of schooling, of politics, and of the media" (Berlin 93). Cultural pedagogy, while it can certainly take place under the umbrella of the entertainment industry and its concomitant corporate communications, also includes the myriad articulations of cultural production that entail pedagogical methodologies for the purposes of epistemological diversification and edification—to include revolutionary, justice-seeking, counter-hegemonic cultural productions that destabilize prevalent misconceptions about racially marked communities and their often-misunderstood or neglected historical precedents.

6.5 PUBLIC PEDAGOGY

Public pedagogy came to prominence in the mid-1990s as a theoretical construct in education research "to focus on processes and sites of education beyond formal schooling" (O'Malley, Sandlin, and Burdick 338). As it pertains to education and cultural studies, public pedagogy is attentively discussed in the work of Henry Giroux, who focuses on the sources through which

“learning takes place across a spectrum of social practices and settings” (61), with particular focus on the negative educative influence of corporations in neoliberal society. As Giroux states, pedagogy “is central to any viable notion of cultural politics” (62), thus forging a link with cultural studies thinkers of the Frankfurt and Birmingham traditions. Eric Weiner offers a useful explanation of public pedagogy: “Pedagogy, in this discourse, is not relegated to the language of schooling or teaching techniques and strategies. Rather, the scope of pedagogy is extended to include the *hegemonic strategies of popular culture* specifically and media generally...In other words, we are ‘schooled’ in *the logic of dominant formations* through a subtle and not so subtle barrage of cultural stimuli” (Weiner 435, emphasis added). From the perspective of scholars working in cultural studies, the public elements of public pedagogy involve connotations of hegemony and dominance—the cultivation of a status quo aligned with prevalent ideological orientations and aspirations.²² Public pedagogy, like critical media literacy, is often used to indicate practices that people should be skeptical of, wary of, critical of, and resistant to. Public pedagogy has been critiqued for this very reason. As Glenn Savage argues, public pedagogy is often discussed in terms of “negative ideological forces that are largely seen to *act upon* and *corrupt* individuals,” and this framework serves to “silence the counter hegemonic possibilities...of subaltern resistance” (109). As these deliberations and criticisms suggest, the term *public pedagogy* has become fraught with discrepancies, which is not a reason to abandon

²² In the fields of education and curriculum studies, as well as rhetoric and composition, one prominent definition of public pedagogy focuses less on neoliberal influence and more on the specific sites wherein pedagogy can occur. From the Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies, for instance, comes the following definition: “Public pedagogy is a theoretical construct focusing on various forms and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling practices; in institutions other than schools, such as museums, zoos, libraries, and public parks; in informal educational sites such as popular culture, media, commercial spaces, and the Internet, and in or through figures and sites of activism, including ‘public intellectuals,’ grassroots social activism, and various social movements” (O’Malley, Burdick, and Sandlin 697).

it, but rather to supplement it with *cultural pedagogy* as a branch of communication wherein creative—and not necessarily harmful—acts of pedagogical methodology take place.

6.6 CULTURAL PEDAGOGY

Interestingly, one finds Giroux occasionally using the terms public pedagogy and cultural pedagogy in what seems like an interchangeable manner. In an exchange of emails between Giroux and myself, I asked him for his thoughts on how one might differentiate cultural pedagogy from public pedagogy. I asked him if cultural pedagogy and public pedagogy were essentially interchangeable, or if, in his thinking, the term *cultural* signifies something distinctly different from *public* in terms of pedagogical contexts, means, and functions. His 2016 email reply offers some useful clarification:

As you know I use public pedagogy to speak to those spaces and apparatuses actively engaged and organized for the production of knowledge, subjectivity, and social relations. I am taking a leap here, but cultural pedagogy is a broader term that simply suggests that education is central to culture itself in the most general sense as when I [am] talking about culture constituting a central pedagogical dimension by virtue of the general role it plays in shaping world views, modes of agency, and politics itself. (Giroux “Inquiry”)

Some key words stand out in this email message: public pedagogy involves *apparatuses actively engaged and organized*, while cultural pedagogy, for Giroux, denotes the centrality of education to culture itself. Public pedagogy has designs on its audience, usually motivated by capital gain; cultural pedagogy may involve marketing elements, too, but it also involves the inherently

educative nature of sociocultural communication. Giroux's indication that he is "taking a leap here" points to the breadth of possibility for interpreting cultural pedagogy. It also indicates the importance of presenting cultural pedagogical case studies in order to develop a complementary and contemporary vocabulary for cultural pedagogical discourse.

When Giroux differentiates the cultural as broader in context than public pedagogy, we begin to garner a stronger sense of culture's role not only in reifying tenets of exclusionary civic discourses, as in the case of public pedagogy, but also culture's role as a vital repository of counter-hegemonic pedagogical praxis. This recalls Lawrence Grossberg's useful conceptualizations of pedagogy from 1994; namely, his thought that "cultural studies requires us to consider, not only pedagogy as a cultural practice, but *the pedagogy of cultural practices*" (16, emphasis added). Here, cultural pedagogy requires searches for and interpretive approaches to those cultural pedagogies that are ethical and effective, even if not recognized as such, and especially where cultural discourse stands as an alternative means for conceptualizing and enacting creative educational practices. We can approach the cultural pedagogical phenomenon in terms of semiotics, as well, as with Inna Semetsky's articulate gesture towards the pedagogy of cultural experience. In her discussion of experiential education and unorthodox pedagogy, she writes, "Cultural artifacts and phenomena are capable of communicative, or semiotic, potential, that is, different objects in our life may carry cultural and psychological significance. Reading and interpreting diverse cultural 'texts' are equivalent to constructing and learning symbolic lessons embedded in a continuous process of our experiential, both intellectual and ethical, growth" (Semetsky 254).

Certainly the breadth and continual flow of cultural pedagogical experience—its nearly ubiquitous and constant stream of occurrence—would have to include everyday interactions

uncatalogued by textual records. Indeed, from a social-psychological perspective, cultural teaching and learning is defined as taking place in virtually every interpersonal interaction, beginning with infancy. Oxford University psychologist Cecilia Heyes, for instance, repeatedly insists that one's ability to be taught is not an entirely genetic propensity, but in fact an ability that is learned culturally. Writing in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, she states,

learning that makes a child more teachable is guided by the actions of others, typically adults. If the adults' guiding actions...are intended to support learning by the child, then there is a very real sense in which *children are taught to be teachable*; their receptivity to teaching constitutes cultural, rather than natural, pedagogy. However, even when adults do not intend to influence a child—when they are going about their normal business, looking at events that interest them, and reacting warmly to behavior simply because they find it pleasing—the effect of their actions is to *promote the development of psychological tendencies that make children teachable; that make them into pupils. Whether the adults know it or not, their actions are contributing to the cultural inheritance of cultural learning* (Heyes 292, emphasis added).

Heyes focuses on childhood learning, specifically with regard to imitation and the point at which children have learned to imitate the behavior of others. Communicative involvements with cultural texts—reading a novel, writing about a film, discussing a musical album—engage individuals with cultural sites of learning—imitation being one mode of learning. They establish bases for intercultural understanding and affinity not only through representations that are meant to be imitated, but also, for example, through the reconditioning of sensory associations that coincide with cultural experience. In other words, an individual reading or viewing an expressive

occurrence need not come to imitate a character or performer in order to learn from a narrative or performance. He or she can take on nuanced reconsiderations of the environment in which expressive actions occur.

As imitation is only one aspect of the basis for cultural learning, the ability to be receptive to newness and the unfamiliar—to become teachable—is central to authentic learning. It is clear that cultural consumers can learn to be teachable, just as children “are taught to be teachable” in varying degrees. But of course, they do not necessarily undertake that learning, let alone on the basis of ethical growth. As in the case of, for instance, Dylann Roof’s adoption of white supremacy through ideological echo chambers on the Internet, people can take on “lessons” that lead to fundamental misconceptions and violent tragedies. But the “truth” for Roof has only been “verified” by the pre-existing macrostructure of racist hierarchy, anti-black racism, and the discourses of racial violence that were validated, via white supremacist discourse communities on the Internet, in Roof’s distorted thinking. He was not *taught to be teachable* beyond his acceptance and validation of pre-existing status quos of racial hatred and violence. He does not understand human difference beyond the socially conditioned and culturally accepted *norm* of eradicating difference. Ongoing cases of racism, including those that have recently come to be foregrounded in mass media and social media’s selective purviews, are haunting, recursive, unrelenting manifestations of the imperative to facilitate equitable dissemination of and access to diverse cultural pedagogies: people must learn to perceive *difference* differently than what historical precedents of unacceptance and violence dictate and “justify” in insulated social networks. Moreover, such cases point to some of the most pressing imperatives for cultural critics and their academic pedagogies: to facilitate depth of learning through meaningful interpretations of cultural pedagogical discourses that, despite the vitality

and relevance of their lessons, may initially be inaccessible to those who are unequipped to engage with intercultural learning.

6.7 AURALITY AS LOCUS OF LEARNING

It is at this moment when aurality as a locus of learning returns centrally to our discussion. Aurality is often presumed to require the presence of sound, but sonic memory is intimately related to one's experience of the aural. In fact, as a variety of studies in psychology and neuroscience have shown, most people have the capability of generating auditory imagery, which involves "the subjective experience of hearing in the absence of external auditory stimulation"—which is to say, the phenomenon of hearing even in the absence of sound. Psychologists discuss how auditory experience occurs in a variety of soundless situations, including "silent reading, speech perception, auditory hallucinations in schizophrenia and in conversations with spiritual beings, earworms and...musical imagery" (Perham 611). Individuals absorb the content of what they listen to well as the sound of how they heard it. What we learn isn't just content, then, but also means of the content's delivery. Aurality is thus not just the experience of sound, but also the ways in which sonic memories are registered in the processes of listening, retaining, and accessing soundscapes experienced in the past. On the flip side of this, what we learn before we listen to sound shapes how we listen, how we filter, how we process and respond psychoacoustically to what has been heard. In this way, aurality entails the conditioning, the context, the "pre-conditions" that can shape—in potentially dramatic ways—how we listen.

Aurality offers an audience-specific angle on cultural pedagogical production and may be hypothesized as one of African American cultural producers' prominent points of entry for

cultural pedagogical impact. Denotatively, aurality is frequently employed to suggest listening in some way, as in modalities of listening or states of listening in Ana Maria Ochea Gautier's *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (2014), or the history of listening, as in Veit Erlmann's *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (2010). In a few words, aurality refers to "the auditory domain and embodies the idea of communication within the sensory experience of hearing" (Carlisle 243). More elaborately, aurality may refer to "a complexly related web of communicative practices that are received or perceived by the ear, including speech, sound, and music," and by some accounts, to use the term *aurality*, rather than the more common *orality*, is to "resist models of an oral/literate divide and simplistic characterization of cultures or groups as either oral or literate in their communicative practices" (Selfe 646). This goes toward stressing the fact that humans "make and communicate meaning through a combination of modalities—sound, still and moving images, words, among them—and using a variety of media. And they read and interpret texts that combine modalities as well" (Selfe 646). As these observations indicate, there are connotative advantages to the usage of *aurality* along with *listening*.

Aurality stresses both the sensory and the psychoacoustic: it conveys the primary and the secondary, the neurological along with the sensorial, and thus can advance discourse beyond the dichotomy (or negotiational relationship) between hearing and listening. Aurality also emphasizes states of listening, degrees of attentiveness in listening, qualities of listening, the experience of listening to sound rather than the representation of listening itself. This is not to say that listening is an empty term; rather, connotatively, aurality offers a multifaceted, multidimensional signification of listening in its most subject-oriented iterations. In fact, aurality in this line of usages recalls the works of a number of influential thinkers who take up listening

as their object of study, but for whom aurality was not yet a preferred term. For Roland Barthes, for instance, listening requires sustained effort beyond the basic physiological response of hearing. Listening is the work of decoding that can result in multiple forms of experience, discovery, and learning. In defining three levels of listening, Barthes concludes that at the deepest level of intentional listening there develops “in an inter-subjective space where ‘I am listening’ also means ‘listen to me’; what it seizes upon—in order to transform and restore to the endless interplay of transference—is a general ‘signifying’ no longer conceivable without the determination of the unconscious” (246). Here emerges Barthes’ emphasis on aurality as the space of inter-subjective discovery; this becomes an act of reciprocal pedagogy because, after hearing the voice, an analytic listener’s subsequent impulse to consider the unconscious of the speaker, the analysand, implicates the analyst, as well: “The injunction to listen is the total interpellation of one subject by another” (251). Thus, in Barthes work on listening, we find a pronounced element of pedagogical discovery, where listening is linked to a hermeneutics: “to listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred, or mute, in order to make available to consciousness the ‘underside’ of meaning (what is experienced, postulated, intentionalized as hidden)” (249).

What we may read in Barthes’ thinking is the intrinsically pedagogical potential of interpersonal and textually interpretive listening practices. At the same time, we ought to recognize that some of Barthes’ idealisms about aurality verge on universalism, not so much in terms of listening as transcendent of disciplinary residence, an observation with which I fully agree, but rather when he approaches aurality as available to all individuals beyond the scope of “law.” Barthes’ words:

no law is in a position to constrain our listening: freedom of listening is as necessary as freedom of speech. That is why this apparently modest notion (*listening* does not figure in the encyclopedias of the past, it belongs to no acknowledged discipline) is finally like a little theater whose stage those two modern deities, one bad and one good, confront each other: power and desire.

(260)

In this passage, Barthes seeks to establish aurality's transcendentalism—"no law is in a position to constrain our listening"—but as we have seen, many cultural workers engaged with diasporicity and the legacies of racial oppression fight for the right to listen, the right to access epistemologies designated as subaltern by historical developments and neocolonial hegemonization. As we have seen, the racial dynamics of aurality come into focus in the work of Eric Lott, who takes up the racial constraints of aurality in his analysis of white audience's acts of listening to musical repetition, a cultural phenomenon that enabled blackface minstrelsy's interpellation of white and black American racial imaginaries. Listening to "incantatory patterns of repetition" produces effects similar to the repetitiveness of sexual intercourse: it "results in miniature forms of the self's extinction." Drawing from Richard Middleton, Lott submits that listening to minstrelsy's musematic repetition caused "blissful, 'unraced' moments of ego loss," while discursive repetition enabled "ego-preserving feelings of racial mastery and self-assurance" (184-5). Lott's formulation of listening in the context of nineteenth-century minstrelsy finds application in later generations of black musical production, as well, especially in recent theories of listening that have advanced from psychoanalytic foundations in what could be thought of as the politicization of listening—or, rather, the explicit recognition of the fact that there is a politics of listening.

A multidisciplinary set of critical methodologies aligned with sound studies are facilitating new approaches to aurality and musical listening, some of which have stakes in the pedagogical possibilities of cultural inquiry. Alexandra Vasquez, for instance, in *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (2013), offers a way of interpreting sonic texts that she productively terms “listening in detail.” To listen in detail is to listen to “the past, present, and unheard future” of a given performance and to willfully ignore “those accusations of going too far, of giving too much time to a recording of seemingly little significance” (4). Vasquez insists on an “ethical and intellectual obligation” to the question of what musicians actually sound like; even more salient to the cultural pedagogical perspective is the educative value she ascribes to the process of listening in detail: “Listening in detail is not merely a receptive exercise,” she writes, “but also a *transformative one* that enables performative relationships to music and writing” (19, emphasis added). This is because, as she puts it, “Details are, after all, *supple directives*” (38). These educative tenets suggest the specific value of repositioning scholars as students of sound when Vasquez writes, “those bits of history that get skipped over or left unattended...*require a willing surrender to long-term schooling*” (20, emphasis added).

Vasquez’s resolve to pay close attention to sonic details, compelled as it is by such a strong impulse to engage with music as a form of pedagogy, parallels Shana Redmond’s approach to black musical anthems in *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (2013). As Redmond writes, “I am less interested in revising previous accounts of these figures and movements than I am in demanding that we listen to them.” Moreover, she argues that through “*an intense engagement with their sounds...new perspectives and consequences are realized*” (6, emphasis added). This intense engagement with sound as a means for realizing new perspectives and consequences is the core of aurality as a space for

pedagogical reception and cultural learning, a core with sociopolitical potential. Redmond constructively insists that music's alternative political visions, performances, and "alternative sensory engagements" all serve to hold together diasporized communities. As she writes,

The song in concert with its history and present mobilization develops the 'anthemic event,' which privileges hearing over seeing, another grand departure from diasporas based in race and sight. To hear the struggles of others—versus the *hearing of* or seeing of them—requires a different level of engagement with the communities represented therein. The mechanics of listening are technological as well as biological and allow for these texts to be adopted in other national contexts where language and culture otherwise limit international communications. To hear Black anthems, whether live or on wax, is to be a part of the event itself; singing and listening, therefore, involve pronounced political stakes within the anthemic event. (15)

Black anthems culminate as "evidence of the cumulative project of identity formation and political agency mobilized through culture, which, when taken together, construct parallel movements of solidarity and influence" (15). Redmond acknowledges that music has its limits, yet believes that music "still exists as a method for new political performances and futures" (19). She hopes that her project will "assist in compelling the new sounds that inspire and mobilize the making of 'a world in which it will be safe to be different'" (19). Cultural pedagogical theory is one critical methodology that attends to the politics of listening articulated by Vasquez and Redmond; additionally, a cultural pedagogical approach predicated on close listening elucidates some of the aural aspects of African American musical production and reception. Earlier in this dissertation, I have used the word affinity in particular as an alternative to other terms with

political overtones, such as solidarity and alliance, and as an alternative to terms that intimate ideals, such as unity and harmony. These other terms seem inexact, if not sometimes misleading, to describe the kinds of cultural sharing, aesthetic development, and intercultural awareness or sensibilities that aural experiences facilitate. While aural experience may be too subjective and individuated to theorize as a force of sociopolitical bonding, however, there is no doubt that group experiences of musical listening and participation—religious music such as hymns, for instance, or national anthems—can lead to actions of great sociopolitical consequence. Aural experience can and does lead to social bonds that engender political solidarities and aspirations; however, given that some projects involve mass cultural pedagogy across political, socioeconomic, and ethnoracial lines, affinity seems to more appropriately suggest that aural experience can teach people to become teachable and to then, potentially, transcend engrained sociocultural divisions.

In short, amid the politics of listening and the possibilities of cultural affinity is aurality's fundamental role in the enablement of learning. To clarify how the aural and aurality fit into the context of cultural pedagogy, as opposed to the general sense of the aural which indicates the presence of sound, aurality indicates the reception of a sonic text or the reception of the delivery of a sonically registered performance that purposively exploits the fact of aural reception and psychoacoustic response. In other words, aurality involves the reception of sonic texts or performances in which the artist seeks to change the consciousness of the listener through the use of sound. Aurality indicates the reciprocal engagement between an artist seeking to influence the listener and the listener's role in receiving, interpreting, and generating meanings from the artist's sonic signals. Aurality is not sound itself, nor the presence of sound, but the quality of listening or utility of sound that an artist expects will be achieved in aural reception. Again, in

the context of cultural pedagogy, aurality differs from the rhetoricity of music itself. If rhetoric is the art of persuading others for some purpose, then pedagogy seeks to benefit, inform, teach, or otherwise edify others through rhetorical influence. Rhetoric is the means, the craft, the art, the strategies of persuasion itself; pedagogy is the means of instructional, edifying, ontological, or epistemological benefitting of an audience that the performer supposes has certain *needs* (not just expectations, as in performances that are satisfied to meet the audience's desire for entertainment).

Beyond comparing terms, of course, are elaborate theories of aurality as a locus of learning where sound initiates the transformation of subjectivity and the reorientation of paradigms. To gain a clearer sense of these theories, how they have informed my project, and specifically how they might allow for a theory of aurality in cultural pedagogies of black music, I want to work through some prominent theories of orality and aurality. Rather than summarize them in the fashion of a literature review, I want to read these theories critically to better serve the elaboration of elements of aurality that are especially salient in the context of African American cultural pedagogy and cultural history. Specifically, I want to look closely at Walter Ong's influential *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) and Don Ihde's *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (1974). My objective is to make space within the trajectories of these influential texts for the growth of an African diasporic theory of aurality in relationship to African American cultural pedagogies (namely, cultural pedagogies of black music).

Certainly there are problems to grapple with in *Orality and Literacy*, and in so doing its value emerges *if* we shift from the perception of Ong's project as overly binaristic to take seriously how his thinking enables deeper reading of the space *between* the two poles of orality

and literacy, the listening that occurs between call and response. *Orality and Literacy* has struck various scholars, such as Aldon Nielsen, as being far too generalized and disconnected from oral peoples and their cultural relationships to language. In the growing field of sound studies, Jonathan Sterne makes this critique prominently in “The Theology of Sound: A Critique of Orality” (2011) while also situating Ong’s work among those that posit “the ascendancy of the White, Christian West as the meaning of history” (Sterne 222). Ong’s work is debatable at least in the regard that his more general discussions of oral peoples can be read as the homogenization of otherwise stark differences between ethnocultural groups. Ong’s devotion to research conducted among many different groups, however, lend his project more credibility and relevance than some have suggested. His ideas about sound and the reception of sound—not just orality itself, as the title of the book might indicate—are of sufficient value to take very seriously, despite negative remarks about his work. Some critics tend to overestimate the implied binary that Ong’s title suggests: while Ong’s focus on orality and literacy—or rather orality *versus* literacy—creates a binary that some find problematic, some of the ideas he compiles and the perspectives on sound he generates are valuable resources for thinking about the interpretive possibilities of sonic expression, aural experience, and pedagogical effect.

Some of Ong’s points seem obvious in retrospect, but they ought not be taken for granted. For instance, while the written text is presumed to be communicative insofar as it must be read by others in order to have a cultural impact, Ong reminds readers that oral communication necessitates an interlocutor and that oral cultures—which we might rethink as oral cultural practices in any of a variety of social spheres—link long-term, sustained cultural thought to oral communication in ways that scribal cultural practices can overwrite. African American culture is not an “oral culture” in the sense of the virtual absence of writing, and while

others' claims that Ong verges on ethnocentrism seem to make the assumption that Ong creates a black and white distinction between oral and literate cultures, naturally there is gray area between these poles, an area that is marked by relative closeness to complete orality and complete literacy—as if the latter could exist among peoples with the ability to hear and speak. African American expressive culture, however, has in so many ways embraced various degrees of historical proximity to orality in notably intentional ways: oral and musical elements are actively, intentionally, and explicitly intermingled with written and visual forms of expression.

Scholars of African American literature recognize that oral aspects of the literature are not the result of happenstance, but the product of active research, recuperation, recapitulation, and literary extrapolation. Along these lines, it seems to me that part of the problem with Ong's formulation of orality comes from his use of the word "residue." For instance, Ong comments on the "still massive oral residue" (37) of the Douay version of the Bible. *Residue*, which denotes the "remainder, the rest; that which is left" ("Residue" 1), even in its most favorable sense lacks the connotation of agency. The orality of a text is left over, included only as a coincidence of writing. More deprecating, though, is the connotation of *residue* that suggests the residual element as that "which remains after a process of combustion, evaporation, digestion, etc.; a deposit or sediment; a waste or residual product" ("Residue" 4). As Ong seeks to recuperate the value of oral cultural practices, his association of orality with residual "waste" introduces contradiction; in the specific context of the African diaspora, one's use of *residue* might suggest that which "is left" not only from "a process of combustion, evaporation, digestion, etc.," but that which "is left over" after a process of dispersion, dislocation, and enslavement of black people. Finally, the sociological meaning of "residue" implies a "fundamental impulse which motivates human conduct...which is not the product of rational deliberation" ("Residue" 6). Orality is not

primitive, as might be suggested in describing it as residual. It is not removed from “rational deliberation,” but is in fact introduced as a conduit for accessing historical consciousness that would be disparaged as irrational under the coloniality of western epistemology. This is precisely what Amiri Baraka’s 1964 *Dutchman* addresses in its closing scene, when Clay utters one of his most powerful speech acts. Baraka’s Clay recognizes the potential for white hegemonic neocolonial authority to overrun black expression—oral and musical cultures inclusive—which would thus degrade his blackness to an essentialized subservience that, for Clay, is preventable only by murder: “Don’t make the mistake...of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or maybe they’ll begin to listen...and all of those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious and sane, and they’ll murder you” (*Dutchman* 36). Clay makes it explicit that blues people, black Americans construed in the white imagination as mere “plantation” singers, will enact these revolutionary murders. The humans beings reduced by whites into racial epithets, “ten little niggers sitting on a limb,” will murder and will have “very rational explanations” for it: “They’ll cut your throats, and drag you out to the edge of your cities so the flesh can fall away from your bones, in sanitary isolation” (*Dutchman* 36). Thus Baraka—writing nearly twenty years before Ong—positions black oral culture as powerful, but hardly residual: it contains vast knowledge sufficient to interrogate the irrationalisms of racisms justified by western epistemologies.

Repetition is a hallmark of oral traditions, and in African American literary and rhetorical criticism, repetition appears—again and again—as a common strategy. As discussed in Chapter 2, the virtue of repetition is not redundancy, but variation, improvisation, and instruction. Ong, in his attempt to characterize “primary oral culture” in a synthetic fashion, understands the need for

repetition to establish a “highly traditionalist or conservative set of mind that with good reason inhibits intellectual experimentation” (41). African American literature is not a manifestation of a primary oral culture, yet in its proximity to orality, the literature employs (as Henry Louis Gates has argued) strategies of repetition as a means for incorporating and exploring difference within and beyond existing patterns of knowledge. When Ong suggests that knowledge is “hard to come by and precious” (41), one recognizes this as a partial truth, suggesting that knowledge only exists through communication, or at least privileging knowledge as communicated, as opposed to the knowledge one attains through first-hand experience. Discourse does move knowledge, but knowledge does not require direct access to interpersonal discourse. Furthermore, listeners suggest their attainment of knowledge through the experience of nonverbal communicative pathways, from the sounds of the natural world to drumming and various forms of musical expression that hold meaning without words. It is through the texts of *aurally attentive* writers that a reader comes to recognize these forms of knowledge, yet the knowledge itself is not *first* generated through written discourse: it is shared through it.

Interestingly, in two adjacent claims, Ong at once elevates African American practices of the dozens as a non-violent art form—which, while sometimes artistic, is not necessarily free from violence—while simultaneously suggesting that enthusiastic descriptions of violence are central to oral narrative compositions: “gross physical violence, central to much oral epic and other oral genres and residual through much early literacy, gradually wanes or becomes peripheral in later literary narrative” (44). In African American literary narratives, violence frequently appears and yet not often enthusiastically, let alone to the point of celebration or the point of intimacy, as Adam Gussow has suggested. Violence is often represented as tragic and epistemic before those instances where violence can become heroic or even revolutionary. Ong

thinks of the “serious novel” as more focused on “interior crises and away from purely exterior crises” (44), but we have seen novels in the African American tradition incorporating both interior and exterior crises, of course, and there are numerous cases wherein both interior and exterior crises have corresponding soundtracks or soundtracks that link interiority with exteriority. These are “serious novels,” perhaps all the more so for the political interventions they make.

Whether hailing from a primary oral culture or a primarily literate one, sound has its psychodynamic impact in the mind of the listener, though the impact will vary based on the social conditions that shape how one listens. Ong famously says that sound “exists only when it is going out of existence,” yet sound itself triggers changes in consciousness, leaving its marks in the mental state of the listener with varying degrees of permanence. Studies show the brain stores images with relative permanence, even if all images are not at once accessible. What is the brain’s capacity for remembering sound—musical or otherwise? Music has perhaps the greatest resonance due to its repetitions—both internally for its rhythms and melodies but also externally for the many repetitions instigated by the listener or the culture in which the listener exists. Though speaking of sound more generally than in specifically musical terms, Ong writes of the “unique relationship of sound to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses,” stressing the interiority of “human consciousness and of human communication itself” (71). He draws parallels on this point about interiority with other material objects, pointing out that sounds “all register the interior structures of whatever it is that produces them” (72). Where sight isolates, sound incorporates: whereas “sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer” (72). Elaborating on the dichotomy between sound and sight, Ong continues:

Vision dissects...Vision comes to a human being from one direction at a time: to look at a room or a landscape, I must move my eyes around from one part to another. When I hear, however, I gather sound simultaneously from every direction at once: I am at the center of my auditory world, which envelops me, establishing me at a kind of core of sensation and existence...You can immerse yourself in hearing, in sound. There is no way to immerse yourself similarly in sight. (72)

Ong is onto something crucial here, though his formulation dissatisfies some. Yes, there are differences between sight and sound, and indeed there may be something virtuous or ethical in Ong's bifurcation of vision as the "dissecting sense" and sound as a "unifying sense" (72). As for the dissatisfaction with Ong's dichotomy, Jonathan Sterne lays his out as follows in his assessment of Ong's oeuvre, particularly *Orality and Literacy* and its reliance upon what Sterne calls the audiovisual litany:

Hearing is spherical; vision is directional

Hearing immerses the subject; vision offers a perspective

Sounds come to us, but vision travels to its object

Hearing is concerned with interiors; vision is concerned with surfaces

Hearing involves physical contact with the outside world; vision requires distance from it

Hearing places you inside an event; seeing gives you perspective on the event

Hearing tends toward subjectivity; vision tends toward objectivity

Hearing brings us into the living world; sight moves us toward atrophy and death

Hearing is about affect; vision is about intellect

Hearing is a primarily temporal sense; vision is a primarily spatial sense

Hearing is a sense that immerses us in the world, while vision removes us from it.

(Sterne 212)

Sterne critiques the audiovisual litany to the point of dismissal when he suggests that these differentiations do not hold up to empirical or philosophical scrutiny. In dismissing the litany, however, and in associating it with the religious and spiritual dimensions of Ong's personal philosophy, Sterne downplays the differences between hearing and seeing that are immediate and consciousness-altering. More importantly, however, is that in critiquing the audiovisual litany, Sterne reduces its constituents to hearing as an involuntary sensory response without considering the intentionality of *listening* and the ways in which active, intentional listening render these differentiations significantly more viable. In the first place, hearing is a highly omnidirectional sensory experience; sounds do in fact impress upon the ear and the body from many directions at once in an immersive way, whereas sights require movement: one has to "look around," but not "hear around." So it is not false to say that "sounds come to us" differently than sights do; furthermore, when involved in *listening* rather than just *hearing*, one's attention travels to or occupies the sound object just as the sound object occupies one's attention. Hearing *does* require "contact" with the "physical world," for it is only through the capacity of feeling vibrations that hearing can occur; sounds literally move us, making hearing closer to the sense of touch than to the sense of sight.

Ong cites C.S. Lewis's widely noted claim that "rhetoric is the greatest barrier between us and our ancestors" (108), which, although written in reference to sixteenth-century European literature, points to the particular imperative to generate alternate conceptions of rhetoric (e.g., African and African American rhetorical traditions) outside of European literary histories. Doing

so will not resolve the problematic of “us” and “our ancestors,” but in terms of epistemological hybridity and the exclusion of African American rhetorical traditions from the canon of western rhetorical studies, it will go toward resolving the problem of what “counts” as rhetoric and thus who “counts” as rhetors. Thurmon Garner and Carolyn Calloway-Thomas address this problematic in “African American Orality: Expanding Rhetoric.” As they write, “The widely held notion that African American discourse is primarily based on an oral culture is an appropriate starting place from which to rethink African American rhetoric. A new beginning must take into account the idea that rhetorical print or writing as a means of acquiring knowledge, developing consciousness, and defining literacy continues to dominate Western thought, exclusive of any other rhetorical posture” (43-4). African American forms of rhetoric exhibited in the tradition of musical literature abound with rhetorical modes of instruction intended to harness the learning capacity of the listener, thereby opening, rather than blocking, pathways to ancestral knowledge. Just as the *McGuffey’s Readers* in the United States specialized in “sound-conscious” literature that featured “‘heavy’ oral characters” designed to improve the reader’s abilities in oral, declamatory reading (Ong 116), an abundance of African American narrative works, as we have seen in the foregoing chapters, utilize written devices conveying orality and musicality in order to position the reader as a *listener* in training.

Ong wonders why phonetically written texts now seem wrong to modern readers, answering forthrightly that it is because “we feel the printed words before us as visual units,” whereas people of the sixteenth century were “concentrating less on the sight of the word and more on its sound than we do” (121). Here, Ong introduces the problematic assumption of a collective we, suggesting that contemporary readers prioritize sight and sound to the same degrees in the ways they process “text for meaning.” As Ong vaunts the early age of print in

which readers still approached texts “primarily as a listening process, simply set in motion by sight” (121), he overlooks the fact that literacy can be oral, written, and aural. Moreover, he does not reference the multiple literacies of authors of the African American tradition who innovatively conjoin their oral and aural skills with literary writing in sonic texts. The problem of adjustment Ong sees taking place in the nineteenth-century novel hardly ends in that time period: with authors’ “recurrent ‘dear reader’” modes of address, they tend to “feel an audience, listeners, somewhere, and must frequently recall that the story is not for listeners but for readers, each on alone in his or her own world. The addiction of Dickens and other nineteenth-century novelists to declamatory reading of selections from their novels also reveals the lingering feeling for the old oral narrator’s world” (149). As an “old” technique, writing for an implied listener is not necessarily “residual” in the disparaging sense discussed above. Quite the contrary, the use of orality to position the reader *aurally* can be a powerful opportunity to convey aesthetic mastery and to teach cultural, social, and political strategies for artistic-epistemological retention, community formation, and methods for negotiating problematics of diasporic history.

Oral practices that position listeners and readers to aurally receive said lessons are fraught with barriers of apprehension, transcultural interpretation, and sheer aesthetic preference. Even when actively, logically inferring the credibility and reliability of any pedagogy, social conditioning leads listeners and readers to discern pedagogies according to any of a variety of prejudgments. In other words, important pedagogies may be at work, but reception is compromised by one’s inability or unwillingness to arrive at an intercultural aurality. This brings us back to Don Ihde’s phenomenological study of listening, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (1974), referenced in Chapter 3 in relationship to the work of Ralph Ellison and Gloria Naylor. *Listening and Voice* stands as a core text for the emergent cluster of

disciplinary interests associated with sound studies. Ihde's philosophical-empirical approach to auditory experience says little about reading practices themselves: the sonic elements of written texts, so to speak, are not attended to, yet Ihde's inquiry into the human experience of sound has useful transferability to the study of literature and culture. Anticipating theoretical developments among scholars such as Fred Moten, Alexander Weheliye, and Alexandra Vasquez, Ihde practices phenomenological listening as "more than an intense and concentrated attention to sound and listening, it is also to be aware in the process of the pervasiveness of certain 'beliefs' that intrude into my attempt to listen 'to the things themselves'" (49). In other words, rather than giving oneself over to sound, listening phenomenologically is a critical mode of sensory appreciation that requires the listener to monitor the already-conditioned self at something of an objective distance. Like a "lens" or an "optic" used to "see" or "witness" some phenomenon, listening phenomenologically requires an interpretive awareness of the subjective self. This is a philosophical basis for understanding how aurality becomes a locus for transformational learning.

Ihde seeks to understand the relationships between sight and sound, including the limits or horizons of visibility and audibility: "with the 'overlapping' of sight and sound there remains the 'excess' of sight over sound in the realm of the mute object. Is there a comparable area where listening 'exceeds' seeing...?" (51). Offering examples—hypothetical or based on his personal experiences—Ihde suggests rather profoundly the limits of sight:

I hear [a windstorm's] howling and feel its chill but cannot see its contorted writhing though it surrounds me with its invisible presence. No matter how hard I look, I cannot see the wind, *the invisible is the horizon of sight*. An inquiry into

the auditory is also an inquiry into the invisible. Listening makes the invisible *present* in a way similar to the presence of the mute in vision. (51)

Ihde characterizes sound as both directional and encompassing, which acoustical studies verify in terms of acoustic reproduction (higher frequencies of approximately 2,000 Hz to 18,000 Hz are directional; lower frequencies of approximately 16 Hz to 2,000 Hz are predominantly omnidirectional). Most important is Ihde's elaboration on the directional-versus-encompassing dynamic in the context of human interactions. When a person's voice is both directional and encompassing—striking a balance between the higher and lower frequency ranges—Ihde suggests the manifestation of an auditory “halo” or the “auditory aura” (79). When someone speaks in sonorous speech, they present as “‘more’ than something fixed, ‘more’ than an outline-body, as a ‘presence’ who is most strongly present when standing face to face” (79). This auditory aura is similar to the experience of music, though different in that

the temptation to become disembodied, to allow oneself to float away beyond the instrumentation is absent. Rather, in face-to-face speaking the other is there, embodied, while exceeding his outline-body...It is in his speaking that he fills the space between us and by it I am auditorily immersed and penetrated as sound ‘physically’ *invades* my own body. (79)

We find literary record of this experience quite profoundly in the biography and writings of Jean Toomer, most notably in his work with *Cane*. The immersive, penetrating aspects of sound that Ihde discusses characterize Toomer's experience of Southern folk music before and during the writing of *Cane*. In Toomer's words, black spirituals and work songs—which he called “the true art of the race's past” (qtd. in Kerman and Eldridge 84)—“gave birth to a whole new life” (qtd. in Kerman and Eldridge 83) and “were like a part of me.” In the context of *Cane*'s composition,

it is significant when Toomer writes, “I identified with my whole sense so intensely that I lost my own identity” (qtd. in Kerman and Eldridge 84), demonstrating the explicit connections Toomer had formed between song, self, and, in particular, the transformation of self, which subsequently gave rise to larger questions about aural experience and racial identity. Toomer did not initially go to Georgia for the purpose of cultural preservation or ethnomusicological study; however, his experience there unleashed an artistically productive deluge of self-transformation that began with immersive aural experience—Toomer’s aurality.

Ihde invokes the term “auditory imagination” to ask: “What is it that I ‘hear’ when my listening is to the ‘second voice,’ the imaginative voice? What is that listening that occurs within my self-presence and that accompanies the presence of the things and of others in the perceived World? If the ‘self’ arises phenomenologically strictly as a correlate to the World...it also hides within itself and its imaginative acts (which hide themselves from others) a kind of autonomy” (117-8). Hearing things in the mind—imagining the sound of words after they have been uttered or imagining words to be spoken in some conversation that has not yet occurred—requires access to the auditory imagination: it is memory, but not only memory, for there is the generative capacity of the mind that is called upon in order for such internal, imaginative “listening” to take place. The auditory memory supplies the imagination, but does not rule it, for we have the ability to generate a secondary listening experience that has never occurred in our existence. Again taking up Toomer as example, we know that Toomer’s experience of music in Georgia did not result in an instantaneous transformation; rather, that experience induced a series of psychoacoustic deliberations over his identity and his expressive capacity as a cultural producer. What becomes clear is that through a newly discovered aurality—one reshaped by the experience of black music—he developed a newfound commitment to an African American aurality to such

a degree that he experienced a sense of wholeness through it. Aurality is not only the immediacy of sonic experience, but also its psychoacoustic echoes.

Toomer's literary work stands as an illustration of how listening phenomenologically to the voices of others and our own voices (internally and externally) constitutes the polyphony of subjectivity. The auditory imagination is both the storehouse of polyphony and the generator of its possibilities. This applies to the musical imagination, as well: a song may be easily remembered, and new music may be imagined with great vivid detail, even though that new music has not been played. Beethoven could auditorily imagine an entire symphony before it was ever composed or played. One can quietly imagine music so vividly and in such dynamic detail that it becomes a fantasy composition, a music of the imagination of an incredible nature that may or may not be physically producible, not unlike the seemingly life-changing satori and profound moments of epiphany that emerge from some intense instant of philosophical inquiry rooted from momentary experience—satori and epiphany that, when the thinker attempts to write them down or paint their image or give them some material representation, fall flat and fail to emanate with the original profundity experienced by the thinker in her moment of realization. The capacities of the auditory imagination are not consistent from one person to the next; neither are the capacities to represent the auditory imagination. Some people have vivid and “almost continuous visual imaginations” (Ihde 128), while others have no visual imaginations at all; in the same way, some people are consumed with auditory imaginings (the auditory hallucinations that frequently occur before one falls asleep or the “earworms” one awakens to are just two ways this happens), while others imaginatively “hear” little. Thus, listening phenomenologically and imagining auditorily can be contingent practices. As Ihde states, “determining a sense of the imaginative is necessary” (128), and while contingency is a problematic inherent in the discourse

of experience, analysis of humans’ “*thinking in language is the place where that further plunge into ‘contingency’ may continue*” (129). Even for the focused listener of music for whom whole sets of musical performance can be imagined with great detail, the moment of composition may not capture the dynamism of that which was imagined.

Ihde’s experience is representative of the way a listener brings contingent knowledge to musical experience in the same way that the sonic memory and aesthetic awareness of a reader informs any approach to sonically rich written texts. Ihde discovers things through listening that are profound and surprising, but only after having acknowledged the recording as intentional in composition and performance. In the same way, readers may sense that something is particularly unusual or moving in an unfamiliar way about a written text, but it is typically upon further reflection in a wider context of literary and cultural developments that the quality of the text can be more fully appreciated and understood. Taking an aural approach to the pedagogy of written literature is a way of slowing down the reading, monitoring the text, experiencing the text until the discovery of its soundscape resonates in the reader’s verbally-provoked but auditorily retained imagination. As examined in Chapters 2 and 3, written narratives can be taken as musical compositions themselves—even if there are typically no recordings to accompany them, no way of physically listening to cues in the way Ihde intentionally focuses on a Vivaldi recording. We have seen how intermedial references to a specific song or musician are only the beginning of a print text’s musicality, as these signals are often clues to keep “listening” to a narrative and to listen differently in view of the text’s pedagogy, and in the case of Amiri Baraka in Chapter 4, we have seen how the textual infusion of black sound with graphic representations of performative, retributive, symbolic scenes of violence position readers to “listen” while they look.

The cases of Baraka, Naylor, and Toomer show quite pointedly that articulating the knowledge held in music requires skills in listening and a profound ability to translate aural experience into verbal expression that shapes the readers' imaginations. For literary critics, then, Ihde's suggestion to reconceive inner speech as a type of auditory *imagination* should come as profoundly generative. In daily life, inner speech as a form of auditory imagination is hidden, but in literature, it finds representation, and as Ihde writes, "in this hidden, fragile, and difficult to locate phenomenon are deeper existential significance for the understanding of *human being as language*" (134). The self, the human being realized as human being, depends upon language, whether that language exists as utterance or inner thought: "Inner speech is an *almost continuous* aspect of self-presence" (134). Moreover, as an "*accompaniment* to the rest of experience it is a most 'inward' continuity of self-presence and the hidden familiar presence of an experiential polyphony" (134). The auditory imagination does not hold all aspects of self-definition and presence—but it is the core of many people's sense of being human. As Helen Keller wrote, "the problems of deafness are deeper and more complex, if not more important, than those of blindness. Deafness is a much worse misfortune. For it means the loss of the most vital stimulus the sound of the voice that brings language, sets thoughts astir, and keeps us in the intellectual company of man" (qtd in Ihde 135). For Keller, the severity of this misfortune lies in the fact that deafness inhibits not only the hearing of others' voices, but the hearing of one's own voice, which Ihde suggests is "*distinct from all other forms of hearing*" (136). The presence of one's own inner voice, "which 'thinks' in a language" (136), becomes "an imaginative modal counterpart to spoken voice" (Ihde 137). Ihde would agree that the sonority of spoken voice be recreated imaginatively by reading the written word: "At its most suggestive and descriptive, as in the novel or the poem, writing still reflects and elicits a sense of the auditory" (153). While

Ihde takes up the relationships between music and language, it is beyond the scope of his project to discuss the connections between reading and listening. One might argue that the experience of “imagining” musical sound would better be achieved by simply reading musical compositions, and they would likely be right; however, musical imagination, auditory imagination more broadly, and sonic memory find *different* articulations in literary works than in compositions themselves.

Perhaps the most important point Ihde sets up for future scholars is in the ways that musical listening compels the individual: its *physical* immediacy, its *participatory* gestures, its *bodily* interactions. Listening to music is the act of being “dramatically engaged in a bodily listening that ‘participates’ in the movement of the music,” he writes, and by sheer will to listen with concentration, one’s “self-presence” is engaged and called upon to “dance” (156). In Ihde’s formulation of “dance,” he thinks of dancing “not merely in a literal fashion, for dance in this context is the enticement to *bodily listening*” (156, emphasis added). Music issues a call to dance that “spans the continuum from actual dancing, as in dance music or in the spontaneous dances found in rock festivals or religious revivals, to the ‘internal’ dance of rhythms and movements felt bodily while quietly listening to baroque music” (156). It is the “internal” dance of rhythms and movements experienced cognitively and felt bodily while quietly reading that interest me here. It is the call to dance itself whereby dancing is in fact deferred due to the physical constraints of reading; this allows the reader to “dance” in cognition and sensation based on what has been read: dancing is aesthetic appreciation, cultural affinity, political ambition, social reformation, all instilled kinetically as potential in the reader through this call to dance wherein “*involvement* and *participation* become the mode of being—in the musical situation” (156). In short, the capacity of music to fill one’s auditory imagination “*amplifies* a participative sense of

bodily involvement” and is given context, character, development, and direction through the elements of narrative. Thus, a dynamic reading of a written text can be achieved and shared through a readerly attunement akin to musical identification within the words themselves, conjoined with phenomenological reflection on the text’s musicality, conjoined or applied yet further to the interpretation of the function of that musicality within a given diegesis. In terms of viable discourse on these phenomena, this presents difficulties for Ihde: his examples are approximations that, he admits, “do not yet precisely describe the nearness of music and word” (157). Languages have their musics and musics have their grammars, and these remain “caught in metaphysical classification.” It is worth considering that we can sometimes think more clearly and incisively about musical sound by reading it and reading about it then by hearing it.

Reading musical sound and reading about it shapes the auditory imagination in ways that remain unknown. Words read, but unheard, have associated sounds. These sounds become intradiologic, and come to play in the auditory imagination which then serves as the basis for imagined interactions past and future. Ihde reminds us that auditory imagination, “unlike its visual counterpart, is almost always continuous” (210).

One might expect an aurally based cultural pedagogy to be fundamentally different from, for instance, what might appear as the predominantly visual pedagogy of Baraka’s written and performed dramatic works. However, the effect of sonic writing in Baraka’s cultural pedagogy is similar to the way a musician or speaker exploits the psychoacoustics of aural experience itself—the multisensory, bodily, cognitive perception of sound—to alter the consciousness of listeners for pedagogical purposes. Aurally based cultural pedagogy, then, in the cases of Baraka and Jimi Hendrix, takes as its central purpose the facilitation of states of experience for readers and listeners that they hoped would go on to resonate throughout social experience. The desired

outcomes differed. For Hendrix, his was often a pedagogy of announcing and exemplifying Hendrix's own model of individualism in order to complicate familiar cultural and ethnic alliances and to subsequently generate intercultural and interethnic affinity (the basis for one of Hendrix's sought after "learning outcomes": peace). For Baraka, his process of rhetorical defamiliarization and pedagogical reorientation involved sonic elements, images, and forms in written language as a means for altering the way readers will thereafter listen; he thereby modified listening modalities to help readers arrive at multidimensional understandings of black music. As nuanced and individuated as their respective outcomes were, the common ground of consciously exploiting aurality establishes a shared foundation for their cultural pedagogy. We return to the differences between rhetoric and pedagogy: if rhetoric is deployed to persuade others, and in some cases for the benefit of the rhetor seeking power, celebrity status, fame, and financial fortune, pedagogy is ideally conceived and performed for the purpose of benefiting the students, the audience, the learners, the listeners—even if they enter as consumers, and even if it takes the achievement of celebrity status to ultimately reach an audience more on the performer's terms than the corporate producer's financial interests. In each case, cultural pedagogy cultivates affinities between performers and audience, between audience members themselves, and across the often-racialized genres in these cultural pedagogies engage.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of auditory imagination. Departing from philosophy and entering into auditory neuroscience, we can find a growing body of evidence which shows that "activity in the auditory cortex of humans and other species can be heavily influenced by inputs from other sensory modalities" (King R410). That reading can inform listening is evidenced specifically by studies showing that "the auditory cortex can be reliably activated in the absence of any external stimulus" (King R410). Moreover, neuroimaging studies

show that activation of auditory cortex occurs spontaneously and “can be induced during silence by stimulus expectancy or mental imagery” (King R410). What I find so compelling in this research are imaging studies of listeners’ brains, where there are notable differences in auditory cortex activation when listeners encounter familiar songs as compared with unfamiliar songs. In one study, “Silent gaps embedded in familiar songs induced greater activation in auditory association areas than did silent gaps embedded in unknown songs,” which was true for gaps in songs with lyrics and without lyrics (Kraemer 158). The inability to fill in the silent gaps symbolizes the problematic of monocultural auralities: for any subjective aurality to become intercultural (that is, for gaps of silence to be filled in the absence of stimuli) is for that subject’s aurality to utilize the auditory cortex, invoke the auditory imagination, and generate auditory imagery which can only be based upon exposure to and psychoacoustic consideration of that which is unfamiliar. Listeners may have sufficient familiarity of black musics to fill in the gaps of silence lyrically or melodically; but when academic pedagogy fails to provide interpretive methodologies that facilitate access to black epistemologies, let alone to include adequate historical accounts of black history and cultural history, we come to recognize how sincerely relevant and imperative it is to seek, find, recognize, value, and disseminate cultural pedagogies of black music.

6.8 CULTURAL PEDAGOGIES OF BLACK MUSIC

Close attention to aurality facilitates interdisciplinary, transnational approaches to African American cultural pedagogy and the African diaspora. With the burgeoning of black popular music in the early- to mid-twentieth century, literary and cultural production, circulation, and

reception were central to the international dissemination of black thought, particularly as certain musics and the literatures related to those musics came to constitute and contest a spectrum of racial perceptions, philosophical developments, political aspirations, and social and geopolitical reimaginings. As such, some literary works are critiqued for their imperialist functionality and their pejoratively gendered, racialist, and racist assumptions and representations, while others furnish landmark interventions that can rightly be thought of as pedagogical. Interventionist pedagogies convey lessons, to borrow the words of Fredrick Douglass, on “what ought to be by reflecting what is, and endeavoring to remove the contradiction” (qtd. in Slate 243). Yet representation is not so black and white as to suggest a dichotomy of right and wrong; often, because cultural texts engage with and create surprising layers of complexity, the development of new approaches and paradigms for such texts are required. Over the course of this dissertation, I have considered, drawn from, and in some cases diverged from some of the ways scholars have integrated studies of music and literature, for instance, into broader frameworks of the African diaspora, in order to emphasize the ways in which cultural pedagogies forge connections with historical African epistemologies and mediate understandings of black history, thought, and experience.

That scholars integrate history with literature and literature with history serves as a useful reminder that the goals of studying the African diaspora are rooted in the pursuit of truth and justice. When it comes to scholarly picture-making, the discovery and representation of truth, and the possibility of literature working for those ends, we are reminded that there is usually fiction in truth, but sometimes there is truth in fiction. For instance, the work of Brent Hayes Edwards in *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003) stresses how internationalization and multilingual translation can assist

in the difficult navigation of the contentious grounds of literary representations of race, racism, gender, and colonialism. By showing how racist and imperialist novels accrued transdisciplinary truth-value and how literary criticism and literary counter-representation combatted those novels, Edwards demonstrates how racial and imperialist literary representation interacted with broader formations of black internationalist thought. He reveals how literary representation and connection were not always necessarily productive or honorable; nevertheless, literature is shown to have served as a core medium for the exchange of important and competing ideas, exchanges which potentially offer transformative pedagogies. Michelle Stephens' feminist critique of the masculine foundations of imperial and nationalist constructions finds special resonance in the black literary imagination. With her emphasis on how a politics of transfiguration resides within not just elite but also popular traditions of black literature, Stephens offers a way forward for thinking about how literary exchange has fostered interconnected, transnational, albeit gendered Afrofuturist utopianisms. And Nico Slate, in *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (2012), similarly finds within the literary a special creativity and transnational impulse with the potential to connect—even if creative thinking and the impulse toward transnational solidarity are kept in check by ideological or material barriers. Nevertheless, in all of these scholars' work there is some degree of recognition of the ways in which historical agents have sought to overcome seemingly incommensurable differences through the creation of novel imaginaries sustained by progressive rhetorics. These cultural imaginaries, in some cases, have forged pedagogical networks between disparate groups, disconnected diasporic subjects, and influential leaders who have sought to unite and organize in spite of divisions, disparities, and forces of oppression. What I hope will become a significant development in this discussion is really quite

pointed and specific: throughout the cultural networks that comprise the greater black Atlantic discursive sphere, how was and is black music employed for pedagogical purposes?

The challenges involved in measuring the efficacy of black music's pedagogical reach, let alone the risks of generalizing or speculating about black music's facilitation of cultural affinities and social bonds, should not discourage the effort to understand the cultural pedagogical *means* by which connectivities can potentially be achieved. Slate stresses that the significance of culturally fomented solidarities should not be underestimated. In his words, "to treat solidarities as significant only when they could be leveraged in the realm of global power politics is to flatten the thickness of transnational encounter and to ignore the human dimension of the protests that propelled freedom movements in both India and the United States" (248). While some approaches to the African diaspora would only regard as significant those connections which result in political outcomes, Slate's history of "colored cosmopolitanism" demonstrates that belonging, sharing, and sense of connection are crucial to remembering the human, ethical impulse toward equality and justice that precedes and sustains the organizations and mobilizations which anticipate, and sometimes achieve, political outcomes. Diasporic, transnational solidarities generate shared value systems that oppose forms of oppression and shift the racial and geographical morphology of collectives. For Slate, written discourse and the power of words takes precedence over, for instance, embodied performance, ritual practice, or popular culture more generally, but what is most important is his urgent recognition of the human dimension of resistance movements: the position that politically measurable change is but one significant realm of change to be accounted for studies of the African diaspora's many discursive constituents.

It goes without saying that political ideology is not without cultural dimensions, even if it sometimes finds prominence in intellectual rather than social or cultural history. Taking a different approach than Slate and cultural studies more generally, George Fredrickson's *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* studies "the thought and actions of exceptional rather than ordinary people" (7) in the U.S. and South Africa, discussing "the ideas or ideologies of black assertion and liberation" contextually and pragmatically "in relation to the purposes they served and how well they served them" (8). His qualifications are important, for Fredrickson is concerned with *cultural exchanges* only insofar as they allow him to "discern a political impact" (9), which leads him to study, for instance, religion in its relation to political thought and action, and to exclude, on the other hand, "the fascinating subject of musical and literary influences" (10). It is not influences per se that concern me here so much as the recognition and examination of aurality's role in musical and literary pedagogies. Thus while Fredrickson makes some use of existing research in these areas, it is perhaps because he eschews sustained critical attention to a wider spectrum of cultural exchanges that some of his claims about black political consciousness raise concern. Fredrickson is intentional in his focus, of course, and he establishes four ideological corollaries between U.S. and South African liberation struggles: first, the similarities of white supremacy (5); second, a Pan-Africanist frame of reference among the "politically aware" (5); third, a sense of minority status in the white-dominated societies (6); and fourth, some European or Euro-American elements absorbed into black liberation ideologies (7). Determining the extent to which these commonalities are similarly or differently articulated across a broader spectrum of cultural pedagogical exchange is not only fascinating, to use Fredrickson's adjective, but is indeed fundamental to the recognition of multidimensional cultural pedagogies comprising transnational

black consciousness. Fredrickson notes that “discourse does not exist independently of external realities or circumstances” (6), but how would this kind of study be different were it to engage more transdiscursively with cultural expressions that, through innovative pedagogical tactics, alter “external realities or circumstances” outside of institutional politics?

Continuing with the question of how different types of cultural exchange have variously contributed to diasporic community formation, one may also turn to ritual practices and beliefs. John Lorand Matory, taking up Paul Gilroy’s nomenclature in *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (2005), argues that Africanness is “constituted by a genealogy of interested claims and practices, available for selective invocation as precedents” among “African and African-American actors—along with the white scholars who study them, the white nationalists who appeal to their loyalty, and the white slaveholders and officials who oppress them.” For Matory, the meaning of Africanness has been “claimed and/or renounced...in ways that no African or African-American people has been able to escape. This debate has powerfully shaped the history of African culture around the Atlantic perimeter” (24). Matory provides nuance to Gilroy’s black Atlantic framework when he proves that “central features of local linguistic and ritual practice, as well as the meanings and motives that believers invest in them, resulted from a *long-distance dialogue* with colonial Africa and with other American locales, much of which took place after both the slave trade and slavery had ended” (41, emphasis added). Long-distance dialogue includes the impetuses to impart knowledge, offer modes of training through instruction, and generate pedagogical reciprocities through cultural exchange. As Matory works against Herskovitsian notions of “survivals” of African culture in the Americas, he productively reframes them as “products of ongoing human agency in a circum-Atlantic field, the overall form of which I call the ‘Afro-Atlantic dialogue’”

(44). Matory, then, stands as one scholar whose focus may be upon a specific form of discourse—religious practice—but he recognizes that discourse outright as one thread of dialogic connectivity between peoples in Africa and the Americas.²³ Ultimately, Matory’s designation of “Afro-Atlantic dialogue” is a productive model for understanding the discursive constitution of the greater black Atlantic discourse community, not excluding extra-Atlantic discourse, but tracing those exchanges that did in fact occur across the Atlantic between peoples of African descent and their non-Afro-descended interlocutors without needing to formulate a geographically or racially exclusive model. Matory puts it succinctly when he writes of the Afro-Atlantic world, “this geographical area is old, dense, and intense with political, commercial, and discursive interconnections within its borders, but it is not hermetic” (280).

Attention to the pedagogical interactions between not just formal institutions, but also to reciprocally interactive cultural spheres, manifests the benefits of transnational and transdiscursive approaches to the African diaspora. The transnational formation of black cultural pedagogies and their interactive counterparts has involved processes of connection across borders of language, nation, race, class, and gender. The degree to which these connections become legible within scholarship of the African diaspora is largely dependent upon the range of transdiscursive inquiry undertaken—or at least conceptually accounted for. In other words, just as an isolated mono-national focus can elide the transnationality of exchange that has been central to the formation of diasporic connectivity, so too the claimed preeminence of a purely

²³ Another advocate for the importance of including various levels of discourse in studying Afro-diasporic culture and connection is Rosalind Shaw. In *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination*, Shaw makes the compelling claim that scholars should “listen to what the discourse of ‘cannibalism’ tells us about the memory of Atlantic commodities and the modernity of a twenty-first century war” (262), standing as a profound reminder that even in the most unlikely of discursive spaces—around cannibalism or divination, in her case—can be found clues to understanding conflicts and cultural phenomena within the African diaspora.

musical, or religious, or political, or literary, or commercial undertaking of transnational black discourse can elide the spectrum of exchange—bottom up and top down—that constitutes diasporic discourse communities. Privileging one discursive realm at the expense of so many others garbles the intrinsic multidimensionality of the African diaspora, flattening the thickness of transnational blackness. Transdiscursive, transdisciplinary inquiry is thus essential to the ethically productive study of cultural pedagogy, to the accrual of shared thinking across epistemological barriers, and to the prospect of fruitful reciprocity in works of cultural pedagogical scholarship. The wide range of approaches now available for thinking about the pedagogy of culture makes it clear that no single emphasis can be taken as representative of the whole, and that the body of scholarship focused on aspects of diasporicity must allow room for engagement with unexpected, underserved, even seemingly unlikely expressions and dialogues of human beings influenced by and actively influencing the multifaceted phenomena of African diasporas.

T. Austin Graham's *The Great American Songbooks: Musical Texts, Modernism, and the Value of Popular Culture* (2013) is an example of a recent book that successfully undertakes the challenges of transdiscursive criticism while also indicating the advantages of cultural pedagogical approaches to literary and cultural history. As Graham's subtitle suggests, his study adds to a rich series of interpretations of musical texts and modernism and to the plethora of theories about the value of popular culture. What Graham adds that is so important is the interpretive and theory-driven work of taking seriously the multi-sensorial, psychoacoustic dynamics of reading musical texts. He does so as he responds to three broad questions: "What did music represent to the American public and the literary establishment in the modernist period? What role does the sense of hearing play in the reading act? And what relative value

does popular culture enjoy in comparison to the ‘high’ arts?” (4). In answer of the first question, Graham suggests that Americans found themselves surrounded by music “to an extent that earlier generations could scarcely have imagined, thanks to a spectacular expansion of commercial entertainment and various technological advances in producing and disseminating sound” (4). This translated into changes in the way music could be used in literature, resulting in a literary chronicle of a historical shift “in American thinking about one of the most exalted of the arts” (4). To the second question, Graham responds that writers of the period “made concerted efforts at interweaving modes of expression and at appropriating the varying demands that each makes on the human sensorium” (4). This resulted in literature of great musicality that, “depending on one’s familiarity with the music it contained, could become remarkably audible” (5). Finally, to the third question, Graham responds that one finds in American musical-literary works “the stirrings of a broadmindedness that would eventually be a central part of the nation’s collective thought: audible in them are the beginnings of a miscellaneous sensibility, a cultural perspective that rejects rigid, categorical delineations of the ‘high’ and the ‘low’ and instead considers how ‘art’ and ‘popular culture’ can be appreciated and valued on their own, unique terms” (5). He explains how authors’ insistence on the “multisensual character of written language in the 1960s came hand in hand with an increased understanding of textual meaning as less a fixed object than an ongoing, participatory, and interpretive process, one that is shaped by the reader’s imagination as well as by authors” (19). Citing Friedrich A. Kittler, he argues, “the gramophone and its production of precise, faithfully recorded sounds led to a desiccation of those ‘voice,’ participatory reading practices so central to the 1960s debates on orality and the written word. Before the advent of phonography...and idea had to pass through the ‘bottleneck’ of written language in order to reach an audience, with a writer’s meaning being transformed into

letters and words that would in turn be re-formed into sensation within the reader's imagination. As Kittler puts it, 'words quivered with sensuality and memory. It was the passion of all reading to hallucinate meaning between lines and letters'" (Graham 21). Graham questions whether the oral-versus-written crisis of language announced by Kittler was really such a crisis for American writers after all; instead, Graham explores the possibility that recording technology enriched "the sensory possibilities of language" (22). But to what end? With what designs? As crucial as Graham's perspective on musical texts, modernism, and the value of popular culture is, we are left with a set of realizations about aesthetics, literary history, and sensory experience that does not attend to the role of listening in terms of cultural learning. He very effectively provides a phenomenological theory of listening to modernist literature—an extraordinary basis for continuing to probe into the pedagogical methods and effects of musical aesthetics in the modernist period and beyond. This is where aural traditions, aurality more generally, and the concept of cultural pedagogy in its broadest contours comes to aid.

In the body of texts studied in this dissertation, the availability and accessibility of their respective articulations of cultural knowledge with respect to aurality and cultural pedagogy have, to varying degrees, been dependent upon their relationships to or engagements with diasporicity. As argued early in this dissertation, there are important insights to be gained from turning to pedagogically reflexive mediations of cultural production in explicit or implicit relationship to the sociopolitical dynamics of diasporicity. While by no means a gesture to homogenize African American cultural production as an always diaspora-related endeavor, texts in this dissertation that respond pedagogically to diasporas past and present tend to align in several ways: coexisting as pedagogical bases of resistance to oppressive racialist social structures, corresponding as negotiations of identitarian models of political solidarity and social

communitarianism, and coinciding as endeavors to utilize cultural pedagogy as a way to facilitate affinities across and within different modes of identitarianism.

Such alignments came into focus through Chapter 2's lens on blues narrative form, which was shown as a narratological means for remembering the blues as educative. Blues narrative form is one cultural pedagogical example in which authors' engagements with the African diaspora's continuum of sociopolitical complexity functions to recover the educational, rhetorical work of blues music; to deepen the history and widen the geography of the blues; and to teach the importance of epistemological recovery, cultural innovation, and diasporic community formation through the literary use of blues music. Such attention to aurality and diasporicity found deeper pedagogical focus in Chapter 3; namely, where *Bailey's Cafe* stands as an example of cultural pedagogy that channels, restores, and conceives anew the resonations of African diasporic heritage through its oral and musical traditions. As part of broader inquiries into diasporic community formation, these examples of African American cultural pedagogy attest to the vitality and innovation of cultural producers who engage creatively with the sociopolitical dynamics and sociocultural possibilities engendered by historical and contemporary diasporas. Reading further into cultural pedagogical engagements with African diasporic heritages and legacies, Chapter 4 showed how Amiri Baraka and some of his Black Arts contemporaries incorporated musical writing as a locus for listening and as a means for reckoning with and rethinking historical and contemporary problematics of African diaspora community formation. Finally, Chapter 5 argued that although some cultural teachers (in this case, Jimi Hendrix) did not write or speak extensively about African cultural heritage, kinship, diasporas, or diasporic communities, let alone large-scale practices of diaspora such as black cultural nationalism or classical black nationalism, the subtlety of Hendrix's involvement in

black cultural politics of his time constituted a venue for cultural pedagogy, including processes of deliberation that are, in theory, characteristic of what Brent Hayes Edwards terms the practice of diaspora. In the case of Hendrix, this includes implicit and explicit deliberation over the parameters of communitarianism, the challenges of cultivating interethnic affinity, the potential of what Huey Newton termed revolutionary intercommunalism, and the possibilities of what Tommie Shelby refers to as pragmatic—rather than classical—black nationalism.

These case studies of cultural pedagogical praxis offer a number of theoretical insights about the concept of cultural pedagogy in the contexts of African American cultural production and interdisciplinary diaspora studies. At the most fundamental level, a turn toward African American cultural pedagogy considers explicitly the creative pedagogical methods by which the enfranchisement of black cultural epistemologies can be achieved in studies of the African diaspora. This is a way of arriving at fuller understandings of *what* is being taught by recognizing *how* it is being taught. In this sense, the cultural pedagogical approach prioritizes black literary and cultural expressions and considers their connectivity with Afrodiasporic traditions, with the goal of making sometimes difficult or misunderstood pedagogies increasingly transparent, accessible, and available in context. Moreover, cultural pedagogical theory offers the opportunity to reconsider and reassess the structures of discourse and modes of inquiry shaping studies of African diaspora cultures. Amid the ongoing and necessary calls to include African American cultural figures and their work in scholarship and teaching, there is an implied imperative to understand and share the cultural pedagogical modes of communication through which deeper understandings of black cultural discourse can be realized. A large part of the cultural pedagogical project, linked as it is to aurality as a locus of learning, is thus to facilitate interdisciplinary approaches for achieving cultural-epistemological balance in discourse on the

African diaspora. Without interdisciplinary approaches to African American cultural pedagogy, we lose sight of critical questions about collectives and the ethics of intercultural affinity: questions involving inclusion versus exclusion, the determining of “us” and “them,” the morphology of “we” that African American cultural pedagogy often takes up as one of its most difficult tasks.

Unrelenting manifestations of anti-black racism demand new approaches to cultural pedagogy and specifically to African American cultural pedagogies, to the modes of cultural instruction and potentially transformative pedagogy that are so frequently marginalized due to entrenched racialist and racist social conditioning. Those innovative means by which African American cultural texts *can* teach tend to be neglected because of structural limitations on the equitable dissemination of those texts. Nancy Fraser argues that subaltern counterpublics “invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (67), and it is worth insisting that said counterpublics are hardly limited to interpretations of *their own* identities, interests, and needs, when so clearly the cultures of disenfranchised communities are as invested in the discursive means of self-definition and empowerment as they are in the pedagogical imperative to guide explicitly and complicitly racist individuals to unlearn misguided knowledge. The interdisciplinarity of cultural pedagogy, in my view, has the potential to positively guide scholarship related to important lessons about and from the cultural producers of the African diasporas, hopefully by expanding or giving way to more capacious, inclusive diasporic models. By attending to the groupings and types of discourse represented in cultural pedagogies, we may better understand how collectives have defined themselves, how they have been defined, the degrees to which layers of community formation have been perceptible or imperceptible, and

how these phenomena have been accounted for as scholarly categories of analysis change over time. Furthermore, by moving from studies that focus on one medium to those that embrace multiple mediums of exchange, we may also find that what seem to be conflicts may turn out to be complements, and that objectivity is not bound to any singular discursive focus. If historicizing the complex forces by which peoples of African descent have been dispersed globally, and if recovering and interpreting evidence of the ongoing and varied efforts of people of African descent to redefine and reconstruct identities and communities, scholars across disciplines have in common the essential fact that their work depends upon the observation, collection, and interpretation of various types of discursive exchange. The methods and the concepts that shape scholarly production reveal differences in the ways various geographical orientations, archival resources, discursive mediums, and perspectives on race, gender, and politics are engaged. Thus, in the end, this range of complementation and divergence serves as a flexible theoretical foundation for the identification of communicative acts and texts that function pedagogically to enable diasporic connectivity, specifically those forms of communication that reflect the centrality of aurality in dialogic learning.

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