

Epistrophies

Jazz and the Literary Imagination

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introduction
*"I Thought I Heard": The Origins of Jazz
and the Ends of Jazz Writing*

When Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, and A. B. Spellman founded a journal of music criticism in 1968, they named it *The Cricket: Black Music in Evolution*. Calling for nothing less than a "cultural revolution" spearheaded by black artists, the editorial in the first issue announced that the journal "represents an attempt to provide Black Music with a powerful historical and critical tool." History and criticism would be at the service of the music because, as the editorial proclaimed in its opening lines, "the true voices of Black Liberation have been the Black Musicians. They were the first to free themselves from the concepts and sensibilities of the oppressor."¹ The editors went on to explain, "We call this monthly *The Cricket* because Buddy Bolden who is one of the fathers of Black Music had a sheet in New Orleans by that name."² It is a gesture worth pausing over: a group of writers naming their periodical after the *writing* of "one of the fathers of Black Music."

Baraka, Neal, and Spellman had not seen a copy of Bolden's predecessor "sheet." This particular facet of the legend of Bolden—the never-recorded cornetist who supposedly was the first to meld the blues and the spirituals into the nascent strains of the new music at the turn of the twentieth century; who supposedly convened a city into hearing the new sounds with the volume and resonance of his horn, which "could be heard for miles, from the river back to Lake Pontchartrain"³—has been traced back to a single paragraph in one of the founding works of jazz historiography, the 1939 book *Jazzmen*, which was edited by Charles Edward Smith and Frederic Ramsey Jr. As Vic Hobson has noted, when it was published, *Jazzmen* "was the first book of its kind: it presented jazz as music with a history and firmly placed New Orleans at the origin."⁴ In the chapter in *Jazzmen* on "New Orleans Music"—which was largely compiled using oral histories conducted in the late 1930s with a number

of musicians who had been active in the city at the turn of the century—William Russell and Stephen W. Smith describe Bolden in magisterial terms:

So when Buddy Bolden, the barber of Franklin Street, gathered his orchestra together in the back room of his shop to try over a few new tunes for a special dance at Tin Type Hall, it was no ordinary group of musicians. Nor was Buddy an ordinary cornetist. In his day, he was entirely without competition, both in his ability as a musician and his hold upon the public. The power of his sonorous tone has never been equaled. When Buddy Bolden played in the pecan grove over in Gretna, he could be heard across the river throughout uptown New Orleans. Nor was Bolden just a musician. He was an “all-around” man. In addition to running his barber shop, he edited and published *The Cricket*, a scandal sheet as full of gossip as New Orleans had always been of corruption and vice. Buddy was able to scoop the field with the stories brought in by his friend, a “spider,” also employed by the New Orleans police.

Before the Spanish-American War, Bolden had already played himself into the hearts of the uptown Negroes. By the turn of the century his following was so large that his band could not fill all the engagements. Soon “Kid” Bolden became “King” Bolden.⁵

What is fascinating here is that Bolden’s status as an “‘all-around’ man” seems crucial to the amplification of the legend—as though it is somehow necessary that the first “King” of the music would have to be simultaneously some sort of guarantor of grooming, preparing bodies for the rituals of public display and seduction, on the one hand, and the publisher of a newspaper overflowing with a compendium of the lowest, most prurient *fait divers* and gutter rumblings, on the other. It seems significant that Bolden is described not simply as a writer but instead as an *editor*: a bird’s-eye orchestrator and assiduous compiler, that is, of a discursive field churning around him.

As Donald Marquis documented in his 1978 book *In Search of Buddy Bolden*, the legend reverberated out from this paragraph in *Jazzmen*, with

the result that the vast majority of dozens and dozens of jazz history works through the course of the twentieth century reiterate this information.⁶ Only a few attempted to verify it with follow-up research.⁷ Marquis was astonished to find that some even embellished the tale, adding details in describing the venues where Bolden’s band played, or hypothesizing about the night crawling of those “spider” informants. The repertoire of Bolden’s band included a few often-cited classics, such as “Careless Love” and “Funky Butt”—the latter famously recorded as “Buddy Bolden’s Blues”⁸ by Jelly Roll Morton in the late 1930s with a revised set of lyrics (“I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say/Dirty nasty stinkin’ butt, take it away”) that seemed to imply that Bolden’s legacy was a matter of rumor: a muffled echo, a faint refrain you weren’t quite sure you’d heard right. But in some subsequent historical sources, the band’s set list ballooned from the half-dozen songs listed in *Jazzmen* to a much longer list of evocative titles, some of which were otherwise undocumented: “Don’t Go Way Nobody”; “Emancipation Day”; “Idaho”; “Joyce 76”; “If You Don’t Like My Potatoes, Why Do You Dig So Deep”; “Stick It Where You Stuck It Last Night”; “Let Me Be Your Li’l Dog Till Your Big Dog Comes”; “Don’t Send Me No Roses ‘Cause Shoes Is What I Need.”⁹ Nevertheless, the conclusions of Marquis’s exhaustive research were definitive: “no copies have ever been found of *The Cricket*, and *Jazzmen* seems to be the sole source of this story. (Bill Russell attributed it to ‘a figment of someone’s imagination.’) . . . Russell, in his notes on a conversation with Buddy’s widow, Nora, said that ‘according to her he [Buddy] did not run a scandal sheet and was not a barber, although he drank a lot and hung out at barber shops.’”¹⁰

More recently, Vic Hobson (whose revelatory 2014 book *Creating Jazz Counterpoint* takes advantage of previously unknown sources in Frederic Ramsey’s personal papers) discovered copies of a New Orleans newspaper called *The Cricket*, although the surviving copies contain no mention of Bolden. The editor and publisher of *The Cricket*, Lamar Middleton, described it in the first issue (dated March 21, 1896) as “a fortnightly paper which shall chronicle and discuss matters of current interest in society, light literature, music and the theater; and shall furnish a medium of expression to local literary talent,” specifying furthermore that “politics will be of decidedly minor importance; and idle gossip of a social or other nature will be absolutely avoided.”¹¹

Hobson argues that this far-reaching comedy of errors originates first of all with the innovative methodology used in compiling *Jazzmen*: the book's "strength was also its weakness: it relied heavily on oral testimony of the jazzmen themselves."¹² One way to make sense of the implications of the Bolden legend for jazz historiography is to consider in more detail the specific ramifications of oral history, which has been central in jazz studies but is still almost always simply mined for biographical data and anecdote rather than theorized as a mode with characteristics—most obviously its antiphonal structure and improvisational form—that might well be viewed in relation to the music itself.¹³ Oral historians such as Alessandro Portelli have argued, though, that the utility of oral history ultimately has less to do with the empirical data it may provide than with the way it registers "the very changes wrought by memory"¹⁴: in other words, even when oral histories contain "imaginative errors," those "errors" are indispensable indices of "subjective truths" with regard to our shifting investment in the past.¹⁵ Oral history is "credible," Portelli writes, "but with a *different* credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge."¹⁶ This is to say that rather than to debunk the Bolden legend in the interest of some absolute fealty to empiricism, the task is instead to consider the resonance of the ways it departs from fact. Portelli suggests that "memory manipulates factual details and chronological sequence in order to serve three major functions": symbolic, psychological, and formal.¹⁷ The symbolic and psychological implications of the Bolden legend for jazz historiography may seem self-evident, given the predilection to frame the music as a progression of individual male geniuses. But we should not overlook the *formal* effects of an empiricism warped, blurred, or refracted by memory. For Portelli these are mainly a matter of shifts in chronology or narrative sequence: for example, misremembering the date of a significant event in a manner that marks it as a turning point or a culmination in the course of lived experience. But when a legend travels, through time and across media—when it is taken as a template, a founding model, a guiding orientation—what is misremembered or misconstrued can be the source of formal innovation.

Because Baraka, Neal, and Spellman established *The Cricket* in the shadow of what they imagined to be Bolden's model, they thought of the journal in a different way. The masthead (Figure I.1) listed musical "advisors" (Sun Ra, Milford Graves, and later Cecil Taylor) in addition to an editorial team and corresponding contributors in San Francisco, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. And the journal published poems, essays, and reviews by Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, and Graves, among other musicians. "Bolden's *Cricket* has been called a 'gossip' sheet by the hip white boys who wrote the histories," the editorial in the first issue notes sardonically, adding a riposte: "we'll have some 'gossip' for the reader and a whole lot of other shit too."¹⁸ And the subsequent issues of the short-lived journal went on to include a regular feature bluntly titled "Gossip," which one might argue the journal elaborated into something of a research methodology—that is, a way of going about the collection of material—drawing in all sorts of unsourced and underground fragments and whispered rumors into its pages along with more traditional signed articles and poems. The "Gossip" column in the third issue opens:

Why only organ trios in black communities? Where is the new music and the new musicians? Where should black musicians play? What is a night club? Why should our musicians play in them? Why isn't Pharoah receiving any dough off Tauhid????????? Why don't black musicians turn down contracts with beast recording, and record with brothers? [. . .] many, many more sides to come. Salaam till next time.¹⁹

Another feature titled "Inquiry" is a page filled with sixteen repetitions of the same question: "DO YOU THINK THE MAFIA KILLED OTIS REDDING?????????????????????????????????????" A note at the bottom instructs readers to "WRITE THE CRICKETS" to give their answer and provides the magazine's post office box address in Newark.²⁰ Whatever Bolden did or did not do, the resonant received figure of his "scandal sheet . . . full of gossip" compelled his self-styled 1960s descendants to reformulate and extend the scope and tone of what a black music journal could mean.

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Advisors: Sun Ra, Milford Graves, Cecil Taylor

Correspondents: Gaston Neal, Wash, DC, Stanley Crouch, LA;
James Stewart, Philadelphia, Clyde Halisi, LA;
Don L. Lee, Chicago, Norman Jordan, Cleveland,
Ben Caldwell, New York, Larry Miller, New Ark,
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Figure 1.1 Masthead and table of contents, *The Cricket*, issue 3 (1969).

Instead of deflating the Bolden legend, then, we might wonder why the figure of the musician-writer seems to reverberate so powerfully. What is at stake in the idea that the first great instrumentalist in the music, the founding "King" in a future pantheon of Dukes, Counts, and Ladies, was also a renowned editor, who "scooped the field" not only on the bandstand—and, to follow the legend, beneath the bedsheets—but also in publishing scandal and gossip, gathering the dirty doings of the Crescent City in a serial "sheet" of another sort?

Michael Ondaatje's 1976 novel *Coming through Slaughter* is among other things the most thorough exploration of this notion of transmedial consonance, the proposition that the resonance of the Bolden legend—its traveling power, one might say, as an origin story, even if the claim of locating origin is always ultimately a ruse—has everything to do with the multiple media it puts into concert (sound and print). Rather than a gadfly prone to wallow in the lascivious, the Bolden in *Coming through Slaughter* is portrayed as an editor driven by a particular sense of counter-historiography, angled against the propriety of the mainstream print media (that is, the sort of periodical that designates itself the guardian of "all the news that's fit to print"). According to the novel's version of history:

The Cricket existed between 1899 and 1905. It took in and published all the information Bolden could find. It respected stray facts, manic theories, and well-told lies. This information came from customers in the chair and from spiders among the whores and police that Bolden and his friends knew. *The Cricket* studied broken marriages, gossip about jazzmen, and a servant's memoirs told everyone that a certain politician spent twenty minutes each morning deciding which shirt to wear. Bolden took all the thick facts and dropped them into his pail of sub-history.²¹

In this sense, editing a newspaper puts into practice a theory of historiography, a way of handling the effluvia of passing events by refusing to discriminate among them, instead tossing everything into the paper's "pail of sub-history." Bolden's "own mind," we are told, "was helpless against every moment's headline. He did nothing but leap into the mass of changes

and explore them and all the tiny facets so that eventually he was almost completely governed by fears of certainty" (ibid., 15). Rather than a means to categorize, filter, and interpret, the newspaper here is a technology precisely of regurgitating "all the information Bolden could find."

The musical allusion in the clause "he did nothing but leap into the mass of changes" (implying not only the ebbs and flows of social history but also, and more specifically, the harmonic "changes" of a piece of music) seems deliberate, as well. The implication is that despite the differences between a cornet and a printing press, between a song and a newspaper, there is a parallel between the way Bolden edits, on the one hand, and the way he plays, on the other. The novel includes a number of excerpts of what appear to be oral histories of contemporaries of Bolden; in one of them, Frank Lewis muses that "we thought he was formless, but I think now he was tormented by order, what was outside it" (37). At another point, there is a description of Bolden's friend, a detective named Webb, listening to the band at a dance hall:

Far back, by the door, he stood alone and listened for an hour. He watched him dive into the stories found in the barber shop, his whole plot of song covered with scandal and incident and change. The music was coarse and rough, immediate, dated in half an hour, was about bodies in the river, knives, lovepains, cockiness. Up there on stage he was showing all the possibilities in the middle of the story. (43)

Coming through Slaughter's own form is elliptical, piecemeal, an awkward mélange of different sorts of texts (not only fictional narrative but also something more like historical writing, as well as set lists, song lyrics, names of band members, and passages from interviews, oral histories, and institutional records). In other words, the novel mirrors or parallels the approach to aesthetic form it "hears" in Bolden, or in the received figure of Bolden. There are passages, especially toward the conclusion of the book, when a first-person authorial voice surfaces, expressing wonder at the irresistible lure of Bolden and the "thin sheaf of information" around him. Addressing Bolden, the narrator muses: "Why did my senses stop at you? There was the sentence, 'Buddy Bolden who became a legend when

he went berserk in a parade. . . .' What was there in that, before I knew your nation your colour your age, that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself? [. . .] There was the climax of the parade and then you removed yourself from the 20th century game of fame, the rest of your life a desert of facts. Cut them open and spread them out like garbage" (134). Just as for Baraka, Neal, and Spellman, here the specter of the musician-writer seems to provide or even impose the model of a different sort of fictional aesthetics: a novel that in its very form would spread a meager repository of facts "out like garbage."

Still, there is something in the allure of the figure of the musician-writer that goes beyond the positing of a parallel among media, or even of a cross-media influence, in which the practice of one medium can be inspired, provoked, or extended by an attention to the specificities of another. At the beginning of Chapter 3 in this book, I quote the stunningly eloquent opening of James Baldwin's 1951 essay "Many Thousands Gone": "It is only in his music, which Americans are able to admire because a protective sentimentality limits their understanding of it, that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story. It is a story which otherwise has yet to be told and which no American is prepared to hear."²² The idea that the music contains not only emotional surges and rhythmic propulsion but also the "character of cognition"—commentary, insight, and even lucid critical analysis—can be traced at least as far back as Frederick Douglass's musings on the meaning of the "wild songs" sung by slaves, songs in which "the thought that came up, came out—if not in the word, in the sound;—and as frequently in the one as in the other," and W. E. B. Du Bois's description of the spirituals as the "naturally veiled and half articulate message" of the slave to the world.²³ In the groundbreaking 1963 book *Blues People*, Amiri Baraka declares in a similar vein that "music, as paradoxical as it might seem, is the result of thought."²⁴

But note Baldwin's phrasing: it is *only* in his music. Here it is not a matter of a writing that finds its form in the music or responds to it, but instead of a "story" that apparently cannot be rendered in any other medium. The music, one might say, possesses a native intelligence before and beyond any writing. In this respect, the figure of the musician-writer implies a theory of musical *immanence*. "The music gives you its own

understanding of itself,” according to Sidney Bechet in his classic autobiography *Treat It Gentle*. Responding to those who ask, “What’s Negro music?” Bechet argues, “When you get so you really hear it, when you can listen to the music being itself—then you don’t have to ask that question.”²⁵ Thus the music can provide the model for criticism because the music *already is* criticism—itsself, autonomously, purely in the medium of sound. (One might add that the title *The Cricket*, as a reference to an insect that produces sound not by prosthesis but instead by stridulation—by rubbing or scraping one member of its body against another—seems entirely appropriate as a metaphor for musical immanence, for a self-generating music that somehow already possesses its own understanding of itself.)

Baraka says that he learned this lesson from his English teacher at Howard University, the poet Sterling Brown. When Baraka and his classmate A. B. Spellman were students in his Shakespeare class, “lolling around like the classic submature campus hipsters we most emphatically were, ‘Those Who Would Be Down,’” Baraka writes, Brown took the time to show them “that we wasn’t quite as hip as we thunk.” The poet invited them to his home and, gradually, in a series of extracurricular tutorials, introduced them to the full scope of black music through the medium of his own record collection:

And man, there in a center room was a wall, which wrapped completely around our unknown, of all the music from the spasm bands and arwhoolies and hollers, through Bessie and Jelly Roll and Louis and Duke, you know? And we watched ourselves from that vantage point of the albums starting haughtily at us, with that “tcch tcch” sound such revelations are often armed with.

The albums, Folkways and Commodores, Bluebirds and even a Gennett or three, stared us with our own lives spelled out in formal expression. “This is the history. This is your history, my history, the history of the Negro people.”²⁶

This theory of immanence, while it is surely in part a defensive strategy (against the ways that, in the phrasing of the editorial in the first issue of

The Cricket, “ofay white critics have written the histories and the criticisms of our music”), is also a matter of memory—and perhaps even of the “creative ‘errors’”²⁷ wrought by memory under the thrall of a deeper imperative. “White people,” Bechet explains at one point, “they don’t have the memory that needs to understand it. But that’s what the music is . . . a lost thing finding itself.”²⁸

While with the Bolden legend these issues are a matter of myth and memory, it seems to me that they extend far beyond a “tall tale told by inattentive idealists.”²⁹ Indeed, one could argue that the issues at stake in the resonant figure of the musician-writer come to run through, and even to delineate, the cultural field of the music as a whole. Of course it would be possible to dismiss a statement such as Bechet’s (“White people, they don’t have the memory that needs to understand it”) as at best the misguided application of a myth, and at worst a pernicious instance of racial essentialism. But even if it is rooted in what Ronald Radano calls “evolving myths of blackness,” my point is that black music is defined by a deep-set and ongoing negotiation of the musician-writer figure and everything it implies about the social function of music.³⁰ Moreover, its power is rooted in what Radano describes as its “socially constructed instability, wavering between sound and text to the point of complicating distinctions between music and language.”³¹

To start with only the most obvious example, the figure of the musician-writer is crucial to the understanding of the legacy of the artist often described as the first great soloist of jazz in the recording age, Louis Armstrong, the subject of Chapter 1. That he was a writer is no “figment of someone’s imagination”: Armstrong was arguably “jazz’s most productive autobiographer.”³² Curator Michael Cogswell notes that despite never completing a junior high school education, Armstrong traveled on the road with a typewriter as early as 1922 and wrote at least ten thousand letters during his lifetime.³³ He was astonishingly prolific, composing not only a number of published and unpublished memoirs but also a variety of ephemeral prose pieces (including jokes, recipes, and pornography) and magazine articles, including excavations of “jive talk” for the *Harlem Tattler* in the 1940s and reports for the *Record Changer* and *Melody Maker* in the 1950s.³⁴

The example of Armstrong is a reminder of just how many jazz musicians *are* writers, from Armstrong and Duke Ellington to Sun Ra and

Cecil Taylor, from Babs Gonzales to Marion Brown, from Mary Lou Williams and Danny Barker to Art Taylor, Anthony Braxton, and George Lewis. The term *jazz literature* tends to bring to mind writing influenced by music. But this other sort of jazz literature—that is, writing *by* musicians—includes an enormous range of work, including not only autobiography but also music criticism, history, interviews, philosophy, fiction, poetry, drama, technical and instruction manuals, liner notes, and magazine and newspaper articles. Aside from autobiographies this work has received little attention from scholars of either literary studies or jazz studies, but it seems to me that this corpus must not be dismissed as a curiosity. It should be understood, instead, as a persistent impulse. Whether in Sun Ra's "cosmo-myth rituals" or in Ellington's "social significance" suites, one encounters again and again an approach to aesthetics that resists any easy distinction between "writing" and "music," instead viewing both as components in a broader sphere of art making and performance.

It is worth noting that a good deal of this writerly activity has emerged in genres one might term *ancillary* to the commercial recording, in that their protocols (length, tone, mode of address, and so on) have taken shape in accompaniment or response to the manufacture, sale, promotion, and circulation of the record as an artifact. This is obviously the case with record reviews, many interviews, and liner notes (the latter are a main focus of Chapter 5). The term *ancillary* implies these texts' auxiliary, supporting role in providing information and commentary that advertises the sound recording they accompany or to which they respond. But one should not assume too hastily that these ancillary genres are thereby automatically subordinate afterthoughts, stray jottings that are inherently of secondary importance in relation to the music. In fact, a rapturous record review, a piquant interview, or a snarky "blindfold test" can emphatically frame the way a recording is heard, whether by noting the stylistic trends it exemplifies, making an argument for its historical significance, pointing out its shortcomings, or sketching an alluring (or off-putting) "persona" for the musician behind the music. With regard to liner notes, Tom Piazza has made the case that though they might appear to "promise little more than glorified promotional copy," in fact liner notes provide "much more," including biographical information on the musicians, discographical background, observations about a given recording session (providing a

semiethnographic "window into the recording process"), musical analysis, and historical and political context.³⁵ They are equally crucial, he writes, in "setting the tempo" for the listener's sensibility in a manner that has been important in creating dynamics of fandom and collecting: "they tell the listener, in subtle ways, what it means to be a jazz fan. They embody styles of appreciating the music, a range of possible attitudes toward it."³⁶

If it may seem self-evident that liner notes can and even must be read in accompaniment to the commercial recording, in the pages that follow I extend this argument about the ancillary genres of jazz literature in some perhaps unexpected directions, including song titles (in Chapter 6) and even seemingly "literary" subgenres such as the blues poems of Langston Hughes (in Chapter 1), which in fact adopt their characteristic three- or four-stanza length from the *recorded* blues.³⁷ My goal in this respect is not to provide either a systematic survey or a straightforward chronology of all the generic variants of jazz literature—say, in something like the way that scholars including Sascha Feinstein, Aldon Nielsen, T. J. Anderson III, and Meta DuEwa Jones have begun to do for jazz poetry in particular.³⁸ Instead, this book works through a constellation of case studies to raise the question of what one might call the *ends of jazz writing*: its uses and implications for artists we tend to think of primarily as composers and improvisers.

Coming to terms with the history of jazz literature in this expanded sense also means coming to terms with the *archive* as yet another medium of practice. Louis Armstrong's legacy is astounding first of all because of the sheer volume of what he left behind, now collected mainly in the Louis Armstrong Collection at Queens College and the Armstrong House in Corona, Queens, with significant smaller stashes at the Institute for Jazz Studies in Newark and the Library of Congress. The Armstrong archive is not a mass of material—the discards and leavings and overflow of a life. Instead it is the record of a life spent collecting and collating and annotating its own progress. If the house in Queens is now a sort of monument and memorial, it is equally an institution of learning about jazz and U.S. history and about a character named "Louis Armstrong," an archive that includes a stunning amount: hundreds of books, 1,600 recordings, 5,000 photographs, 86 scrapbooks, 650 reel-to-reel tapes made by Pops himself (most of which are carefully numbered and catalogued, and

kept in boxes Armstrong decorated with fascinating collages and drawings), as well as “12 linear feet” of papers.³⁹ Historian Antoinette Burton’s *Dwelling in the Archives* is a fine study of the personal archives of three Indian women of the middle of the twentieth century, whose memoirs, scrapbooks, and collections Burton uses to throw into question the status of history itself as a discipline, taking up the problem, as she puts it, “of who counts as a historian, what archives look like, and why memories of house and home should be recognized as crucial to what we think of as the historical imagination.”⁴⁰ This is an important issue for jazz history, I would suggest, not only because of the primacy of Armstrong as a figure in the music but also because collecting and documentation are clearly a central part of the work and self-conception of so many musicians.

Aside from a single tintype photograph, the only traces of Buddy Bolden reside in the recorded memories of those who knew or heard him, which is perhaps what makes him an ideal figure to conjure with. But history of the music is replete with musicians like Armstrong who not only wrote but also retained their own material archives of their personal and professional lives, in a manner that goes far beyond the scope of their discography of commercial recordings. One could argue—but only by figuring out how to *read* these archives—that the archive itself is equally an arena of practice, a medium immanent with “its own story,”⁴¹ parallel to or interwoven with music as well as literature. Despite the dearth of historical documentation on Bolden, one might also point out that the myth of *The Cricket* is also a myth of the archive: as the editor of the newspaper, Bolden is figured in *Jazzmen* not only as a writer or a manager of a team of writers but also as a kind of collector, “scooping the field” with the otherwise fugacious stories he gathered and preserved in his “scandal sheet full of gossip.”

In considering the resonance of the Bolden myth of origin, then, we have to ask what is at stake in the need to imagine the first great jazz musician to be not only the first jazz writer but also the first jazz archivist. If what resonates in the figure of the musician-writer is above all the notion of musical *immanence*, as I have suggested, then it is not just that the music seems to contain articulate reflection and even critical analysis, but also that it can serve as a reservoir or repository for a range of historical experience preserved in no other form. To explore this point, one could turn

to any number of literary works, such as Gayl Jones’s devastating 1975 novel *Corregidora*, in which the blues come to serve as something like an embodied archive—a novel in which a singer’s voice can be compared to “callused hands,” scarred and bruised in a way that “gives witness” to the lived experience of racial and sexual brutality.⁴² But this understanding of the music is also on display in the ways musicians themselves talk and write about their art.

There is a particularly poignant example in Sidney Bechet’s autobiography. Bechet met Louis Armstrong in New Orleans before the younger man became known a trumpeter; Bechet remembers hearing him first as a singer in a barbershop quartet. Wanting to get to know him better, Bechet asked him over for dinner, but Armstrong declined the invitation. “I could see there was something troubling him,” Bechet explains:

[A]nd finally he let it out. “Look, Sidney,” he says, “I don’t have any shoes . . . these I got, they won’t get me there.” Well I said that was easy fixed and gave him fifty cents to get his shoes repaired, and he went off promising me he would come.

Well, I don’t know what it was, but he never showed up. We lived way across on the other side of town and that was a hell of a distance to walk. And it’s that way you see . . . it’s a little thing, and there’s big things around it, but it keeps coming back. You’re playing some number and it starts about those shoes. When you’re playing about it maybe you don’t know it is about that. But then, later, you’re thinking about it, and it comes to you. It’s not a describing music, nothing like that. Maybe nobody else could ever tell it was about that. But thinking back, you know the music was how you felt about remembering that time on that street . . . remembering it from a way back.⁴³

(To revisit the Bolden legend for a moment: even if it is a fictional addendum to the King’s set list, “Don’t Send Me No Roses ’Cause Shoes Is What I Need” might be said to capture something in the air in New Orleans in the early twentieth century: the unique shade of humor at the crevasse between sappy romanticism and dire poverty.) In Bechet’s anecdote, that jazz is defined by musical immanence means not only that it is

a self-reflexive medium but also that—without being programmatic or somehow simply mimetic (“a describing music”)—it is an art where, even when it goes unannounced and unnoticed (“Maybe nobody else could ever tell it was about that”), sound itself can capture and retain and even revisit (“it keeps coming back”) a precise historical transcript of the most complex affective experience.

This is already to begin to suggest the infinitely fertile interface between music and literature in African diasporic culture. Something hovering “at the very edge of semantic availability” can be captured in sound (even if not necessarily made explicit or communicated).⁴⁴ And the resulting music in turn can provoke or compel an attempt to stretch or expand the capacity of literary language to make meaning on the page. Perhaps one reason this interface has been so fertile is that this back-and-forth—the ongoing, self-conscious, continually recalibrated, and (not least) sensuous work of testing and stretching and redefining the frontiers of articulacy—is already at stake in the music itself. As Fred Moten puts it, “Black performance has always been the ongoing improvisation of a kind of lyricism of the surplus.”⁴⁵ Or as I mention in Chapter 1, there is a brief passage in Albert Murray’s masterful 1976 *Stomping the Blues* where Murray makes the point that all new world black music can be heard as a practice of “reciprocal ‘voicing’”: “The tonal nuances of blues music,” Murray argues, “are also a matter of singers playing with their voices as if performing on an instrument, and of instrumentalists using their brasses, woodwinds, strings, keyboards, and percussion as extensions of the human voice.”⁴⁶ If some of these effects can be described under the rubric of “novelties”—say, in the ludic and sometimes uproarious ways brass players used a virtuosic range of “flutter, growl, wah-wah, and buzz techniques” to make their horns sound “like a woman chastising her wayward man, a dog barking, or any number of barnyard noises”—then one can only say that *novelty* is another term for the persistent, insatiable drive toward articulacy at the core of the music.⁴⁷ In the manifold variants of jazz *literature*, then, this ferment at the horizon of articulacy already in the music is extended or redoubled at the interface between media, in the different ways that sound and print can “speak.”

One of the more compelling recent overviews of comparative arts is Daniel Albright’s 2014 book *Panaesthetics*.⁴⁸ Against thinkers who would

erect strict distinctions among artistic media—the lineage of “medial separatists” from Gotthold Lessing, who contended that “the temporal arts, such as music and literature, had protocols wholly distinct from those of the spatial arts, such as sculpture and painting,” to Clement Greenberg, who famously proclaimed that “to restore the identity of an art the opacity of its medium must be emphasized”⁴⁹—Albright argues provocatively that “an artwork is an artwork precisely because it is especially susceptible to translation into an alien medium, and because those translations have a certain captivating aspect.” Moving among a range of examples in European literature, painting, and music, Albright examines the varieties of *intermedial* art—“the imaginary artwork generated by the spectator through the interplay of two or more media—the transient, complex thing that is assembled in each spectator’s mind through attention to the elements in different media” (209)—as well as what he terms (after Adorno) *pseudomorphosis*; that is, “in a work in a single artistic medium, the medium is asked to ape, or do the work of, some alien medium” (212).

Albright writes that in pseudomorphosis, making one artistic medium imitate or take the shape of another “typically involves a certain wrenching or scraping against the grain of the original medium” (212). He tends to interpret this as a sort of violation or transgression of the “original,” which he recognizes creates a paradox in relation to his larger argument that a cross-media impulse is constitutive of the aesthetic itself. As he puts it, “Art is not art unless capable of being transposed; but the transposition is never comprehensive or even correct, except with respect to a few contrived congruences” (232).

But the friction or erosion that results from pseudomorphosis can also be described as a motor of artistic innovation, defined in the words of Nathaniel Mackey as the “pursuit of a more complex accommodation between technique and epistemological concerns, between ways of telling and ways of knowing, especially where knowing is less the claim than a nervousness about it.”⁵⁰ In terms of the second or target medium, the process of pseudomorphosis can be a way to expand boundaries, to discover new possibilities, to transform a medium precisely by making it become other.

Roland Barthes’s 1972 essay “The Grain of the Voice” takes a famously unorthodox approach to reinventing music criticism. All too often, Barthes

writes, writing about music amounts to describing it with a “facile and trivial” stock of adjectives that, rather than capturing the complex ways music challenges and even afflicts the listener, instead reduces it to a reassuringly familiar set of prescribed qualities.⁵¹ The solution Barthes proposes is not to formulate some better, or more precise, repository of adjectives to describe music, but instead to “change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to speech: to modify its level of perception or of intellection: to shift the fringe of contact between music and language [*langage*]” (269). He limits his focus to the “very specific space” of words set to melody in European art song; in other words, he reconsiders the relationship between music and language by concentrating on the mode of performance when music *is* language—when “the voice is in a double posture, a double production: of language and of music” (269). He calls this limited area “the grain of the voice,” which he defines as “the friction between music and something else, which is the language [*langue*] (and not the message at all)” (273). In this respect he is less concerned with evaluating the ways a song “communicates” emotion or “expresses” character than with articulating his own unique, sensuous response as a listener to the ways sung “melody actually *works on* language—not what it says but the voluptuous pleasure of its signifier-sounds, of its letters: explores how language works and identifies itself with that labor” (270–271). What one hears in singing, then, is “the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue” (270): the unique ways that a particular human body—the channel of one singer’s throat, the bellows of her lungs, the articulating muscle of her tongue, the backstop of her palate, the pliable portal of her lips—gives resonant form to a particular language (*langue*).

The examples in Barthes’s essay are drawn from European classical music (versions of Schubert song by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Charles Panzéra) and, given the emphasis in that tradition on immaculate articulation and aesthetic “expressiveness,” Barthes’s preference for the grain, for the audibility of the singer’s body rather than the conveyance of the lyrics he sings, can seem idiosyncratic, even perverse. But “The Grain of the Voice” is highly suggestive in the realm of blues and jazz singing, which so pervasively and compellingly “ornaments both the song and the

mechanics”—as is immediately apparent when one listens to Louis Armstrong, or Skip James, or Billie Holiday, or Mississippi Fred McDowell, or Little Jimmy Scott, or Nina Simone, or Andy Bey.⁵² Black singing seems particularly imbued by an aesthetics of the grain in Barthes’s sense, an approach in which “what counts for most is not verbal precision (which is not to say vocal precision) but musical precision, or perhaps better still, musical nuance. . . . It is not at all unusual for blues lyrics of the very highest poetic quality to be mumbled, hummed, and even garbled by the outstanding performers of the idiom.”⁵³

Like Barthes’s essay, this book can be described as an attempt to shift the fringe of contact between music and language. But in a different manner, and to a different degree. In a passage that might initially seem cryptic, Barthes insists that the grain of the voice is ultimately a kind of “writing”—the “sung writing of the language” (*écriture chantée de la langue*), he calls it (274). He means that the qualities of a singer’s unique sound (the specific way Panzéra rolls his *r*’s, for instance) are *material* effects, an audible reshaping of the phonic fabric of the French language—pursued for the sake of play, of pleasure, rather than in the service of conveying meaning (or as he puts it, “the tyranny of signification”) (273). Whereas Barthes thus restricts his purview to the space where music and language coincide or overlap, in the chapters that follow I instead trace some of the many pathways and passages between two putatively discrete media (sound and writing) to argue that pseudomorphosis—working one medium in the shape of or in the shadow of another—is the paradigm of innovation in black art.

Although all the chapters shuttle between jazz and literature, it is not by coincidence that the first is devoted to Louis Armstrong, in an attempt to take account of the apparent parallels or shared predilections across his work as a singer, an instrumentalist, *and* a writer. To read and hear Armstrong this way—or Duke Ellington, or Sun Ra, or Mary Lou Williams, or Henry Threadgill—is to shift the fringe of contact between music and language by noting that black musicians so often insist on working in multiple media, not as autonomous areas of activity but in conjunction, insistently crossing circuits, rethinking and expanding the potential of each medium in the way it is like and unlike the other. It is also to insist

that the provocation goes both ways: from music to literature, from literature to music.

Throughout, I am especially keen to track the terms (*grain, parallel, gappings, interstice, differential, interval*) that arise as heuristic—sometimes hesitant or ersatz, sometimes vernacular rather than highbrow—theorizations of this interface between sound and writing.⁵⁴ These terms are not my own but instead the artists' own attempts to make sense of the relation between media in their work. While Ellington tends to make recourse to "parallel," Armstrong jokes about "gappings," and Cecil Taylor expounds on the impact of "differentials." If they hover around a shared set of aesthetic questions, these words are not synonyms: they represent a tradition of self-generated, provisional theorizations arising out of artistic practice itself, rather than externally applied analysis in the hindsight of scholarship. This is to note that this book will not provide a single keyword or master trope that could cover all instances; instead it is my conviction that the variety of such terms, and even their heuristic status, attests both to the vibrancy of this field of interplay and to its self-reflexivity. While it takes up a broad range of cases, this study is by no means exhaustive. And attention to other instances—whether the many other poets and novelists one might consider (from Michael Harper to Gayl Jones, from Ntozake Shange to Jayne Cortez), or the many other examples of writing by jazz musicians (Cab Calloway's jive dictionaries; autobiographies by Babs Gonzales, Marion Brown, and Charles Mingus; Wadada Leo Smith's collection of notes on "creative music"; poetry by Joseph Jarman and Oliver Lake; Anthony Braxton's metatheoretical *Triaxium Writings*; interviews by Art Taylor and William Parker) would result in a different collection of heuristic terms, a different set of innovative pathways across media, in open-ended dialogue with the ones that I take up here.⁵⁵

"Epistrophy" is the name of a tune copyrighted on June 2, 1941, by pianist Thelonious Monk and drummer Kenny Clarke. Monk biographer Robin D. G. Kelley explains that they initially called it "Fly Rite" and then "Iambic Pentameter," but eventually settled on the title under which it became one of the best-known examples of bebop composition.⁵⁶ The word may not seem out of place among the more recondite song titles in 1940s bop that suggest an eclectic arsenal of research disciplines ("Orni-

thology," "Anthropology," "Crazeology"), but the etymology of "Epistrophy," interestingly enough, comes from a literary source: the word means "turning about" in Greek, and "refers to a literary device in which a word or expression is deliberately repeated at the end of successive phrases, clauses, sentences, or verses."⁵⁷ Literary critic James Snead has pointed out that epistrophe is one of the most familiar forms of literary repetition: whereas anaphora involves a repeated word or phrase at the beginning of a clause, epistrophe places the repetition at the end (Snead gives the sermon example "Give your life to the Lord; give your faith to the Lord; raise your hands to the Lord," noting that both epistrophe and anaphora are central devices in the powerful rhetorical repertoire of the black church).⁵⁸

To the extent that the Monk/Clarke tune is an enactment of epistrophe—the main melody, as Kelley observes, is "constructed of repeated phrases" in which the "melodic line turns in on itself"—it can be described as a prominent instance of musical composition finding a formal model or inspiration in a literary device. But it resonates in other ways or on other levels in Monk's music, as well. It is tempting to hear *epistrophy* not just as the title of one tune but also as a word for the unusual little dance (a "turning about," one could call it) that Monk would often do during his concerts, standing up and leaving the piano while his sidemen soloed. As Kelley describes it:

His "dance" consisted of a peculiar spinning move, elbow pumping up and down on each turn, with an occasional stutter step allowing him to glide left and right. It was a deliberate embodiment of the rhythm of each tune: Every drummer interviewed who played with Monk said that he liked to get up to dance in order to set the rhythm; it was a form of conducting that required complete attention from the drummer.⁵⁹

The historian Sterling Stuckey went so far as to argue that Monk's dance was a sort of echo of the ring shout, the foundational African diasporic dance form, although on this point Kelley demurs: "Was it also a sacred expression? Perhaps."⁶⁰ In any case, the little dance became something of a well-known predilection or compulsion, and while Monk did it not just

during “Epistrophy” itself but during many tunes, there is something in the lurching chromatic harmony of “Epistrophy” in particular that seemed to be paralleled or repeated in his physical movements. What is suggestive for me here is the sense of a formal device that, taken into another medium, provides the ground of inspiration, the syntactical cell for a melody, which is then echoed in yet another medium (the body in motion, and even “a form of conducting” as other players watch the choreography). Epistrophy, then, might be one name for a turning or troping that, in turning, has a tendency to jump the track from one medium to another.

The key point is that the interface can be crossed in either direction. So we might recall that in 1964 Amiri Baraka published a short poem titled “Epistrophe,” which strikingly does not even once employ the device itself:

It's such a static reference; looking
out the window all the time! the eyes' limits . . .
On good days, the sun.

& what you see. (here in New York)
Walls and buildings; or in the hidden gardens
of opulent Queens: profusion, endless stretches of leisure.

It's like being chained to some dead actress;
& she keeps trying to tell you something horribly maudlin.

e.g. (“the leaves are flat & motionless.”)

What I know of the mind
seems to end here;
Just outside my face.

I wish some weird looking animal
would come along.⁶¹

One way to read it is as an oblique allusion to the Monk/Clarke tune. Thus the somewhat clunky aspiration that concludes the poem (“I wish some weird looking animal/would come along”) brings to mind the peculiarity of the melody, as though “Epistrophy”—the music, that is—were

a sort of emblem (a theme song, perhaps) for that hoped-for intrusion: an unclassifiable beast lumbering by to break up the tedious “static reference” of what the speaker sees “out the window all the time.” But if this poem ends somewhat tepidly, with only a vague and unfulfilled desire for something to disturb the surface of perception, there are many examples in Baraka’s work of places where music could be said to provide the catalyst for innovation. If “imaginative error” can be said, whatever its roots in fancy, to spur innovations in literary *form*—a periodical reconceived because of the spectral catalyst of an unavailable and even misdescribed predecessor periodical—one can also make the case that a resonant figure of musical immanence can be the impetus behind an innovative *poetics*.

A decade after the comet heyday of *The Cricket*, Baraka published a brilliant multipart poem about John Coltrane called “AM/TRAK” in the 1979 volume *Poetry for the Advanced*.⁶² While it doesn’t mention New Orleans or Buddy Bolden, it nonetheless can be read as yet another working through of the political implications at the core of the music in a manner that revisits the same figure of musical immanence. The five sections of the poem sketch a loosely chronological arc through Coltrane’s life, and one might say the task of the poem is to intuit the relationship among a set of key terms that, in the short first section, are splayed paratactically, in a manner that provides no sense of causality, no sense of their interarticulation:

Trane,
Trane,
History Love Scream Oh
Trane, Oh
Trane, Oh
Scream History Love
Trane (267)

In other words, the task of the poem is to intuit the relationship among a spondaic array of proper nouns: “Trane” (not only the self, one supposes, but the abbreviation implying a propulsion, a drive, that takes on

allegorical proportions in the way an artist comes to stand in for sort of national transport: thus the title “AM/TRAK”), “History,” “Love,” “Scream,” “Oh.”

If we dare lend an ear to its gutter rumblings, the poem can also be read as a meditation on *shit*, the word and the substance. The word is repeated often enough in the poem that it almost becomes a sporadic percussive motif. *Shit* is first of all the term for a brand of existential trouble: “The navy, the lord, niggers, / the streets / all converge a shitty symphony / of screams / to come / dazzled invective” (267). Sidney Bechet writes, “I met many musicianers and there was none of them hadn’t found himself some trouble sometime. . . . Some of them, they were strong enough and the trouble didn’t take them: they were stronger than the trouble. And some of them, they had the trouble too strong and it took them. But I don’t care how strong they were, they all of them had a piece of this trouble in them.”⁶³ So *shit* is first of all a word for that trouble, the shit one has to deal with. (It is also an allusion to the scourge of drugs.) The art, if it merits that name, is the ironic “symphony” of working through that mess with a scream. Or as it is put later: “Can you play this shit? (Life asks” (269).

But in the third section of the poem, about Coltrane’s period playing with the Miles Davis Quintet, the word *shit* starts to seem to connote something slightly different—a sound becoming itself, one could say: “Trane clawed at the limits of cool / slandered sanity / with his trying to be born / raging / shit” (268). And it is a demand from an audience, a re-fried vernacular term for the essence of what must be voiced: “tell us shit tell us tell us!” (268).

In the fifth and final section, Coltrane in the period of the early 1960s “classic quartet” emerges out of “the ugly streets of us” as the embodiment of “Black Art”: a “*black blower of the now*” (270). Here are the last two stanzas of the poem:

Jimmy Garrison, bass, McCoy Tyner, piano, Captain Marvel
Elvin
on drums, the number itself—the precise saying
all of it in it afire aflame talking saying being doing meaning
Meditations

Expressions

A Love Supreme

(I lay in solitary confinement, July 67
Tanks rolling thru Newark
& whistled all I knew of Trane
my knowledge heartbeat
& he was *dead*
they said.

And yet last night I played *Meditations*
& it told me what to do
Live, you crazy mother
fucker!

Live!

& organize

yr shit

as rightly

burning! (271–272)

Unexpectedly, in one of Baraka’s characteristic open-ended parentheticals, with their multiple implications (layering; an unending proliferation of qualification, annotation, and digression; as well as immersion: a step farther down, or in), we are with Baraka himself, beaten and jailed during the Newark uprisings in the summer of 1967, whistling Coltrane’s music to keep himself sane, precisely at the moment of Coltrane’s death. But the poem concludes exhilaratingly (“And yet last night I played *Meditations* / & it told me what to do”): what is in Coltrane’s music is still there, captured in the medium of recorded sound. The music gives you its own understanding of itself. It is an exhortation to “Live!” not a soundtrack to mourning. And it tells you to get your *shit* together: to organize its combustion. Even if unannounced, this poetics—a way of making in language that finds the music in a figure, making shit resonate, as it were—is the same mode enacted in the 1968 editorial of *The Cricket*, where *shit* likewise morphs from a term of opprobrium (“Recording companies have stolen the music. . . . And through all of this shit, the music has survived and propelled itself forwards into more profound areas of human

experience”) into an editorial method, and even, one could say, into a historiography (“Bolden’s *Cricket* has been called a ‘gossip’ sheet by the hip white boys who wrote the histories. We’ll have some ‘gossip’ for the reader and a whole lot of other shit too”).⁶⁴ Even this far away, there is yet another faint echo of that cornet resounding across Lake Pontchartrain.

one

Louis Armstrong and the Syntax of Scat

Scat begins with a fall, or so we’re told. In his second Okeh recording session with his Hot Five on February 26, 1926, in Chicago, Louis Armstrong recorded a lyric by Boyd Atkins called “The Heebie Jeebies Dance.” The words are not particularly memorable, a jingle about a dance craze: “I’ve got the Heebies, I mean the Jeebies, / Talk ’bout a dance the Heebie Jeebies, / You’ll see girls and boys, / Faces lit with joys, / If you don’t know it / You ought to learn it / Don’t feel so blue, / Some one will teach you, / Come on now let’s do that prance / Called the Heebie Jeebies dance.”¹ Supposedly the practice takes of the tune went smoothly, but a fortuitous fumble as the band was cutting the record transformed the song from one of the first journeyman efforts of a studio band to one of the most influential discs in American popular music. As Armstrong himself tells it:

I dropped the paper with the lyrics—right in the middle of the tune . . . And I did not want to stop and spoil the record which was moving along so wonderfully . . . So when I dropped the paper, I immediately turned back into the horn and started to Scatting . . . Just as nothing had happened . . . When I finished the record I just knew the recording people would throw it out . . . And to my surprise they all came running out of the controlling booth and said—“Leave That In.”²

In the liner notes to an Armstrong reissue, producer George Avakian remarks that there are “several versions” of the story. Others present, like trombonist Edward “Kid” Ory, told Avakian that “Louis had the lyrics memorized, but forgot them (or at least pretended to, Ory adds with a grin). Louis says he doesn’t remember, but he, too, offers a quiet smile.”³

As Philippe Baudoin, Gary Giddins, Richard Hadlock, and others have pointed out, it’s a rather unlikely anecdote.⁴ And although this

session is often credited as the “origin” of scat singing in jazz, there are many other earlier practitioners of the mode. Baudoin notes Don Redman, who recorded a scat break of “My Papa Doesn’t Two-Time No Time” with Fletcher Henderson five months before “Heebie Jeebies.”⁵ Will Friedwald, in *Jazz Singing*, points to vaudeville singer Gene Green’s half chorus of imitation-Chinese scat in his 1917 recording of “From Here to Shanghai” and mentions other overlooked figures, including Cliff “Ukulele Ike” Edwards, who scatted on a December 1923 record of “Old Fashioned Love,” and used to work in a theater accompanying silent movies “with his ukulele as well as with singing, vocal sound effects, and ‘eefin’ (the word Edwards used before anyone had thought of ‘scat’).”⁶ In the late 1930s, the champion self-promoter and deft revisionary historian Jelly Roll Morton told Alan Lomax of his own role in the mode’s origins more than twenty years earlier: “People believe Louis Armstrong originated scat. I must take that credit away from him, because I know better. Tony Jackson and myself were using scat for novelty back in 1906 and 1907 when Louis Armstrong was still in the orphan’s home.”⁷

I am less interested in the truth or fiction of the anecdote than in its perseverance, its resilience as a touchstone legend of origin. What’s fascinating about the story is the seeming need to narrate scat as a fall, as a literal dropping of the words—as an unexpected loss of the lyrics that finally proves enabling. The written words slip to the ground, and an entirely new approach to the singing voice is discovered in the breach, in the exigencies of musical time. It is not exactly that the “song” is separated from the “script,” but more that the anecdote relies on an oral/written split to *figure* the way that Armstrong’s voice peels gradually away from the reiteration of the chorus, and from linguistic signification altogether. (This happens as a kind of erosion or disarticulation, not a sudden loss: “Say you don’t know it, you don’t dawduh, /Daw fee blue, come on we’ll teach you . . .”) Of course the anecdote buys into a familiar narrative about “genius” and “spontaneity,” the notion that the great man improvises his way out of a tough spot with a dancer’s grace—talking to save time, as it were. But there is another quality, as well, an apparently necessary coexistence of dispossession and invention, perdition and predication, catastrophe and chance. If “Heebie Jeebies” is an unprecedented occasion for poetic in-

novation, in which Armstrong’s scat somehow moves closer to the qualities of music, it forces the recognition that an *occasion* is etymologically precisely that, Latin for a “falling toward,”⁸ here both the lyric sheet drifting down and the singer finding resource, happening upon a new sound (itself falling away from the word) in the void of the phonograph horn.

Although it is seldom noticed, the song itself seems particularly appropriate to the occasion it enables. *Heebie-jeebies* is a phrase that dictionaries of American slang define as “a feeling or anxiety or apprehension,” “craziness, foolishness,” “errors, irregularities,” or even “delirium tremens.”⁹ The first use of the term given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is a 1923 caption by a cartoonist named Billy De Beck in the *New York American*: “You gimme the heeby jeebys!” A notion particular to the postwar U.S. vernacular, the phrase enjoyed a brief vogue in modernist literature (employed by Dos Passos, O’Neill, Wharton, and Odets, among others) and even provided the title for an African American weekly review in Chicago called *Heebie-Jeebies: A Sign of Intelligence*.¹⁰ In *The Book of Negro Folklore*, Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps define the “heebies” as “the shakes,” while Mezz Mezzrow says it refers to the “jitters.”¹¹ So the dance starts with a sense of an inherently modern state of bodily unease, anxiety, or trembling, perhaps in the wake of an excess of stimulation (Hughes and Bontemps give this example: “Cheap wine will give you the heebies”), that causes a loss of control, a nervous loss of articulacy that expresses itself as incommodious physical movement. One might wonder whether scat needs to start with such an implication of somatic circuit crossing, a nerve-driven jostle and hum in the muscles. Interestingly, Mezzrow goes so far as to describe the particular quality of Armstrong’s talent as precisely this kind of edgy physical activation, a sensitivity of the nerves that approaches electrification:

Every day, soon as I woke up about four in the P.M., I would jump up to Louis’ apartment and most of the time catch him in the shower. That man really enjoyed his bath and shave. I would sit there watching him handle his razor, sliding it along with such rhythm and grace you could feel each individual hair being cut, and I’d think it was just like the way he fingered the valves on

his horn, in fact, just like he did everything. When he slid his fingertips over the buttons, delicate as an embroiderer and still so masculine, the tones took wing as though they sprang from his fingers instead of his lips. The way he shaved put me in mind of the time Louis was blowing and I brushed up against him by accident, and goddamn if I didn't feel his whole body vibrating like one of those electric testing machines in the penny arcade that tell how many volts your frame can stand.¹²

Heebie-jeebies also implies a kind of premonition or haunting: the "apprehension" that intuits an invasive presence. This dis-ease itself claims the body. Is it that the infectious music compels the fumbling dance, forcing the jittery hand to lose its grip on the page, or that the body is haunted by, singing for, vibrating to the echo of the words it's dropped?

Scat Semantics

Scat is almost always defined, without further comment, as singing or vocal improvising with "nonsense syllables."¹³ There are a number of ways to push at such a definition, but here I am particularly concerned with the implications of hearing scat as "nonsense." Does scat mobilize (syllabic) fragments of language without regard to meaning? Even in a musical sense, one could argue that scat does carry semantic content, though not necessarily linguistic content: one thinks immediately of the way scat turns so often to musical quotation of melody, sometimes to make a sardonic point through the juxtaposition. Roman Jakobson would call this an *introversive semiosis* in music. Music constitutes meaning because it refers first of all to itself: "instead of aiming at some extrinsic object, music appears to be *un langage qui se signifie soi-même*."¹⁴ There is a recording by Ella Fitzgerald of "How High the Moon" live in Berlin in 1960, in which she wordlessly quotes the melodies of more than a dozen tunes, sometimes with great humor, including "Poinciana," "Deep Purple," "The Peanut Vendor," "Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?," "A-Tisket, A-Tasket," "Heat Wave," and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes."¹⁵ But one might

equally argue that scat can convey "extrinsic symbolization" (referring to the outside world through either spatiotemporal, kinetic, or affective registers).

For Jean-Jacques Nattiez and other theorists of musical semiosis, music means not because it carries specific signifiers but precisely because it doesn't. "Music is not a narrative, but an incitement to make a narrative," he argues. It signifies as a "potentiality," engaging a "narrative impulse" in the listener who follows and fills in its syntax. "If the listener, in hearing music, experiences the suasions of what I would like to call the narrative impulse," Nattiez writes, "this is because he or she hears (on the level of strictly musical discourse) recollections, expectations, and resolutions, but does not know what is expected, what is resolved."¹⁶ The limitation of this argument, as scholars such as Susan McClary and Robert Walser have pointed out, is that Nattiez remains concerned almost exclusively with the metadiscursive analysis of music, claiming to operate at what he terms the "neutral level of analytical discourse."¹⁷ This ignores the ways that musical signification is inherently bound up with social context: if music offers a discursive system, its utterances only carry content within social "conventions of practice and interpretation" that make musical meanings "contingent but never arbitrary."¹⁸

With regard to scat singing, in other words, one should be able to speak more specifically not just about syntax but about the contingency of particular rhetorical choices in black musical performance—since a legato phrase of soft-tongued phonemes ("La loo la loo lo") would seem to carry an altogether differently range of significance than a sharp run of fricatives, occlusives, and open vowels ("Shoop be doop").¹⁹ A number of jazz scholars, including Paul Berliner, Ingrid Monson, and Brian Hatcher, have attempted to consider signification in instrumental jazz. They note the prevalence of metaphors of narrative or "telling a story" among jazz musicians, which they argue indicate that improvisation is syntactically structured in socially determined ways, even if its referentiality is nonspecific.²⁰

Another way to approach this question is to read Billie Holiday, who, in her autobiography *Lady Sings the Blues*, memorably describes listening to Louis Armstrong on the Victrola in Alice Dean's whorehouse:

I remember Pops' recording of "West End Blues" and how it used to gas me. It was the first time I ever heard anybody sing without using any words. I didn't know he was singing whatever came into his head when he forgot the lyrics. Ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba and the rest of it had plenty of meaning for me—just as much meaning as some of the other words that I didn't always understand. But the meaning used to change, depending on how I felt. Sometimes the record would make me so sad I'd cry up a storm. Other times the same damn record would make me so happy I'd forget about how much hard-earned money the session in the parlor was costing me.²¹

Does such phonetic material, the ground of scat, involve an absence of meaning, or on the contrary an excess of meaning—even a troubling or transporting excess of meaning, a shifting possibility of a multitude of meanings? The trouble and transport, the heebie-jeebies, would presumably be due to a radical disorientation of reference: the musical syntax remains constant but is capable of assuming a wide variety of affective significance.

It might be useful to turn to Nathaniel Mackey's epistolary work *Bedouin Hornbook*, in which the multi-instrumentalist only identified as N. suggests in one of his letters that scat's "apparent mangling of articulate speech testifies to an 'unspeakable' history" of racial violence, lynching in particular.²² In elaborating this function, the phrase he returns to is "telling inarticulacy"—an inarticulacy that nonetheless (or thereby) speaks, carries content.²³ For N., this function in scat is linked to a common predilection in black musical expression for the edges of the voice: the moan, the falsetto, the shout. All these vocal strategies indicate not just play, much less incoherence or ineptitude, but instead the singer's "willful dismantling of the gag-rule amenities which normally pass for coherence. Refusal worked hand in hand with exposé in such a way that what one heard was a loud critique of available options, a gruff dismissal of available conduits, no matter how 'coherent,' for admissible truths."²⁴ "Deliberately false" vocal production, in other words, in supplementing the sayable, "creatively hallucinates a 'new world,' indicts the more insidious falseness of the world as we know it."²⁵ This is inherently a

communicative function, even if it "dismantles" the rules of signification. N. quotes Anthony Heilbut's study *The Gospel Sound*: "the essence of the gospel style is a wordless moan. Always these sounds render the indescribable, implying, 'Words can't begin to tell you, but maybe moaning will.'"²⁶

In the letter, N. contends that this function may be as present in black instrumental music as in black vocal music. Other critics, from Gunther Schuller to Amiri Baraka, have argued likewise that there is a kind of continuum—what Albert Murray terms a "reciprocal 'voicing'"—between black vocal practice and black instrumental practice in the way they mobilize telling inarticulacy. "The tonal nuances of blues music," Murray argues, "are also a matter of singers playing with their voices as if performing on an instrument, and of instrumentalists using their brasses, woodwinds, strings, keyboards, and percussion as extensions of the human voice."²⁷ Thinking along such a continuum would mean we'd have to pair, for example, Clark Terry's well-known and jocular "Mumbles," in which the trumpeter sings, slurring choruses of a mumbled scat that seems to linger just beyond comprehensible language, with his more obscure efforts like "Trumpet Mouthpiece Blues," where he disassembles his horn and blows through his mouthpiece to attain a sound that approaches the inflections of speech.²⁸ In the manuscript that provided the material for his book *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*, Louis Armstrong recounts an anecdote from his days playing with Joe "King" Oliver's Band in Chicago in the early 1920s that makes a similar point about the interaction of words and music along a continuum of meaning:

Finally they went into a number called "Eccentric"—that is the one where Papa Joe took a lot of breaks. . . . At the very last chorus he and [bass player] Bill Johnson would do a sort of Act musically. While Joe Oliver would be talking like a baby [on his trumpet], Bill Johnson would pet the baby in his high voice. The first baby Joe would imitate was supposed to be a white baby. When Joe's horn had cried like the white baby, Bill Johnson would come back with, "Don't Cry Little Baby." The last baby was supposed to be a little colored baby, then they would break it up. Joe would yell, "Baaaah! baaaaaaah!" Then Bill would shout,

“Shut up you lil so and soooooo.” Then the whole house would thunder with laughs and applauses.²⁹

It is not to be overlooked that scat singing is engaged at different points along this continuum, thus “telling” to various ends. My purpose here is not to offer a typology of scat, but I’ll quickly indicate a few of the elements that would have to be taken into account in order to do so. On the one hand, there is a whole range of scat that approaches what Armstrong’s buddy and main supplier Mezz Mezzrow called jive talk—hallucinating a secret language, a language of the “inside.” Think of the linguistic hipsterism promulgated by musicians such as Cab Calloway, Babs Gonzales, Slim Gaillard, and Leo Watson, or tunes like “In the Land of Oo-Bla-Dee” (which Joe Carroll sung with Dizzy Gillespie’s band often in the 1940s) written by Milt Orent and Mary Lou Williams, with its pseudotranslations of an amorous fairy-tale exchange of scat. “This jive is a private affair,” Mezzrow writes, “a secret inner-circle code cooked up partly to mystify the outsiders, while it brings those in the know closer together because they alone have the key to the puzzle. The hipster’s lingo is a private kind of folk-poetry, meant for the ears of the brethren alone.”³⁰ Louis Armstrong might be said with little exaggeration to be the origin of this focus in scat singing, given the extraordinary influence of his spoken and sung vernacular in U.S. popular culture throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In his orchestra recording of “Sweet Sue (Just You)” in 1933, there are two choruses of call-and-response in which Armstrong “translates” phrases scatted by saxophonist Budd Johnson in what Armstrong explains is a secret hipster “viper language.”³¹ Humor is another crucial element in scat, especially where musical performance approaches novelty and comedy routines, culminating in such masterworks as “The Avocado Seed Soup Symphony” (1945) by Slim Gaillard, Leo Watson, and Bam Brown.³² Even if musicians were playing the game of eloquence and erudition, “they were also mocking the game and the rule-makers too, and mocking the whole idea of eloquence, the idea that words are anything but hypes and camouflage.”³³

Another important point along the continuum of scat is a fascination with what Robert O’Meally has called “mock-foreign language.”³⁴ Mezzrow writes that in 1926, music lovers in Chicago were imitating the slips

and phrases of “Heebie Jeebies” so much in everyday conversation that “Louis’ recording almost drove the English language out of the Windy City for good.”³⁵ But from the very beginnings of scat—performances such as Gene Green’s imitation Chinese in the 1917 recording of “From Here to Shanghai”—the form was concerned with the representation of the foreign: alterity projected onto the level of linguistic impenetrability and absurdity. Here one notes an imposition of cultural and racial difference through a play that draws upon the phonetic contours of spoken language. The contortions of tunes like Cab Calloway’s “Chinese Rhythm” from the mid-1930s were only a part of an industry of alterity in U.S. popular culture in the middle of the century, one that may not be unrelated in this respect to minstrelsy in the nineteenth century, which similarly drew on an imposed linguistic deformity (whether in the deliberately inscrutable orthography of dialect literature, or in the stereotyped conventions of minstrel show vocal delivery) to imply illiteracy and inarticulacy. Groups including Slim and Slam performed equal-opportunity scat reification, moving from the faux-Chinese of their “Chinatown, My Chinatown” (1938) to a pseudo-Yiddish in “Matzoh Balls” (1939) and even a vocalization of African barbarity called “African Jive” (1941).³⁶

This mode of performing alterity in scat even becomes, at a number of signal moments, the arena in which disputes over the shape and development of the music are fought out. When Dizzy Gillespie was playing in Cab Calloway’s band in the late 1930s, the trumpeter would chip away at the chord changes of Calloway’s swing arrangements in his solos, experimenting with a proto-bebop melodic vocabulary. This fascinated some of the members of the band, particularly Milt Hinton and Danny Barker, but drove Cab Calloway crazy. Significantly, he conveyed his resistance to bop with an interesting figure of foreignness: “[Dizzy’s] interpretation of jazz was originally wild. It was really wild, and it was something that I really had to get used to. I used to call him on it. I’d say, ‘Man, listen, will you please don’t be playing all that Chinese music up there!’”³⁷ It is a particularly odd objection for a musician who a few years earlier had been insisting in song that “you’ve got to have Chinese rhythm.” Similarly, in 1949, faced with an interviewer fishing for controversy, Louis Armstrong explains his disdain of bebop by criticizing in particular the uncredited way that the younger musicians had appropriated scat, his own “invention”

many years earlier. Pops recounts the anecdote about recording “Heebie Jeebies” in 1926, and adds indignantly: “But these bop cats act as though they’d invented scat singing. . . . I think they’re trying to sound like Africans, don’t you?”³⁸ In vocal expression in music, scat falls where language rustles with alterity, where the foreign runs in jive and the inside jargon goes in the garb of the outsider. But as the examples above demonstrate, the performance of difference in scat is by no means innocent; it is the very point at which the music polices the edges of its territory.³⁹

Dropping Words

I want to return to the way the occasion of scat in Armstrong evokes a divorce between words and music. I’m wondering about the resonance of such a model in a broader trajectory of black expressive culture—and in the realm of literature in particular. Might one, for instance, read another originary text, W. E. B. Du Bois’s 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, as precisely a theorization of the possibilities of such a fall, such a separation? The epigraphs to each chapter (one section of a European-language poem, one musical fragment of a spiritual, without the lyrics) formally stage a disjuncture of words and music, which is made most explicit in the book’s last chapter, “The Sorrow Songs.”⁴⁰ *Souls* predates jazz and Armstrong but announces a wider New World African concern with the relation between music and language as figuring cultural transport in diaspora. In that final chapter, as well as in each of his other autobiographical efforts,⁴¹ Du Bois tells a tale about a music “far more ancient than the words,” and about his own family’s link to that unspeakable history. Du Bois’s “grandfather’s grandmother,” he writes, “looked longingly at the hills, and often:

crooned a heathen melody to the child between her knees, thus:

Do ba-na co-ba, ge-ne me, ge-ne me!
Do ba-na co-ba, ge-ne me, ge-ne me!
Ben d’nu-li, nu-li, nu-li, nu-li, den d’le.

The child sang it to his children and they to their children’s children, and so two hundred years it has travelled down to us and we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music.⁴²

For Du Bois it is precisely the incomprehension that compels a life-long search for identity and reconnection. As David Levering Lewis puts it, the lyric was “the earliest prompting of a very New England and supremely intellectual great-grandson to try to discern a few true notes of a remote, vestigial, and mysterious heritage.”⁴³ The point isn’t to find a source for the song, or its proper translation, I would argue; it is instead to recognize the way that the distance to a shared ancestral means of expression and genealogical ground is represented by the distance from those impenetrable phonemes to that music, “well understood.” “Words and music have lost each other,” Du Bois writes, and the listener must seek a message that is “naturally veiled and half articulate.”⁴⁴ Such may be the condition of scat, and a condition of New World African expression in general.

I am shifting to this broader register in part because “Heebie Jeebies” is not only the origin of scat but might also be considered a story about the inception of what we call “jazz singing”—the “House That Satch Built” that is American popular culture. Combined with “Muskrat Rag,” it was the first big hit of the Hot Fives, selling more than forty thousand copies in a matter of weeks, and it kicked off what many consider the most extraordinary creative period of any musician in this century. Louis did not simply invent a new style called scat, as Gary Giddins has pointed out: “he added scat’s moans and riffs to the palette of conventional song interpretation, employing them to underscore emotion and rhythm and meaning.”⁴⁵ Scat is sometimes a kind of instrumental technique in the Hot Fives and Hot Sevens, but more often it arises (or tumbles) out of Armstrong’s singing voice; in classic cuts like “Lazy River,” “All of Me,” and “Stardust,” scat originates in the way Armstrong fills the breaks between the lines of the lyric, accompanying himself with hornlike comments, and then allows the words of the song to bleed over into the commentary, mingling call-and-response in a voice that is not one voice, in a

voice that seems haunted by another voice or voices, in “a sort of liquefying of words,” as Zora Neale Hurston would put it.⁴⁶ Armstrong’s vocal doubling, the peeling away from the lyrics through sung accompaniment, is rightfully termed an *obligato*, because it would seem indispensable in this aesthetic.⁴⁷ As Mackey has argued more broadly, there is in jazz singing an obligatory splitting of sound, a “pursuit of another voice, an alternate voice,” that is nothing if not compelling, in all the senses of the word.⁴⁸

One might take up this compulsion in terms of the other sense of *scat*—a sense that we’d sometimes prefer to forget, but which may in fact be appropriate to Armstrong’s aesthetic, at least. I’m thinking of the Greek derivation of the term, which connects it to words like *scatology*. The narrator at the opening of Wesley Brown’s novel *Tragic Magic* espouses just this sense of *scat*, finding a link between black vernacular practice, jazz singing, and an excremental science:

Scatology is a branch of science dealing with the diagnosis of dung and other excremental matters of state. Talking shit is a renegade form of scatology developed by people who were fed up with do-do dialogues and created a kind of vocal doodling that suggested other possibilities within the human voice beyond the same old shit.⁴⁹

In the second half of his life, Armstrong was famously evangelical about the healing effects of a series of herbal laxatives that he tried to combine with various diets and regimens: Abelina water from Texas, then Pluto Water, and then Swiss Kriss, developed by the nutritionist guru Gayelord Hauser after World War II.⁵⁰ Armstrong sent out hundreds of copies of a diet, “Lose Weight the Satchmo Way,” that he had concocted with his wife, Lucille, and was also known to send out a Christmas card with a photo of himself sitting on the toilet, grinning, his pants down, busy above the “Satchmo-Slogan”: “Leave It All behind Ya.”⁵¹

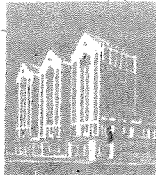
This obsession seems to have originated with Armstrong’s mother, Mayann. Living in extreme poverty in New Orleans in the first decade of the last century, she developed an arsenal of homeopathic stratagems to keep her children healthy. In his autobiography, Armstrong writes: “A

slight physic once or twice a week,’ she used to say, ‘will throw off many symptoms and germs that congregate from nowheres in your stomach. We can’t afford no doctor for fifty cents or a dollar.’”⁵² The version of this anecdote in Armstrong’s manuscript for the book is more blunt, and bolder in proposing a connection between bowel movements, trumpet playing, and sexuality:

She said—“Son—Always keep your bowels open, and nothing can harm you. . . . I remember what my mother said where ever or when ever somebody would die with gas or indigestion . . . And still uses the phrase—“They didn’t shit enough” . . . it all derives—from negligence of the bowels. . . . I am about to be fifty nine years old . . . [. . .] And if I have to say it myself, I am blowing better and twice as strong as I was when I was in my twenties . . . Well I won’t mention my sex sessions these days, because I hate to be called a braggadosha . . . Wow . . . Did that come outa Mee . . .”⁵³

In the final aside, in a characteristic self-disparaging move, an impressive example of Armstrong’s vocabulary (verbal “blowing” inspired by his sexual prowess) garners the same surprised appreciation as a good shit: “Did that come outa Mee.” In this complex metaphorical mix, the Armstrong scat aesthetic is equally a strategy of catharsis and physical (erotic) regulation. This is not at all the scatology of Luther (“spiritual enlightenment on a privy”), nor that of Freud (where character traits of “orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy” are the results of the sublimation of infantile anal eroticism).⁵⁴ Nor, I think, is it the transgression and carnivalesque inversion of hierarchy, the “world turned upside down,” envisioned in Rabelais. It is something more akin to James Joyce’s identification of creativity with excretion—or as he calls it, “chamber music.”⁵⁵ Armstrong too flirts with such a metaphorology, writing—and even singing at times—of the “music of Swiss Kriss.” He commented in one letter to Joe Glaser (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2) that he was enclosing copies of the diet “that you can give to your fat friends . . . Especially those fat band buyers . . . They will gladly buy all of your bands . . . Because, after hearing so much music that they will make from the music of Swiss

HOLLYWOOD
DRAKE HOTEL



HOLLYWOOD AT McCADDEN
HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

September, 8th, 1955,

Dear Mr Glaser:

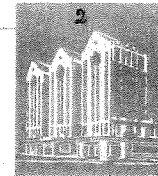
'Gee, I've been trying my damndest, to write to you and thank you for all the wonderful things that you have done for your boy, Ot, Satchmo... And I want to thank you again and again... Believe me when I tell you, - you won't ever regret it... Lucille is happy... Very happy. And having a wonderful time... And, you know she's ever so grateful to you also... I did the show with Gary Crosby, which will be broadcast this Sunday... Seems like a very good show to me... I'm sure, you'll catch it... The next day, which was Thursday, we did the recording date at Decca, with the Benny Carter Arrangements... 'Oh boy, but good... He made some very fine arrangements and we made some fine recordings... A very lovely date... Sonny Burke and all the Decca lads, were very much elated... 'Yass They Were... Tomorrow, Gary Crosby and I will have the whole afternoon to our selves... I just know, - we're going to really 'Whale'!

The people (my public) so thrilled to know, - 'how'n' the hell did I lose ninety five pounds, and still blowing my horn every night... So, I thought it best, instead of explaining to every individual, - I made up this reducing chart, and handed them out to everyone who wishes, one, free of charge... I had a thousand copies made up... I kept five hundred here in California with me, and the other five hundred, I had, sent to our home in Corona... I thinking that I would need them... Huh, when Uncle Mitty (Milton Bert) Gene Norman Helen Thompson (colored lady-Disc Jockey-of station K-F-O-I) finished talking about my chart, and the customers at the Crescendo, in Hollywood and the Macumbo in San Francisco, commenced asking for them, I began to think that I should have kept the other five hundred with me... Ha... You'd be surprised the way this chart is sweeping the country...

Here's a couple that you can give to your fat friends... Especially those fat band buyers... They will gladly, buy all of your bands... Because, after hearing so much music that they will make from the music of Swiss Miss - it will be a pleasure to them to hear a real live band, for a change... We must keep these diet chart a rollin'. Just think of the people who will be 'oh so happy to lose weight the Satchmo way... I soon will have to have a printer (a reasonable one of course) who will keep things going... P.S. the greatest publicity in the world... Two thirds of the people in this world, die with locked

Mr Glaser.

HOLLYWOOD
DRAKE HOTEL



HOLLYWOOD AT McCADDEN
HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

Bowtie - or suffer with gas - and don't know anything at all to do for them selves... Right?... That's why I explained everything thoroughly... Lmf... Did that come outa mee?... I can see you laughing, now... Ain'tcha glad' that you don't have to use it?... So do your boy a favor and pass it around, wilya?... Doctor Schiff, got his, too, Dr Gottlieb... P.S. if you should get a little crowded with requests for my charts just let me know and I will mail to you, all you ask for...

Incase that you don't fit, - I had to have 'eight suits altered, since I have been playing at the Crescendo... I had to throw away, all of my sock straps - underwear - pajamas, etc, and replenish them all with size 'thirty twos... Wow... I find, it's so easy to live by this chart... The new Clarinet man arrived last night (Thursday)... He spent the night-out at the club with us... You sure did send a good man this time... Yea-Edman Hall is one of the very best, there is, on the Clarinet... A man whom I've always admired as a great musician, from the very first time I heard him, until, this very day... I personally, think that he will lift the band up a hundred percent...

So Dad, the old glimmers (my eyes) seem to be getting a little tired... This dam Smog, hasnt helped them any... Two or three days this week everybody's been complaining about the Smog... One night at the Club I had to play the whole night with my dark glasses on... They're much better now... Then to - I had a busy day... So again - thanks for your wonderful kindness... I do hope that Moms (your dear mother) is having fun with the kids... Give my regards to the staff... Tell them, not to be bashful... If they need to lose a little here and there, just step right up and let Doctor Satchmo - lay one of these fine charts, on them... Nightie Night and - God Bless Ya...

Swiss Missou,
Louis Armstrong

"Home of the London Grill and Hunt Room"

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 Louis Armstrong, letter to Joe Glaser, September 8, 1955, Music Division, Library of Congress.

Kriss—it will be a pleasure to them to hear a real live band, for a change . . .”⁵⁶ The “Comments” to Armstrong’s diet “Lose Weight the Satchmo Way” close with wordplay that equates aural attentiveness with open bowels: “P.S. When the Swiss Kriss Company gives me a radio show, my slogan will be—‘Hello Everybody, this is Satchmo speaking for Swiss Kriss. Are you loosening?????’”⁵⁷

In a poignant and rambling autobiographical narrative he wrote during a hospital stay near the end of his life, titled “Louis Armstrong + the Jewish Family in New Orleans, LA, the Year of 1907” (1969–1970), Armstrong gives the most extensive elaboration of this metaphor:

My wife Lucille started me to taking Swiss Kriss. I came home one night as she was reading a book written by Dr. Gaylord Hauser, who introduced Swiss Kriss. Then when we were on our way to bed, she reached and open up her box of Swiss Kriss, took a teaspoonful, put it on her tongue dry, rinsed it down with water, settled into bed for the night, and went right off to sleep.

Now I dugged her for a couple of nights. So the next day I went out and bought a box for myself. She took a teaspoonful. But with all the heavy food that I eat—I must take a little more than Lucille takes. So I took a tablespoonful of Swiss Kriss, rinsed it down off my tongue the same as Ceily (Lucille) did. It’s so easy to take! I forgot that I had even taken it. It’s nothing but Herbs. It said Herbal Laxative on the box anyway. I figured what she had takened had to be better than the mild Laxative that I’ve been taking which was pretty good but not strong enough for all of those Ham Hocks and Beans, Mustard Greens and Rice I had for Supper. It only made me sput like a Motor Boat. So I slept real peaceful with Swiss Kriss, well say! about five or six hours, which was fine. Then I awaken to a little rumble in my stomach, which was a warning—let’s walk to the John. Hmm, I paid it no mind, and went back to Sleep, that is for a few minutes then a little Larger rumbling saying—“Swiss Kriss time, don’t walk—Trot.” And don’t Stumble please. I was lucky enough though—I made it to the Throne in time. And All of a Sudden, music came—Riffs—Arpeggios—Biff notes—etc. Sounded just like

(“Applause”) Sousa’s Band playing “Stars and Stripes Forever,” returning to the Channel of the Song—Three Times. Wonderful.⁵⁸

One shouldn’t lose too easily the fact that this is a metaphor and not a homology. But if the figure describes the effects of the laxative, it also reflects on the status of music in Armstrong’s aesthetics. A music where the action of words and music falling away from each other might best be described as a *release*, a sought-out condition of flow. An ethics of discard (“Leave It All behind Ya”) that also provides the foundation for a poetics. This should make us hear that excursion in “Lazy River,” where Pops explodes the lyrics with a glorious run of sixteenth notes (ending with a spoken aside, commenting on his own invention: “If I ain’t riffin’ this evening I hope something”), in a slightly different way. Novelist Ralph Ellison supposedly told Albert Murray, “Man, sometimes ole Louie shows his ass instead of his genius.”⁵⁹ I’d put it rather differently, though. Sometimes it seemed that Armstrong thought his genius *was* his ass.⁶⁰

Writing Scat

It is a commonplace for critics to write somewhat unthinkingly that Armstrong’s trumpet playing is “like” his singing—as Hugues Panassié gushes, Louis “blows his horn exactly as he sings—and vice versa.”⁶¹ With the increasing availability of Armstrong’s multifaceted written work, they also tend to claim that his writing is “like” his music. I have been drawing on the wealth of Armstrong’s writing in part precisely to raise the question of the relationship between the forms of his creative expression. On what basis, if any, can one make these kinds of analogical claims?

Gary Giddins has rightfully termed Armstrong “by far the most expansive musician-writer jazz has ever known.”⁶² His correspondence alone is voluminous. Dan Morgenstern has wondered in print at Armstrong’s remarkable precocity on the page, as well as on record:

How, then, did this “uneducated” and “deprived” man come to be a writer, and a real one, with a clear and distinctive voice of

his own? We know that Armstrong already owned a typewriter and knew how to use it when he first arrived in Chicago to join King Oliver's band—the climactic event in *Satchmo*. The earliest surviving typed letter by Armstrong I've seen is dated Sept. 1, 1922, and it contains complaints that three previous letters (one to the recipient, two to other friends) have gone unanswered.⁶³

Armstrong wrote copiously and variously: not just letters, telegrams, and postcards to friends and acquaintances and fans, but also a number of articles and book reviews and two book-length autobiographies, as well as a number of unpublished and ephemeral documents found in his home in Queens, which included a wealth of other autobiographical material, transcribed jokes, isolated prose narratives, recipes, pornography, and song lyrics. He carried a typewriter, a dictionary, and a thesaurus with him on the road, and would often sit backstage in his bathrobe and hammer out two-fingered letters while surrounded by family, bandmates, friends, and admirers. A number of newspapers and jazz magazines published articles by Armstrong, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, and a number of them gave special attention to what Morgenstern terms Armstrong's "stylistic and linguistic idiosyncrasies"—in some cases going so far as to reproduce facsimiles of his original letters and handwritten manuscripts.⁶⁴

Thomas Brothers, the editor of an invaluable collection of Armstrong's writings, notes a certain consistency of usage in Pop's "orthographic style": "For punctuation, Armstrong uses all of the standard symbols, but with only a few of them (period, question mark, exclamation mark, semicolon, and colon) does he limit himself to conventional practice." As Brothers points out, ellipses, dash, parentheses, comma, apostrophe, and double apostrophe are "all used inventively."⁶⁵ The parameters of this practice are apparent in a letter Armstrong wrote to Madeleine Berard in November 1946 (see Figure 1.3).⁶⁶ The first thing that sticks out is the epigraph, which Armstrong often cobbled into his letters. Often they were quick, lascivious double entendres. Another letter opens: "Said one strawberry to another-/If we hadn't been in the same bed-together/We wouldn't bee in this jam . . . /Tee Hee."⁶⁷ What is the status of this intruding stanza, which would seem to depart from the conventions of the epistolary genre? The strangeness of the syntax is striking, as well as the

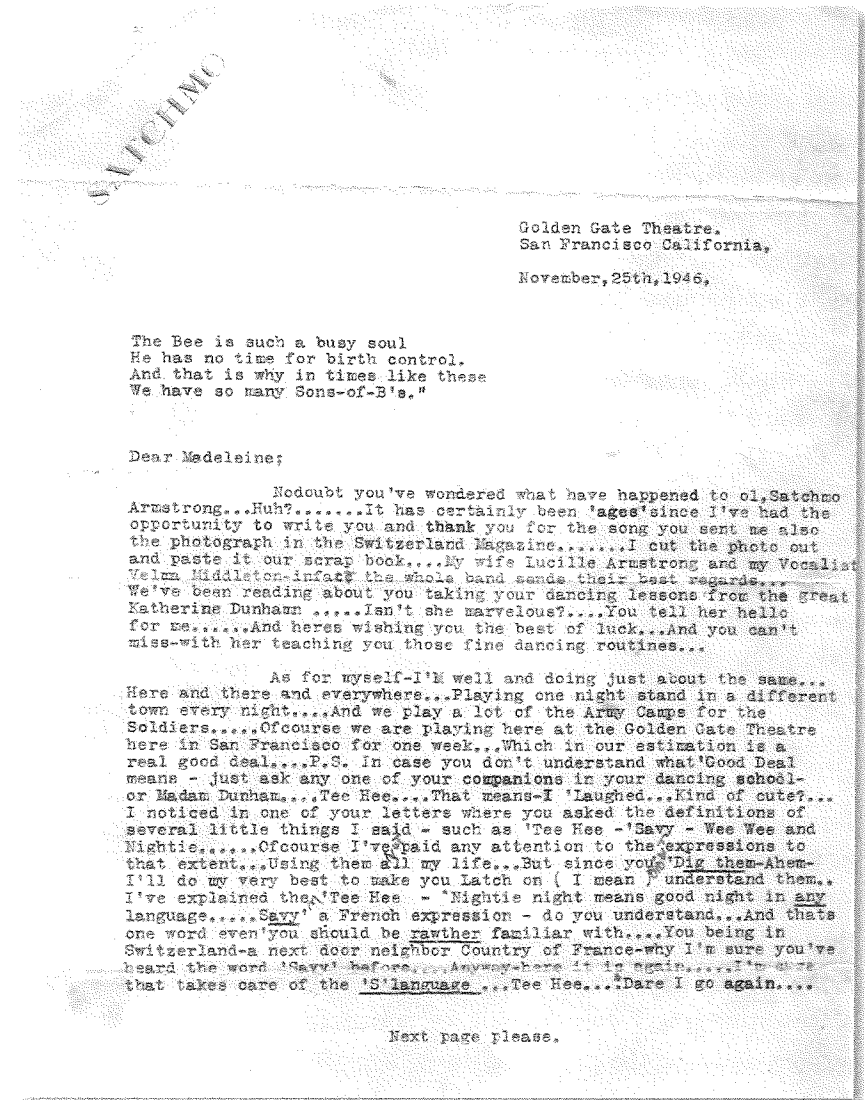


Figure 1.3 Louis Armstrong, letter to Madeleine Berard, November 25, 1946, Louis Armstrong House and Archives at Queens College, City University of New York.

reliance on ellipses (of varying lengths) as the main mode of sentence stop. (Gary Giddins has offered the smart suggestion that this use of ellipses is itself a kind of convention, however: now somewhat archaic, it hearkens back to “the old Walter Winchell style” of journalism, evoking a sense of pace and interconnection meant to connote the informality—and inside scoops?—of a gossip column.⁶⁸) The punctuation of the manuscripts is equally bizarre: Armstrong certainly uses apostrophes, but occasionally a comma will intrude in its place (“ol, Satchmo”). Pops underlines compulsively, and the use of single, double, and even triple apostrophes is not uncommon, sometimes just at the beginning of a word or phrase, sometimes just at the end.

One also notes a kind of multiplicity of register that structurally one might suggest functions like his sung obbligati to his own vocals in tunes like “Lazy River.” The language peels away from itself, questioning, mocking its own pretensions, feigning incomprehension (“Huh?”), continually qualifying and breaking up its own assertions (“But since you didn’t ‘Dig them—ahem—I’ll do my very best to make you Latch on (I mean) understand them”). This effect is also produced through an odd predilection for using postscripts in the middle of a text, even in the middle of a paragraph, often for definitional purposes (“P.S. In case you don’t understand what ‘Good Deal means—just ask any one of your companions in your dancing school—or Madame Dunham”; in another manuscript, Armstrong writes, “I kept saying to myself as I was getting dressed, putting on my old ‘Roast Beef’—P.S. that was what we called an old ragged Tuxedo”).⁶⁹ The letter often makes recourse to an oral orthography—representing speech patterns and accent through the ways the words are written down on the page. But this technique doesn’t always pertain to the representation of hipster language or the black vernacular in particular. (Here, for instance, he affects a pseudo-British aristocratic “rather”: “Savy’ a French expression—do you understand . . . And that’s one word even you should be rawther familiar with. . . . You being in Switzerland—a next door neighbor Country of France.”) And Armstrong relishes in a complex verbal play (“that takes care of the ‘S’language . . . Tee Hee. . . . “Dare I go again. . . .”), which almost constitutes an immanent theory of his literary practice itself. “Slang” is both inside and outside conventional “language,” marked off by an ambiguous set of apostrophes that

also serves to indicate a neologism (“slanguage”). The two apostrophes before the last sentence have a similar multiple effect, appearing to note a citation of a commonplace phrase (“there I go again”) as well as to draw attention to the way it is “played”—the initial consonant articulated at a slant, hardened so as to give it, too, another meaning (“dare I go again”).

One of Armstrong’s handwritten letters begins to theorize more explicitly his sense of typing practice, when he tells Joe Glaser that it is a pity that his typewriter is broken, since he had wanted “so badly to swing a lot of Type Writing, ‘Gappings’ on ya.” The missive opens (see Figure 1.4):

Dear Mr. Glaser"

Am sorry that I have to write this letter with a pen, but, on arriving at the air port in Las Vegas yesterday, My typewriter fell from on top of all, that luggage that was one the truck, And the "Jolt" Sprung' everything. TCH, TCH, isn't it a Drag? And I wanted so badly to swing a lot of Type Writing, "Gappings' on ya" Of course, they're fixing it up for me. So, I Guess, that's all that matters.⁷⁰

Brothers points out that “gappings” is slang for “salary,” and later in the letter, Armstrong uses it this way himself in given instructions regarding his mistress (with whom he’d recently had a child): “Now here are the Bills as follows. I want you to see that Sweets + Baby’ get one hundred per week—or you can send her, a month’s gappings, now + pay her monthly.” But it also may be a reference to the intervallic (keyboard) creativity of typewriting technology.⁷¹ Pops wants in this sense not only to enter a certain economy of exchange, but also to appropriate a rational technology of the interval (“gappings”—in the sense that the typewriter structures and spatializes an access to language) from a particular, paradigmatically black aesthetic (“swing”). A few years later, Amiri Baraka would snarl that “a typewriter is corny,” wishing for a romantic immediacy of expression that would bypass its technological interface.⁷² But Armstrong, a bit like the poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite, seems to revel in appropriating of the technology of rationalization, finding the obligatory edges and gaps of the medium with humor and grace.⁷³

moulin rouge

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

Aug. 2nd 1955

Dear Mr. Glaser:

Am sorry that I have to write this letter with a pen, but, on arriving at the air port in Las Vegas yesterday, my type writer fell from on top of all, that big old thing was on the truck, and the 'jolt' sprung everything. Ten Ten, isn't it a drag? And I wanted so badly to sing a lot of type writing, 'Gappings' on ya" because they're fixing it up for me. So, I guess, that's all that matters. I like to say that I hope, Mom's dear Mother (Mrs Glaser) is feeling better. Such a wonderful person. We love her very much. And you too I know. Quite surprised to get a letter from 'ol Black Benny - since you haven't heard from him in a long time. I love to see Daddy, but you keep,

BONANZA ROAD * LAS VEGAS, NEVADA * DUDLEY 2-7311

Brothers usefully resists any impulse to read the complexity of Armstrong on the page as either illiteracy or "irony."⁷⁴ But then he suggests rather simplistically that the excessive graphicity of Armstrong's "gappings" are an "attempt to add Armstrong's *voice* to his words":

The interpretation that seems to hold consistently is that Armstrong is interested in depicting an oral rendition of his prose; he offers not just written prose but his version of how to hear it. He is especially attentive to emphasis and pace. Given who he was as a musician, this is not surprising, for he was a great master of melodic nuance and rhythm.⁷⁵

Brothers acquiesces to an easy literalism: for him, apostrophe and capitalization are employed not to convey "distance" or "irony" but "more simply, as a way to convey emphasis," and "the varied lengths of his ellipses, from standard three (sometimes two are used) to as many as fifteen, imply varied durations of pause."⁷⁶ Certainly, Armstrong plays on the page with conventions of representing orality, but can that play be reduced to a functional attempt to "depict" his own voice in a legible set of marks?

A literalist approach loses a sense of the peculiar status of Armstrong's writing, the diverse scenes and situations in which he wrote, and it would seem to abandon the issue of Armstrong's connection to his audience and correspondents, as well. But I am not even convinced that it suffices as an explanation of the formal elements of Pops's work on the page. The problem is that although the reader has a wealth of indices—an overflow of graphic marks and pointers that accompany the utterance—one has no access to a code, no means to decipher the shifting levels of those effects through interpretation. Brothers reproduces Armstrong's letter to Glaser in type, simply using italics every time Armstrong underlines (neglecting, in other words, the fact that in Armstrong's manuscripts, while some words are underlined once, others are triple and even quadruple underlined). The complexity of the writing is much better served with a facsimile (see Figure 1.5).

Something else Black Benny said to me, Came true—> He said (TO ME) "DIPPER" As long as you live, no matter where you

Figure 1.4 Louis Armstrong, letter to Joe Glaser, August 2, 1955, Music Division, Library of Congress.

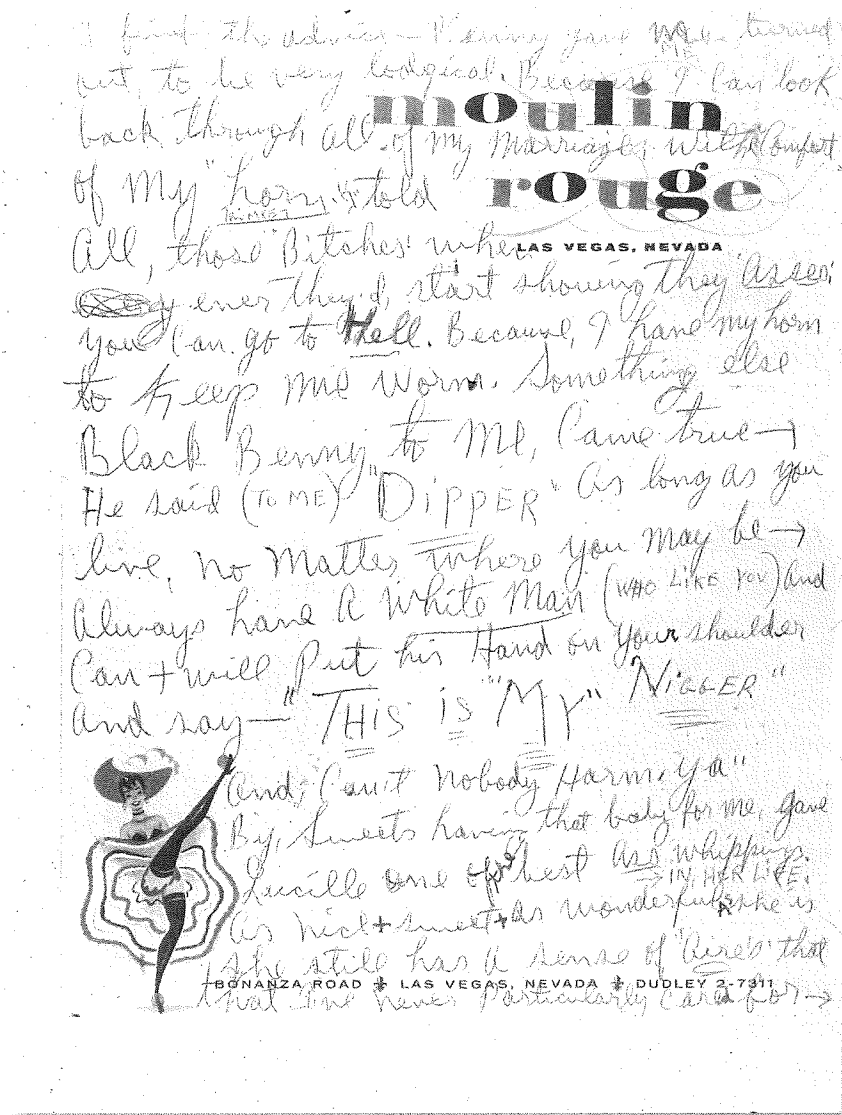


Figure 1.5 Louis Armstrong, letter to Joe Glaser, August 2, 1955, Music Division, Library of Congress.

may be—> always have a White Man (WHO LIKE YOU) and Can+ will put his Hand on your shoulder and say—"This is "My" 'Nigger" and, Can't Nobody Harm' Ya."⁷⁷

The passage is hard enough. Armstrong is recounting an anecdote about Black Benny, a gangster in New Orleans, who supposedly told him that it was all important in life to have a white patron or protector. Glaser, of course, is Armstrong's manager. How is he supposed to receive this passage? Or the ending of the letter, where after coursing through fourteen handwritten pages of disclaimers, confessionals, and monetary and logistical demands, the text closes obsequiously:

I—JUST, Love, your, Checks, in, My POCKETS—"OH" They look so pretty, until, I hate like hell to cash them. Honest to God, I usually keep them as long as I possibly Can. But Suddenly, some Situation raise its "UGLY HEAD." And "bye 'bye Joe Glaser's' signature. "HM . . . It has been such a real Pleasure writing to you, Boss. Hope, I didn't bore you."⁷⁸

Do the apostrophes and underlining, the various manipulations of capitalization and punctuation, aid the reader in comprehending the valence of these words? How would one quantify or measure such an interpretative effect, as Brothers seems to want to do? How does one read (how does one hear Armstrong's "voice" in) a word written surrounded by two quote marks on one side, and three on the other? Is a word underlined four times and surrounded by one single quote and one double quote being given more or less emphasis than a word underlined four times and framed by four apostrophes? Armstrong sometimes went back over his typed letters, correcting spelling and adding words inadvertently left out—but he often also threw in a number of handwritten apostrophes, still adhering to his strange, off-kilter practice. Particularly in the handwritten letters, the exuberance of Armstrong's graphicness makes one wonder whether it should be considered—as Jed Rasula has suggested with regard to the diacritical markings in Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetry manuscripts—as a "visual supplement rather than aural cue."⁷⁹ The graphic accompaniment

in the manuscripts doesn't clarify the writing, in other words. Instead it actually makes them more daunting, giving too much indexical information, pointing in too many directions at once, invading the spaces between words with a thicket of punctuation that threatens to become impenetrable. The letter does not simply express irony, certainly; but neither does it simply transcribe Armstrong's "voice," unless *voice* is taken as another word for such deictic overabundance. It may do all these things and more—and that *excess* of signification may be precisely the effect of Armstrong's writing.

It is thus not sufficient to proclaim that "Armstrong wrote by ear," as Albert Murray does in a review of the Brothers collection, before launching into what is—for one of the great defenders of Armstrong's music—an astoundingly prissy defense of literary standards. Murray excoriates the "illiterate imprecision" of Armstrong's letters and manuscripts, calling them "embarrassingly corny." He adds cruelly (this about an autodidact who had never regularly attended school): "there is very little evidence in any of his published writings that he ever grasped, say, a junior high school-level of competence in the fundamentals of grammar, syntax, and meaning."⁸⁰ One might counter with Gary Giddins that "most of his writing was not intended for public scrutiny in his lifetime,"⁸¹ and at least make an effort to come to terms with the formal peculiarity of a personal letter or private narrative. But I wonder if one cannot make a more complex argument about the workings of all of Armstrong's writing (even the manuscripts prepared for publication), specifically in their relation to music.

Giddins's protestation is inadequate, in the end, if only because Armstrong (who not only wrote but also made hundreds of reel-to-reel tapes of recitations and performances and backstage bull sessions, and then painstakingly decorated the tape boxes with elaborate collages and drawings) is so clearly a *self-archivist*, obsessed with recording technology of every sort. How does one theorize such a long-standing, deliberate practice of archivization, which aims at posterity even if the recordings are not immediately destined for public consumption? (One imagines that the very intimacy of this archiving practice would be all important for a public figure who was so extensively commercially recorded and disseminated.) Just in terms of the formalism of the manuscripts, why would Armstrong's

use of ellipses, for instance, somehow be necessarily less complex than Emily Dickinson's dashes, or Amiri Baraka's open-ended parentheses? Is it possible to read Armstrong's expression in writing while respecting its ambiguity and experimentation, without reducing it *either* to an inanity (a lack of instruction) *or* to a simple functionalism (the representation of orality)?

Scat Aesthetics

I will close by suggesting one way of theorizing what Duke Ellington would call a "parallel" between the forms of Armstrong's performance. Gary Giddins's work on Armstrong has stressed the impossibility of "separating the exalted musician from Armstrong the impish stage wag," and warned of the perils of "underestimating the absurdist humor that informs [Armstrong's] genius." Giddins turns our attention not just to Armstrong's musical creativity but also to his physical presence, specifically his repertoire of wry and insinuating gesture in performances on film.⁸² In the early short *Rhapsody in Black and Blue* (1932), a die-hard fan who's been conked unconscious by his wife (she is furious that he sits around listening to jazz records all day) dreams he is the "King of Jazzmania," sitting on his throne, treated to a command performance by Louis Armstrong. Draped in a ludicrous leopard skin, carrying a handkerchief, and standing up to his ankles in soap bubbles, Armstrong plays and sings "(I'll Be Glad When You're Dead) You Rascal You" and "Shine," with his orchestra behind him in attire that seems designed to connote an oddly regal primitivism. Describing the physicality of Armstrong's performance in films such as *Rhapsody* and in concert footage (including a remarkable 1933 date in Denmark where he performs "Dinah"), Giddins writes that Armstrong's "mugging is so much a part of his performances that it is impossible for anyone who has seen him to listen to his records without imagining his facial contortions. Even when he delivered himself of a ballad, he had an array of expressions—half smiles, a trembling of the lips, a widening of the eyes, a scrunching of the nose—that fit the notes and underscored the lyric. Mugging was a kind of body English done with the face; it was a way of acting out the music."⁸³

Giddins contends that Armstrong in *Rhapsody in Black and Blue* “transcends the racist trappings by his indifference to every sling and arrow. The director/writer is trying to tell the audience one thing. Armstrong is telling it something entirely different—he’s doing it not only with the magnificence of his music, but with his physical muscularity, his carriage, his boding sexuality . . . the look in his eye.”⁸⁴ Or as Giddins puts it earlier, “Genius is the transfiguring agent.”⁸⁵ The reading turns in part on the common assumption that Armstrong “becomes a different man” when he starts playing the trumpet, when he stops mugging and gets down to business.⁸⁶ The implication is that his trumpet playing somehow “trumps” his problematic vocal clowning, and even that Armstrong’s instrumental performance reasserts a sexual prowess and “masculinity” that is somehow undermined or threatened by his singing.

But is it possible to read this scene in terms of “transcendence”? Does one really forget or forgive the leopard skin, the handkerchief, the bugged eyes, the grin, the gaping “Satchel Mouth,” the soap bubbles, the lyrics (“I take troubles all with a smile . . . that’s why they call me Shine”) as soon as Pops picks up the horn? Or is Armstrong’s “absurdist humor” ultimately a tricky willingness to inhabit all these trappings and more? He is the grotesque jester who preens and gapes, disturbing in his willingness to echo the melodramatic performance styles of minstrelsy. He is also the self-assured modernist, who negotiates the trumpet parts with brilliant technique, and injects self-reflexive commentary into his vocal performance, as well. (In one spoken aside during “You Rascal You,” he tosses a line that slyly equates sexual contest with an access to recording technology: “You gave my wife a bottle of Coca-Cola so you could play on her Victrola.”) Moreover, Armstrong’s mugging might not be simply “a way of acting out the music.” What’s striking about his movement is that he’s acting out so much *more* than what’s in the music: facial contortions, chest convulsions, head nods, even mouth movements, shadow pronunciations that don’t correspond to any discernible development in the production of sound. This is not at all “body English” or direct address; instead one sees a spectral presence that seems to jerk and twitch and bulge in the somatic excess of that body. That excess outlines other possibilities, not taken, not voiced. There is no transcendence here; all these elements (at the very

least), all these implications *coexist* in the performance, which is driven throughout by what Giddins more usefully terms Armstrong’s “beguiling knowledge of the anomalous.”⁸⁷ The effect forces the viewer to confront a swinging incommensurability—an untamable, prancing set of contradictory indices that seem to be saying all too much at once.

This deictic complexity is not unique to Armstrong; indeed, it is a key component in black traditions of musical performance. In one section of Nathaniel Mackey’s epistolary fiction, N. describes going to see a Betty Carter concert. He’s struck by the visual component of the performance, the “facial teasing” the singer applies to her songs, “the discrepant play of her precise, near parsimonious delivery against the facial extravagance it’s accompanied by.”⁸⁸ Carter dances around the song, past the song, her body seeming to produce—to “ventriloquize,” N. writes—“a ‘voice’ one synaesthetically ‘saw,’ a ‘voice’ which was not the voice one in fact heard.”⁸⁹ N.’s friend Lambert suggests that this confusion, the “furtiveness of source” of Carter’s voice, actually is geared to give a “utopian foretaste of sourcelessness”: the appearance of pure sound beyond the particular subject, beyond the particular vocal instrument. But that “foretaste,” he adds, is continually “haunted” by “historical debris,” particularly a “history of would-be sources which [are] really subversions, a history it propose[s] an ‘unsourced’ exit from.” Sources that would presume to explain, to delimit, the genesis of that voice. The most obvious example, for Lambert, is minstrelsy, the “historical debris” of distorting stereotypes of the black body in performance. So Carter’s facial extravagance “revels in distortion to show that it’s wise to distortion, immune to presumed equivalence.” (Of course, one would have to consider a whole range of “historical debris” beyond minstrelsy: gender and sexuality, for example. In one interview, Carter talks about this disjuncture in terms that make it clear that gender stereotypes were equally formidable barriers, saying that her physical beauty was “a handicap and also an asset because if an audience looks at a figure first and then you get them quiet enough to listen to the singing, then you have really done something. . . . In the Apollo I would be about eight bars into my tune before anyone realized I was singing. [The comedian] Redd Foxx used to say to me that it was a whole year before he realized I could sing.”⁹⁰) It’s important to note the terms with which N.

describes Carter's furtive voice, its "elusiveness of source which created an illusion of sourcelessness." "It was eerie," he writes. That is, it gives him the heebie-jeebies.

Scat aesthetics distends an expressive medium through the proliferation of index. This is a structural effect, and thus one that can be applied as readily to a linguistic medium as to one like music, which signifies as expressive potentiality, articulating a syntax where in Billie Holiday's phrase the "meaning seems to change." Scat works the "accompaniments of the utterance" in a given medium: in song, the vocal play that liquefies words; in performance, the excessive, oblique physicality of mugging; in writing, the overgrowth of punctuation, self-interruptions, asides, that exceed the purposes of emphasis, intonation, and citation.⁹¹ Inarticulacy is telling because the proliferation of index points at—structurally suggests—an expressive syntax that is unavailable but inferred through its "accompaniments." Scat aesthetics thus involves an augmentation of expressive potential, rather than an evacuation or a reduction of signification. Words drop away from music so that "the unheard sounds [come] through."⁹² The syntax of scat points at something outside the sayable, something seen where it collapses.

two

Toward a Poetics of Transcription: James Weldon Johnson's Prefaces

Ralph Ellison's 1945 *Antioch Review* essay on Richard Wright's autobiography *Black Boy* famously hinges on a compelling definition of the blues. Even if one can cite a number of "literary guides" that may have influenced Wright's work, Ellison writes, still the driving force in the "immediate folk culture" of Wright's early life was not literature but instead a "folk-art form": the "Negro blues." The blues, Ellison explains,

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. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.¹

Ellison defines the blues as a kind of compulsion to record, to hold on to "the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience," and moreover to prolong or revisit that experience, not just as an inert memory but instead as an ongoing ("aching") mode of contemplation in which pain remains throbbingly "alive" in the individual consciousness. Given Ellison's deep engagement with African American music and his early training as a trumpeter,² the definition might seem strikingly distant from any sense of the blues as a musical form. If Ellison does not go quite so far as James Baldwin would two decades later—Baldwin opens his own powerful commentary on the mix of "anguish" and "passionate detachment" in the blues by stressing that he is not writing about music ("I don't know anything about music") but about the "state of being" out of which the music comes—still Ellison's definition seems more concerned with the blues as ethos than with the blues as musical performance.³ Thus he suggests it is

three

The Literary Ellington

One of the main assumptions in thinking about African American creative expression is that music—more than literature, dance, theater, or the visual arts—has been the paradigmatic mode of black artistic production and the standard and pinnacle not just of black culture but of American culture as a whole. The most eloquent version of this common claim may be the opening of James Baldwin's 1951 essay "Many Thousands Gone": "It is only in his music, which Americans are able to admire because a protective sentimentality limits their understanding of it, that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story. It is a story which otherwise has yet to be told and which no American is prepared to hear."¹ Eleven years later, Amiri Baraka put it even more forcefully, excoriating the "embarrassing and inverted paternalism" of African American writers such as Phyllis Wheatley and Charles Chesnutt, and claiming flatly that "there has never been an equivalent to Duke Ellington or Louis Armstrong in Negro writing."² Such presuppositions and hierarchical valuations have been part of the source of a compulsion among generations of African American writers to conceptualize vernacular poetics and to strive toward a tradition of blues or jazz literature, toward a notion of black writing that implicitly or explicitly aspires to the condition of music.

I want to start by juxtaposing these stark claims with an early essay by one of the musicians they so often cite as emblematic. Duke Ellington's first article, "The Duke Steps Out," was published in spring 1931 in a British music journal called *Rhythm*. "The music of my race is something more than the 'American idiom,'" Ellington contends. "It is the result of our transplantation to American soil, and was our reaction in the plantation days to the tyranny we endured. What we could not say openly we expressed in music, and what we know as 'jazz' is something more than just dance music."³ This would seem to be in keeping with an assump-

tion that black music articulates a sense of the world that could not be expressed otherwise—that it "speaks" what cannot be said openly. Yet Ellington, in moving on to describe the African American population of New York City, offers a somewhat different reading of the music that was being produced in that context, specifically in relation to the literature of the Harlem Renaissance that had exploded into prominence in the previous decade. He writes:

In Harlem we have what is practically our own city; we have our own newspapers and social services, and although not segregated, we have almost achieved our own civilisation. The history of my people is one of great achievements over fearful odds; it is a history of a people hindered, handicapped and often sorely oppressed, and what is being done by Countee Cullen and others in literature is overdue in our music.⁴

Here, what we so often suppose to be the dynamics of influence between black music and literature is inverted—in Duke's view, the achievements of the literary Renaissance are a model for his own aspirations in music. He continues: "I am therefore now engaged on a rhapsody unhampered by any musical form in which I intend to portray the experiences of the coloured races in America in the syncopated idiom."⁵ In a remarkably early reference to his lifelong ambition to compose a "tone parallel" to African American history—an ambition that would find partial realization in later works like *Black, Brown and Beige* and *My People*—Ellington makes no apologies for his desire to "attribut[e] aims other than terpsichore to our music."⁶ Indeed, he adds, "I am putting all I have learned into it in the hope that I shall have achieved something really worth while in the literature of music, and that an authentic record of my race *written by a member of it* shall be placed on record."⁷ My aim here is not of course to undermine the importance of black music or to crudely promote the literary at its expense but to begin to challenge some of our assumptions about the relations among aesthetic media in black culture. Looking at the literary Duke, at Ellington as writer and reader, I want to reconsider just what that provocative phrase—"the literature of music"—might mean.

The Uses of the Literary

It is well known that Duke Ellington based a number of his compositions on literary sources. One thinks of the 1943 *New World A-Comin'*, based on the Roi Ottley study of the same name; Ellington's aborted plans to adapt South African novelist Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy* (1946); *Suite Thursday* (1960), the Ellington-Billy Strayhorn suite based on John Steinbeck's 1954 novel *Sweet Thursday*; and the so-called Shakespearean Suite, also known as *Such Sweet Thunder* (1957).⁸ There are many more compositions that involve narrative written by Ellington and/or Strayhorn (either programmatic, recitative, or lyric) in one way or another, including *A Drum Is a Woman* (1956); *The Golden Broom and the Green Apple* (1963); *The River* (1970); and of course the *Sacred Concerts* in the 1960s.⁹ Barry Ulanov has commented that "Duke has always been a teller of tales, three-minute or thirty. . . . He has never failed to take compass points, wherever he has been, in a new city, a new country, a redecorated nightclub; to make his own observations and to translate these, like his reflections about the place of the Negro in a white society, into fanciful narratives."¹⁰

What is remarkable, in this wealth of work, is the degree to which Ellington was consistently concerned with "telling tales" in *language*, not only in sounds—or, more precisely, in both: spinning stories in ways that combined words and music. Almost all the extended works were conceived with this kind of literary component, even though Ellington's attempts at mixing narrative with music were for the most part dismissed by critics. The bizarre and misogynist vocal narration performed by Ellington himself on *A Drum Is a Woman* was mocked as "monotonous" and "pretentious" and as "purple prose," with even favorably disposed reviewers like Barry Ulanov complaining that "there is no point in analyzing the script. Such banality, such inanity, such a hodgepodge does not stand up either to close reading or close listening."¹¹ And yet Duke's desire to write remained constant. Asked to speak to a black church in Los Angeles in 1941 on the subject of Langston Hughes's poem "I, Too," Ellington commented, "Music is my business, my profession, my life . . . but, even though it means so much to me, I often feel that I'd like to say something, have my say, on some of the burning issues confronting us, in another language . . . in words of mouth."¹²

Ellington also wrote poetry. He showed some of his writing to Richard Boyer, who in 1943 was preparing a now-legendary portrait of Ellington for the *New Yorker*: "New acquaintances are always surprised when they learn that Duke has written poetry in which he advances the thesis that the rhythm of jazz has been beaten into the Negro race by three centuries of oppression. The four beats to a bar in jazz are also found, he maintains in verse, in the Negro pulse. Duke doesn't like to show people his poetry. 'You can say anything you want on the trombone, but you gotta be careful with words,' he explains."¹³ Nevertheless, some of Ellington's poems are collected in *Music Is My Mistress* (MM 39–40, 212–213), and there are even a few recordings of Ellington reciting poetry in concert. Some of these performances are whimsical, couched as a humorous interlude to the music, as when Duke recites a short, colloquial quatrain at a Columbia University date in 1964 and prefaces it with the nervous disclaimer that "I wanted to tell it to Billy Strayhorn the other day in Bermuda, and he went to sleep. . . . So I still haven't done it":

Into each life some jazz must fall,
With after-beat gone kickin',
With jive alive, a ball for all,
Let not the beat be chicken!¹⁴

Another example is a poem entitled "Moon Maiden," which Ellington recorded in a session for Fantasy Records on July 14, 1969. He plays celeste on the thirty-six-bar tune, and recites (in an overdub, since he is snapping his fingers, as well) two brief stanzas before taking a solo:

Moon Maiden, way out there in the blue
Moon Maiden, got to get with you
I've made my approach and then revolved
But my big problem is still unsolved
Moon Maiden, listen here, my dear
Your vibrations are coming in loud and clear
Cause I'm just a fly-by-night guy,
But for you I might be quite the right "do right" guy
Moon Maiden, Moon Maiden, Lady de Luna¹⁵

In the liner notes, Stanley Dance comments that this “unique” selection originated when Ellington’s imagination “had been stimulated by the thought of men walking around on the moon, and he had not uncharacteristically visualized their encountering some chicks up there.” These lyrics comprise only one among a number of works that reflect Ellington’s fascination with the space race, like “The Ballet of the Flying Saucers” in *A Drum Is a Woman* (1956), “Blues in Orbit” (1958), “Launching Pad” (1959), and unperformed lyrics like the undated “Spaceman,” with its more lascivious reveries: “I want a spaceman from twilight ’til dawn/When the chicks say there he is he’s really gone/ . . . Give me a spaceman on a moonlit nit [*sic*]/Who can fly further than he’ll admit/One whose cockpit is out of this world/Been around so much he’s even had his stick twirled.”¹⁶

Stanley Dance writes that the “felicitous internal rhymes” of “Moon Maiden” come off Duke’s tongue “as though phrased by plunger-muted brass,” but surely it is important that Ellington conceives the piece as a vocal recitation, not an instrumental number or a sung lyric. Indeed, he had “recorded the number twice as an instrumental, and with at least a couple of singers, but each time he remained dissatisfied.” At one concert around this time, Ellington introduced the piece by saying that “*Moon Maiden* represents my public debut as a vocalist, but I don’t really sing. I’m a pencil cat. My other number will be, *I Want to See the Dark Side of Your Moon, Baby*. . . Extravagance going to the moon? Extravagances have always been accepted as poetic license.”¹⁷ In other words, Ellington was deliberately seeking a kind of rhetorical—and apparently libidinal—excess that he considered to necessitate a poetic form, one in which “extravagances” would be accepted.

I want to focus briefly on what we might term this literary imperative in the Ellington oeuvre, which is not by any means limited to Duke’s efforts at programmatic narrative or poetry. In his brilliant autobiographical suite, *Music Is My Mistress*, Ellington writes of a more general narrative or “storytelling” impulse behind the very process of creating music, arguing for the necessity in music of “painting a picture, or having a story to go with what you were going to play.” He goes on to claim (like a number of other jazz musicians) that soloists could “send messages in what they play,” articulating comprehensible statements to one another on their instruments while on the bandstand. “The audience didn’t know

anything about it, but the cats in the band did,” he adds.¹⁸ But he also noted that “stories” were sometimes necessary to the composition and arrangement process, and often verbalized in language—with Duke talking the band through a new or unfamiliar tune with the guidance of a tall tale or two. The band seldom turned to collaborative arrangements (with all the musicians contributing to the construction of a song), but the anecdotes of that process are legendary, and fascinating for just this reason. Ellington describes it this way:

Still other times I might just sit down at the piano and start composing a little melody, telling a story about it at the same time to give the mood of the piece. I’ll play eight bars, talk a bit, then play another eight and soon the melody is finished. Then the boys go to work on it, improvising, adding a phrase here and there. We don’t write like this very often and when we do it’s usually three o’clock in the morning after we’ve finished a date.

But this is a little off the point. What I am trying to get across is that music for me is a language. It expresses more than just sound.¹⁹

A more vivid description of the same process is provided in Richard Boyer’s “The Hot Bach,” which is worth quoting at some length:

The band rarely works out an entire arrangement collectively, but when it does, the phenomenon is something that makes other musicians marvel. This collective arranging may take place anywhere—in a dance hall in Gary, Indiana, in an empty theatre in Mobile, or in a Broadway night club. It will usually be after a performance, at about three in the morning. Duke, sitting at his piano and facing his band, will play a new melody, perhaps, or possibly just an idea consisting of only eight bars. After playing the eight bars, he may say, “Now this is sad. It’s about one guy sitting alone in his room in Harlem. He’s waiting for his chick, but she doesn’t show. He’s got everything fixed for her.” Duke sounds intent and absorbed. His tired band begins to sympathize with the waiting man in Harlem. “Two glasses of whiskey are on

his little dresser before his bed," Duke says, and again plays the two bars, which will be full of weird and mournful chords. Then he goes on to eight new bars. "He has one of those blue lights turned on in the gloom of his room," Duke says softly, "and he has a little pot of incense so it will smell nice for the chick." Again he plays the mournful chords, developing his melody. "But she doesn't show," he says, "she doesn't show. The guy just sits there, maybe an hour, hunched over on his bed, all alone." The melody is finished and it is time to work out an arrangement for it. Lawrence Brown rises with his trombone and gives out a compact, warm phrase. Duke shakes his head. "Lawrence, I want something like the treatment you gave in 'Awful Sad,'" he says. Brown amends his suggestion and in turn is amended by Tricky Sam Nanton, also a trombone who puts a smear and a wail on the phrase suggested by Brown. . . . Now Juan Tizol grabs a piece of paper and a pencil and begins to write down the orchestration, while the band is still playing it. Whenever the band stops for a breather, Duke experiments with rich new chords, perhaps adopts them, perhaps rejects, perhaps works out a piano solo that fits, clear and rippling, into little slots of silence, while the brass and reeds talk back and forth. By the time Tizol has finished getting the orchestration down on paper, it is already out of date. The men begin to play again, and then someone may shout "How about that train?" and there is a rush for a train that will carry the band to another engagement.²⁰

It is not at all unusual for collaborative musicians and dancers to give each other epigrammatic or narrative clues during the compositional or choreographic process. Here, though, the arrangement seems to *start off* from the narrative, with Duke's self-accompanied performance—the tired band members are drawn into the creative process by the scene Duke sketches as he speaks. Here, in the middle of the night, at the core of what drives the band's extraordinarily creative cohesiveness, is an intimate call-and-response between words and music, narrative instigation and the subsequent musical contextualization of a melody. It is almost a commonplace by now to describe Ellington's music with superlative literary

analogies, as a "drama of orchestration" or a "theatre of perfect timing."²¹ Some critics have gone so far as to write about the "Shakespearean universality" of Ellington's music, contending that it is akin to the Bard's plays "in its reach, wisdom, and generosity, and we return to it because its mysteries are inexhaustible."²² But part of what I am suggesting is that the literary is less an *analogy* for Ellington's music, than an inherent element in his conception of music itself, and a key formal bridge or instigating spur in his compositional process.

A Shakespearean Duke

It seems that Ellington was particularly attracted to the Stratford Shakespeare Festivals in Ontario partly because of the complex creative connections between literature and music fostered there in the late 1950s. The festival was unique in that it featured not only Shakespeare performances but also extensive musical lineups, in effect proposing a dialogue or consonance between aesthetic media. In 1956 the festival presented Benjamin Britten's opera *The Rape of Lucretia*, as well as the Ellington band, Dave Brubeck, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Willie "the Lion" Smith, and the Art Tatum Trio; in 1957 it premiered Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* and programmed Ellington's *Such Sweet Thunder*, as well as Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Gerry Mulligan, and the Teddy Wilson Trio; in 1958 John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* was presented next to the Maynard Ferguson Orchestra, Carmen McRae, the Billy Taylor Trio, the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra, and Henry "Red" Allen and his All Stars, who performed with the poet Langston Hughes. In the program notes to *Such Sweet Thunder*, Ellington commends the 1957 Festival's "awareness" of the "parallel" between Shakespeare and "top-grade jazz," and comments:

There is an increasing interrelationship between the adherents to art forms in various fields. . . . it is becoming increasingly difficult to decide where jazz starts or where it ends, where Tin Pan Alley begins and jazz ends, or even where the borderline lies between classical music and jazz. I feel there is no boundary line,

and I see no place for one if my own feelings tell me a performance is good.

In the final analysis, whether it be Shakespeare or jazz, the only thing that counts is the emotional effect on the listener. Somehow, I suspect that if Shakespeare were alive today, he might be a jazz fan himself—he'd appreciate the combination of team spirit and informality, of academic knowledge and humor, of all the elements that go into a great jazz performance. And I am sure he would agree with the simple and axiomatic statement that is so important to all of us—when it sounds good, it is good. (MM 193)

Here, Ellington slyly pulls the rug out from under the critics who applaud the "Shakespearean" qualities in his music. If anything, in this description of boundary crossing, Shakespeare is revealed to be an Ellingtonian before his time. What unites jazz and Elizabethan drama, for Ellington, is above all a common concern with capturing the vibrant complexity of a particular social milieu. As Billy Strayhorn added in an interview, "Duke also said that the only way Shakespeare could have known as much about people as he did was by hanging out on the corner or in the pool room. He says that if William Shakespeare were alive today, you would surely find him down at Birdland listening to jazz."²³

In 1956, the first time that the orchestra was invited to the festival, Ellington and Strayhorn had been less inspired, offering a set of mainly old hits like "I Got It Bad (and That Ain't Good)" and "Take the 'A' Train." They did offer one selection, though, that seemed geared for the theatrical environs and toward an interest in the "interrelationships" between art forms: "Monologue," also known as "Pretty and the Wolf" (which had first been recorded in 1951). The piece features Ellington with Jimmy Hamilton, Russell Procope, and Harry Carney. The record not only captures Duke's "vagabond syntax" (in Barry Ulanov's description), but also might be heard as an attempt to capture the feeling of one of those late-night arranging session narratives, with Duke narrating a piece to the band. One might hear "Pretty and the Wolf" as a kind of orchestration of that ephemeral process, a version of one of those casual tales spun to incite elaboration and embellishment.

Like the tale Ellington tells the band in the rehearsal recounted in the Boyer article, like "Moon Maiden," and indeed like much of Ellington's writing, "Pretty and the Wolf" is a parable of seduction, as well as an insouciant reflection on African American urban migration (Figure 3.1). "Once upon a time," Duke opens as the three reeds unfurl behind him, "there came to the city a pretty little girl—a little country, but pretty; a little ragged, but a pretty little girl. There she met a man, a city man—smooth—handsome—successful—cool. A well-mannered type man. And since she was pretty, he saw fit to give her an audience, so he talked to her for quite a while." The Wolf, standing on the corner casually twirling his "diamond-studded gold chain," agrees to assist the pretty girl in her ambition to "get somewhere." (The piece's simple conceit turns on the two meanings of the phrase: in other words, the narrative sets up an analogy between sexual conquest and material success.) She obsequiously purrs "Yes, Daddy" at his every suggestion. "And so agreed, they danced," Ellington intones, as Jimmy Woode and Sam Woodyard enter on bass and drums, falling into an infectious swing. But the dynamics of the seduction switch during the dance, a "mad whirl" that leaves the seemingly unflappable city dweller in an amorous "spin." By the end of the two-and-a-half-minute piece, it is no longer the Wolf, but the "pretty girl" who twirls the gold chain. As she "enumerates the various conditions and ways for him to get somewhere, you can hear him say, 'Yes, Baby. Yes, Baby. Yes, Baby.'"²⁴ It is as though Ellington is attempting to perform that singular arranging technique—the music shifting with the bandleader's narrative, taking on shape as his "Monologue" develops. The reeds "spin" in chromatic triplets as the Wolf twirls his chain, rock into rhythm when the characters start dancing, and later wheeze at the close of the piece, punctuating the Wolf's "Yes, Baby" with resignation.

Deeply impressed by the 1956 festival, Ellington and Strayhorn promised to return the next year with a new composition specifically for that context. The result was *Such Sweet Thunder*, which premiered in New York in the spring of 1957 at the Music for Moderns series at Town Hall, and then was performed in Stratford that summer. Ellington explained that "the idea of writing a Shakespearean suite occurred to me during a visit to Anne Hathaway's cottage when we first toured England in 1933. I have often wondered, had I been asked to play for the Bard, what

Pretty and the Wolf - Duke Ellington

Handwritten musical notation for the beginning of the piece, featuring a treble and bass clef staff with a 'rit.' marking.

once upon a time, there came
to the city a pretty little girl - a little country but pretty;

Handwritten musical notation for the first line of lyrics, including a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff.

a little ragged but a pretty little girl there she met a man

Handwritten musical notation for the second line of lyrics, including a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff with 'tr' markings.

Handwritten musical notation for the first line of lyrics on the right page, including a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff.

and since she was pretty,
he saw fit to give her an
audience; oh he talked to her
for quite a while, naturally
she wanted to get somewhere, where
he was already some

Handwritten musical notation for the second line of lyrics on the right page, including a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff with dynamic markings like 'p' and 'f'.

he was standing on a corner twirling his diamond studded gold chain

Handwritten musical notation for the third line of lyrics on the right page, including a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff with triplet markings.

around his finger, and as he enumerates the various
conditions and ways for her to get some where, you can hear her say:

Handwritten musical notation for the fourth line of lyrics on the right page, including a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff.

yes baby yes baby yes baby and so my dear

Handwritten musical notation for the fifth line of lyrics on the right page, including a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff with 'tr' markings.

Figure 3.1 Two pages from one of draft scores (made by copyist Tom Whaley) for Ellington's "Pretty and the Wolf," Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

devices I would have used to impress him. Consequently, I was very pleased when it was suggested that I compose a work for the Shakespearean Festival in Stratford, Ontario, since I found Shakespeare as performed there to be a thrilling experience."²⁵ The suite is constructed around "parallels" to the stories of a number of Shakespearean characters, including Othello, Julius Caesar, Henry V, Lady Macbeth, Puck, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet.

"It was the preparation that was tremendous," Billy Strayhorn told Stanley Dance later. "We read all of Shakespeare!"²⁶ He told another interviewer:

You have to adjust your perspective, you know, as to just what you're going to do, and what you're going to say, and what you're going to say it about, and how much of it is supposed to be coming . . . and this included also consultations with two or three Shakespearean actors and authorities, you know. We'd sit down and discuss for hours . . . And it was a matter of just deciding finally [that] on one album we're not gonna parallel any, you know, anything of Shakespeare. . . . You need a thousand writers and a thousand years to do it . . . to cover Shakespeare. So, we'll say well we'll just devote one number to one Shakespearean word, or one Shakespearean phrase, you know, something like that. Just like "Lady Mac," you know.²⁷

Ellington described the process more figuratively—and with characteristic irreverence: "I kept thinking what a dandy song Lady Macbeth would make. The girl has everything. Noble birth, a hot love story, murder—even a ghost. Then there's Othello and Desdemona. There's a swinging story for you. What a melodrama! What a subject for the blues. Blues in the night!"²⁸

I would argue that this transformation of Shakespeare is doing work very different from other black expressive appropriations one might assume are similar, like Langston Hughes's poem "Shakespeare in Harlem":

Hey ninny neigh!
And a hey nonny noe!

Where, oh, where
Did my sweet mamma go?
Ney ninny neigh
With a tra-la-la!
They say your sweet mama
Went home to her ma.²⁹

Ellington and Strayhorn do not place Shakespeare *in* Harlem, challenging our preconceptions about "high" and "low" art in the process.³⁰ Instead, *Such Sweet Thunder* is above all a *reading* of Shakespeare—perhaps *from* Harlem—and an elaborate reading at that. In the liner notes to the album, Duke describes the title cut (featuring Ray Nance on trumpet) as "the sweet and singing, very convincing story Othello told Desdemona. It must have been the most, because when her father complained and tried to have her marriage annulled, the Duke of Venice said that if Othello had said this to his daughter, she would have gone for it too."³¹ The point is that the speech of seduction is not given in the play itself: here, the music fills the silences or interstices of Shakespeare's work. It imagines what cannot be or is not given in the written language—aiming to capture in sound the enthralling effect of Othello's violent and bloody tales of his life as a soldier. And to do so, the music "rhymes" *Othello* with an entirely different moment from another play, as Barry Ulanov has noted:

On stage Ellington introduces each "major work" with a vagabond syntax that makes one wonder why he bothers. But if one listens carefully, both to the words and the music, one discovers why. One finds, for example, that in titling a piece about *Othello* with a quotation from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ("I never heard so musical a discord, such sweet thunder"), he has gone right to the root of Othello's problem. His blunt and jazzy explanation is probably closer to the substance of the play than the long and involuted commentaries of most Shakespearean scholars.³²

David Hajdu has commented that the Ellington-Strayhorn suites, even when inspired by literary characters, are in no way "traditional descriptive music."³³ Ellington writes in a press release for the Stratford Festival,

"In the suite I am attempting to parallel the vignettes of some of the Shakespearean characters in miniature . . . sometimes to the point of caricature."³⁴

Tone Parallels

Indeed, Ellington seems to choose the word *parallel* carefully to describe the way *Such Sweet Thunder* interprets the Shakespearean texts. It is a term that Ellington used more than any other to describe his longer works, such as the 1951 "(A Tone Parallel to) Harlem," the 1943 *New World A-Comin'*, which he called "a parallel to Roi Ottley's book,"³⁵ and *Black, Brown and Beige* (1943), which was originally titled "A Tone Parallel," and which Ellington described as "a tone parallel to the history of the American Negro" (MM 181). Whereas before *Black, Brown and Beige*, Ellington and Strayhorn sometimes speak more loosely about music "portraying" the world, or about the necessity to "translate" experience into the arena of sound, by the mid-1940s they begin use the term *parallel*, seemingly to specify the effects and requisites of *musical* transcription, without relying on reference to another art form (as in "tone poem," "portrait," or "translation"). The term is sometimes used in a sense that connotes a kind of mimesis, aesthetic reflection, as in *Music Is My Mistress*, where Ellington says that "composers try to parallel observations made through all the senses" (MM 457). Elsewhere, in sketching a history of black music, he describes the "Negro musician" as "strongly influenced by the type of music of his time, and the black beat was his foundation. . . . The music of his time—and sound devices—were always parallel to the progress of science, medicine, and labor. When you pick the jazz musician of any period, if he happens to be one of the many unique performers, you may be sure he always reflects what's happening in his time" (MM 413). But Ellington's use of the term usually avoids formalizing whatever that artistic reflection might involve. *Parallel* has interesting implications for an Ellingtonian understanding of the relation between music and literature in particular, since it offers a metaphor not of crossing, transferal, or import—much less grafting or mixing—but instead of simultaneous

and equivalent movement through space and time. Ellington and Strayhorn seem to favor this sense of an exact match in development, a structure of reflection without primacy, in a term that implicitly respects the distances between expressive media.

Ellington also seems to understand the term *parallel* in a structural sense, indicating the "musical" use of a literary form. The four pieces called "sonnets," for instance ("Sonnet for Caesar," "Sonnet for Hank Cinq," "Sonnet in Search of a Moor," and "Sonnet for Sister Kate"), are "different in mood, orchestration, and rhythm, but have in common, as Ellington scholar Bill Dobbins points out, fourteen phrases of ten notes each, musically mirroring the fourteen lines of iambic pentameter (ten syllables) that make up the literary sonnet Shakespeare favored."³⁶ This effect is particularly marked in Jimmy Hamilton's stately clarinet melody in "Sonnet for Caesar" and Jimmy Woode's plucked-bass statement in "Sonnet in Search of a Moor"—both of which are woven out of a series of ten-note two-measure phrases. But it is also apparent in the theme in A-flat (framed by two blustery blues choruses) played by trombonist Britt Woodman in "Sonnet to Hank Cinq." Ellington's pencil manuscript for "Sonnet for Sister Kate" (which characteristically identifies the trombone solo simply with Quentin Jackson's nickname, "Butter") actually numbers the two-bar phrases of the melody from one to fourteen.³⁷ Of course, this is an odd and somewhat convoluted way to "parallel" the Shakespearean texts, since the dialogue in the plays is not in sonnet form. It is a bit like writing a book of short stories inspired by Beethoven's symphonies, and calling some of the stories "etudes" or "sonatas." Still, the choice evidences the attempt by Ellington and Strayhorn to structure their portraits or caricatures by deliberately adopting the phrasing structure required by a literary stanza form. The "parallel" is staged, in other words, both on a level one might term representational, or even interpretive (the bass suggests the gravity of Othello, perhaps; a medium-tempo blues indicates the swagger of "Hank Cinq") and simultaneously on a structural level.

The other way that *Such Sweet Thunder* "reads" Shakespeare is a strategy that Ellington and Strayhorn take with most of their tone parallels. Particularly in the titles of the pieces, they play with puns and

homonyms, not just for humorous effect but also to highlight the phonemic registers of the Shakespearean text. Strayhorn told one interviewer, "Sonnet in Search of a Moor" was "triple entendre, because it was, you know, you had to decide whether we were talking about Othello, or whether we were talking about love [that is, *amour*], or whether we were talking about the moors [the Scottish lowlands] where the three witches were, you know."³⁸ This is a familiar practice, when one examines the discography: John Steinbeck's novel *Sweet Thursday* becomes *Suite Thursday*, embedded in *Toot Suite* is the French for "right away" (*tout de suite*), and likewise I would suggest that we are asked to hear "suite" in "Such Sweet Thunder." This operation privileges the sound of words over the particular ways they are written on the page. Again, it underlines the specific parameters of a musical "parallel," an interpretive mode that reads by "hearing" phonemically at a certain distance from the literary source text (divining thereby, for instance, that the proper musical form to represent Steinbeck's novel is a "suite"). It brings sound to the fore, as it were, places sound before sense, in a spirit of semantic disturbance or "fugitivity" that Nathaniel Mackey, among others, has argued is endemic to black traditions of literate and musical expression alike.³⁹

This effect is related to what is sometimes considered to be a "trick" that Ellington trumpet players resorted to in performance: playing "words" on their horns in a manner to imitate the relative pitch of English pronunciation.⁴⁰ The most famous example is Cootie Williams's exclamation of "Harlem!" on his trumpet in the 1951 composition "(A Tone Parallel to) Harlem" (MM 189). But in *Such Sweet Thunder* there's another, in the section called "Up and Down, Up and Down (I Will Lead Them Up and Down)," based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Puck, played by Clark Terry in this rendition, comments on the foolish love tangles of the couples (Jimmy Hamilton and Ray Nance on clarinet and violin, and Russell Procope and Paul Gonsalves on alto and tenor saxophones) by "pronouncing" on his trumpet what is perhaps the most famous quotation in the play: "Lord, what fools these mortals be" (3.2.115). To take up an Ellingtonian vocabulary, one might say that in this sense, the suites strive to "insinuate the sonic dimension" in the literary.

Literature and Social Significance

To come to terms with Ellington's sense of the "literature of music," it is necessary to consider in more detail that work he announced so grandly in 1931, the "rhapsody unhampered by any musical form" designed to parallel the "experiences of the coloured races in America in the syncopated idiom." As I argued at the outset of this chapter, for Ellington the literary is not only a medium to parallel in sound, or a poetic mode that allows the expression of libidinal excess; in addition, especially in the compositions he came to call his "social-significance thrusts" (MM 183), the literary is closely bound up with Ellington's sense of the historical.

Ellington had spoken in the 1930s of a "tone parallel to the history of the American Negro" (MM 181) with five sections, tracing a trajectory of diaspora starting with the African past and moving through the experience of slavery, the role of blacks in the development of the United States (particularly in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War), the great migration to the urban centers of the north in the early twentieth century, and the future. The piece that came closest to embodying this project, though, the 1943 *Black, Brown and Beige*, which premiered on January 23, 1943, at Carnegie Hall in a benefit concert for Russian war relief, comprised only three movements.⁴¹ "Black" focused on slavery, drawing on early work songs and spirituals, "Brown" "recognized the contribution made by the Negro to this country in blood" (MM 181), and "Beige" followed the rise of a black community in Harlem. Ellington gave spoken introductions to each section, which form the basis of his description of the suite in *Music Is My Mistress* (181–182).⁴² One programmatic narrative, the introduction to "Emancipation Celebration," one of the short dances in *Brown*, was preserved on the recording of the second Carnegie Hall concert in December 1943 when the orchestra played selections from the composition:

And now another short portion of "Brown" which represents the period after the Civil War, where we find many young free Negroes who are happy with so much opportunity in front of them, and just behind them a couple of very old people who are free but have nothing and no place to go, and of course it's very dark

for them. And we find a duet representing the old people and the solos representing the younger people. This is "The Lighter Attitude."⁴³

As Brian Priestly and Alan Cohen point out in the first detailed musicological analysis of *Black, Brown and Beige*, the relationship between such a programmatic introduction and the music that follows is not necessarily transparent: thus it is not easy to track, in listening to "Emancipation Celebration," a particular moment in the music when one hears the entrance of "a couple of very old people who are free but have nothing and no place to go."⁴⁴ The point is that the narrative is intended neither simply to elucidate the development of the music, nor simply to "sell" the grand sweep of the piece to a potentially resistant audience. Ellington's statement here, in fact, may not deserve the designation "programmatic" at all, at least in any straightforward sense of the term (that is, a narrative that drives the musical composition, providing an audible motivation for its structure). Although the language here gestures toward the historical ("the period after the Civil War"), it also engages in a register of sometimes playful metaphor and double entendre ("This is 'The Lighter Attitude'") and rhetorical obliquity ("of course it's very dark for them") that cannot be easily categorized as a historicist, fact-driven representation of the past. In other words, Ellington's narrative introductions are not at all glosses, or the uneasy discursive cement between weakly linked segments—they are integral to the structure of *Black, Brown and Beige*. They provide a literary component of the performance that is constitutive because outside or beyond (but "parallel" to) the music itself.

Critic Graham Lock, in his excellent book *Blutopia*, has considered in more detail the ambitions of Ellington's music as history. Lock contends that for Ellington, music serves as "an alternative form of history" in a mode of creative expression that might be termed "Blutopia": "a utopia tinged with the blues," a mode "where visions of the future and revisions of the past become part of the same process, a 'politics of transfiguration,' in which accepted notions of language, history, the real, and the possible are thrown open to question and found wanting."⁴⁵ Placing Ellington's work in what some music historians would consider unfamiliar territory (in juxtaposition to the music of Sun Ra and Anthony Braxton), Lock re-

veals the innovative futurism that is a sometimes overlooked element in Ellington's aesthetic, while at the same time demonstrating the engagement of Ra and Braxton with supposedly "traditional" issues of historical representation and racial politics. In the process, Lock offers a number of fresh readings of the Ellington-Strayhorn oeuvre, from the "jungle music" of Ellington's early period in Harlem in the late 1920s (78–91), to a number of the later extended works, including *Jump for Joy* (93–97); *The Deep South Suite* (97–101); *Black, Brown and Beige* (102–118); and *A Drum Is a Woman* (137–141).

Here I will question only one component of Lock's theoretical framing, a presupposed antidiscursivism that reduces Ellington to a position that "music can be used to say that which cannot be stated openly" (78). Lock takes this antidiscursive stance in the very subtitle of his opening chapter on Ellington's music, called "In the Jungles of America: History without Saying It" (77). Lock makes this argument most forcefully in his reading of the purely instrumental *Deep South Suite*, which premiered in 1946 at Carnegie Hall, and which for Lock was driven by a "more pointed subtext" of racial protest than was apparent in Ellington's discussions of the suite, or even in his description of it nearly thirty years later in *Music Is My Mistress* (MM 184). In the autobiography, Ellington recounts an anecdote about a party after the concert, where William Morris Jr. approached him to complain that the piece was too timid in its protest. Ellington writes: "You should've said it plainer," he kept insisting. "You should have said it plainer!" He was for out-and-out protest, but as with *Jump for Joy*, I felt it was good theatre to say it without saying it. That is the art" (MM 185).

Lock assumes that the notion of a history "without saying it" was one of Ellington's "guiding aesthetic principles" (95). But even given the *Deep South Suite* anecdote, this would seem a difficult argument to make about a great deal of Ellington's oeuvre. Indeed, a number of the scholars who have traced Ellington's musical development, including Mark Tucker, have noted the prevalence of programmatic, narrative, and multimedia work among his key influences.⁴⁶ Tucker stresses not just Ellington's exposure to innovative and hybrid forms such as the Cotton Club revues and Lew Leslie's Blackbirds shows that dominated the New York musical theater scene in the late 1920s, but also Ellington's upbringing in

Washington, DC. Tucker notes Ellington's exposure to "Negro history" and heritage programs early in his childhood and speculates in particular that the elaborate pageants that were produced in black communities throughout the country in the 1910s and 1920s greatly affected Ellington's sense of the way that history should be depicted in artistic expression. These included sweeping allegorical works like *The Evolution of the Negro in Picture, Song, and Story* (which played at the Howard Theatre in 1911), *The Open Door* (which played at Carnegie Hall in 1921, with music featuring the Clef Club Orchestra), and especially W. E. B. Du Bois's magisterial pageant *The Star of Ethiopia*, a performance that premiered in 1913 and was reprised in 1915 in Washington. *The Star of Ethiopia* attempted nothing less than to encapsulate "10,000 years of the history of the Negro race."⁴⁷ Du Bois drafted the spectacle as an outdoor, participatory lesson in the African diaspora, what biographer David Levering Lewis has described as an almost unimaginably grandiose "three-hour extravaganza in six episodes, featuring a thousand creamy-complexioned young women and tawny, well-built men, and flocks of schoolchildren marching through history." The music featured not only two selections from Verdi's *Aida* but also new pieces from a number of black composers, including Bob Cole, Rosamond Johnson, and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. The range of historical information condensed into the pageant was itself mind-boggling: three young women dressed to represent the regal African past (Sheba, Ethiopia, and Meroe) were "serially replaced center stage by a pharaoh, Mali's fourteenth-century Islamic ruler Mansa Musa, Columbus's pilot Alonzo; moaning slaves in chains; Spanish lancers; Toussaint L'Ouverture; Sojourner Truth; Frederick Douglass; and, to the accompaniment of rolling drums, the Massachusetts regiment of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw; followed by children, the professions, and the working class." A narrator extolled Africa's gifts to the world, including iron and fire, the great civilization of Egypt, and then a parade of spiritual values, with performers meant to portray "Faith in Righteousness, then Humility, and the gift of 'Struggle Toward Freedom' and finally 'the Gift of Freedom for the workers'—all this in 'a great cloud of music that hovered over them and enveloped them.'"⁴⁸

Beyond these early influences in Washington, the work by Ellington that led most directly to *Black, Brown and Beige* (discussions of writing

his "tone parallel" with journalists in the 1930s, the film *Symphony in Black* in 1935, the musical revue *Jump for Joy* in 1941) evidences an interest in explicit and discursive history, pointing toward the literary and narrative experiments that would become such an integral part of his music. For instance, the film *Symphony in Black: A Rhapsody of Negro Life* was produced in December 1934 and early 1935 at Paramount's Eastern Service Studios in Astoria. Especially compared with the early film appearances of other African American musicians such as Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong,⁴⁹ *Symphony in Black* is remarkable if for no other reason than the unprecedented and dignified depiction of Ellington as a black composer commissioned to perform a "symphony" in a concert hall. But one should not overlook its clear narrative and allegorical aspirations. The film opens with a carefully planned shot of Ellington at his piano, composing music for the premiere of the "symphony" in pencil on a manuscript score. After this thirty-second introduction, the film segues through four sections indicated by handwritten titles that the film implies are written on Ellington's manuscript: "The Laborers," with a theme based on work songs played in accompaniment to sharply angled and heavily shadowed "images of black men shoveling coal into blast furnaces and carrying bales on a river wharf";⁵⁰ a second set piece called "A Triangle," portraying a lover's betrayal in three movements ("Dance," "Jealousy," and "Blues"—featuring a version of "Saddest Tale" sung memorably by Billie Holiday, in her first film appearance); a "Hymn of Sorrow," portraying a black minister leading his congregation in a stylized mourning ceremony; and "Harlem Rhythm," shot with the Ellington orchestra in a nightclub apparently based on the Cotton Club, with the dancer Earl "Snakehips" Tucker. What is notable even in this early composition, again, is Ellington's insistence on a narrative framing—here, one that interestingly combined the sentimental romance of much of Ellington's poetry and short prose (in the section called "A Triangle") with the emblematic historicism of "The Laborers" and the near ethnographic expressionism of the scenes of contemporary Harlem nightlife.

Nearly ten years later, *Black, Brown and Beige* marked a narrowing of this programmatic frame into a register of historical representation. Indeed, the so-called *Black, Brown and Beige* controversy emerged only partly around Ellington's foray into the concert hall, and the debate over

whether jazz could provide the foundation of long-form musical composition.⁵¹ It was most explicitly articulated in terms of the way *Black, Brown and Beige* “says it”: in terms of the suite’s programmatic form, its attempt to “parallel the history of the American Negro” by combining spoken narrative, song lyrics (in the “Blues” in *Brown*), and the instrumental music itself. Almost all the major critics castigated not just the piece’s length (many snidely suggested he restrain himself to the length of a record side: “Mr. Ellington can make some two dozen brief air-tight compositions out of *Black, Brown and Beige*. He should.”) but more specifically its literary components and historicist baggage. Mike Levin opined sourly that “I don’t think the music needs any such ‘programmatic’ prop,” and Paul Bowles, reviewing for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, reserved his most dismissive words for the work’s “ideological” frame, claiming that “presented as one number it was formless and meaningless. In spite of Mr. Ellington’s ideological comments before each ‘movement,’ nothing emerged but a gaudy potpourri of tutti dance passages and solo virtuoso work.”⁵² In fact, Barry Ulanov was one of the few critics who later countered that a listener’s “understanding and appreciation of the work will, however, be considerably heightened if you bear Duke’s program in mind while listening to the music.”⁵³ Ulanov’s spirited defense of the programmatic ambition of Ellington’s composition is worth quoting here:

The fact that [*Black, Brown and Beige*] is not written in the sonata form and therefore is not a symphony, the fact that it is programmatic, these are not limitations from Duke’s point of view or from that of sympathetic auditors whose listening experience in some way duplicates Ellington’s. Duke, contrary to the arrogant dismissal of his musical equipment and knowledge, could have written . . . a symphony or string quartet or oratorio or opera; he chose, instead, to write a “tone parallel,” in which jazz virtuosi, in solo and in section and in band ensemble, gave vigorous interpretation to his phrases, some rough, some tender, all colorful and all directed to a narrative point.⁵⁴

Lock adopts the phrase “without saying it” directly from Ellington, in a passage from *Music Is My Mistress* devoted to the revue *Jump for Joy*,

where he writes: “I think a statement of social protest in the theatre should be made without saying it, and this calls for the real craftsman” (MM 180). But *Jump for Joy*, a vibrant West Coast production that involved collaborators such as Langston Hughes, Mickey Rooney, Dorothy Dandridge, Big Joe Turner, and lyricist Paul Webster, was a compilation of sketches, dances, and songs expressly designed “to correct the race situation in the U.S.A. through a form of theatrical propaganda” (MM 175). Lock himself admits that it “was possibly the most outspoken project [Ellington] was involved in” (95). Ellington pens the sentence about social protest not in reference to the discursive content of the show (its song lyrics and spoken sketches—many of which were openly ideological) but in reference to a debate about whether the comedians in the show should put on blackface:

I had stopped all the comedians from using cork on their faces when they worked with us. Some objected before the show opened, but removed it, and were shocked by their success. As the audience screamed and applauded, comedians came off stage smiling, and with tears running down their cheeks. They couldn’t believe it. I think a statement of social protest in the theatre should be made without saying it, and this calls for the real craftsman. (MM 180)

This is a much more subtle point about the strategy of critiquing racist stereotypes in theatrical representation: it asks, if anything, for a certain subtlety in the manipulation of specifically *visual* signifiers, without coming anywhere near demanding a simple reticence or shying away from linguistic expression. As I have already pointed out, this passage in no way dampens Ellington’s continuing conviction that an effective mode of “propaganda” had to combine art forms—and specifically that it had to include a literary element.

Ellington seems to have decided, in the wake of the journalistic criticism of *Black, Brown and Beige*, that the programmatic mix of narrative and instrumental music was not successful, and as Lock points out, he never performed the entire suite again in public. Yet this traumatic rejection became the impetus for Ellington to write *more*, not less. Ellington

penned a never-published manuscript (thirty-eight typed pages) that seems designed to parallel the music of *Black, Brown and Beige*, following the progress of an African slave named Boola from bondage to freedom, and (in the *Beige* section) into Harlem, the modern black metropolis. In Ellington's verse narrative, the music—work songs, spirituals, blues, and finally jazz—charts the drive to emancipation and modernity among New World black populations: "Out of this deep dream of freedom/Evolved the blessed release/Of freedom of expression in song."⁵⁵ But in the end, the narrative also argues that the music is *not* enough, that the "song" of the American Negro does not tell the whole story—that the music has been "categorized," perverted, and commercialized to the degree that it doesn't speak for the full wealth of black modernity:

HARLEM! Black metropolis!

Land of mirth!

Your music has flung

The story of 'Hot Harlem'

To the four corners

Of the earth!

...

The picture drawn by many hands

For many eyes of many races.

But did it ever speak to them

Of what you *really* are?

Did it say to them

That all your striving

To take your rightful place with men

Was more than jazz and jiving?

...

It can't be true

That all you do . . .

Is dance and sing

And moan!

Harlem . . . for all her moral lurches

Has always had

LESS cabarets than churches!⁵⁶

Interestingly, the proposition here would seem to be that the music is inadequate, alone—that by itself it is open to misinterpretation ("But did it ever speak to them/Of what you *really* are?"). Even though the music has "flung/The story of 'Hot Harlem'/To the four corners/Of the earth," it cannot transport the truth of black strivings for political justice and historical retribution. If anything, it remains mired in easy racist stereotype and cliché ("jazz and jiving"). In a startling apostrophe, departing from the allegorical narrative of Boola to address its own historical referent and end point ("HARLEM"), here Ellington's verse narrative announces its own indispensable "parallel" role in the project of *Black, Brown and Beige*.

Ellington's difficulty, in other words, was ultimately methodological: how does one stage such a parallel? How does one bring such a verse narrative into conjuncture with a musical composition, without falling into a mode of expression that would be heavy-handed or unwieldy or scattered? This is a problem that Ellington does not solve. It haunts all his larger works after *Black, Brown and Beige*—all of which are at least in part motivated by an attempt to unearth the elusive definition of that suggestive phrase, "the literature of music." Duke continued to yearn for the proper structure, even as he declined to perform *Black, Brown and Beige* in full again. In June 1943 *Variety* reported that Ellington was even going to attempt to literalize his aesthetic of parallel, placing narrative and music (score) into one publication:


Duke Ellington is preparing a book explaining the story behind his much-discussed composition, "Black, Brown and Beige," which he debuted during his orchestra's recent Carnegie Hall, N.Y. concert. Leader [*sic*] feels that detailing the thoughts which motivated the work will help toward a better understanding of it: to this end the story will be printed on the upper half of each page in the book, with the music related to each portion below on the same page so that readers with a knowledge of music can follow both at the same time.⁵⁷

In 1956 Ellington told another interviewer that he had "almost completed" *Black, Brown and Beige* "as a stage presentation: songs and narration and all that. . . . Now I want to do *Black, Brown and Beige* with a narration

and tell all the things about the Negro in America—the Negro's contributions and so on." When the interviewer asks him to explain the scope of the piece, Ellington hesitates, and then says: "Maybe you should *read* it." "You got a script?" the interviewer responds, and Ellington says, "I have a thing I wrote a long time ago—some of it might be changed now." Even here, he seems uncertain of the status of his writing in the larger composition, calling it variously a "screenplay," a "script," and "annotations" to the music. Ellington adds that he's trying to add song lyrics for the spiritual theme (most likely "Come Sunday," which was recorded in 1958 with Mahalia Jackson singing the lyrics), the work song, and the Emancipation Celebration section; but he doesn't know yet if the words he's written are "adequate."⁵⁸

Autobiography and the Dream Book

It is only appropriate that by the end of his life Ellington consistently projected this effort to practice a "literature of music" into the realm of eschatology.⁵⁹ Both the tortured quest for compositional form and a spiritual register are evident, for instance, in Ellington's only book, the autobiographical suite *Music Is My Mistress*, published in 1973. Mercer Ellington has commented wryly on the "undoubtedly unique" composition of his father's "autobiography," which Duke wrote slowly and haphazardly while on tour, scribbling fragments "on hotel stationery, table napkins, and menus from all over the world."⁶⁰ (The book was subsequently "deciphered," thoroughly edited, and assembled by jazz critic and biographer Stanley Dance, who nonetheless would only let Ellington give him a minor credit in the book's acknowledgments.) In this sense, the composition of the vignettes and portraits that make up the book can also be read as a diffuse travel itinerary, recording the places the Ellington orchestra passed through in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). Reading the fragments and notes gives a sense not just of the intermittent travails of Duke's memory but also of the incredibly diverse variety of the scenes where he wrote, especially the hotels that allowed brief moments of literary work in his hectic concert travels. For example, Ellington's description, near the beginning of *Music Is My Mistress*, of Frank Holliday's poolroom on T Street near the Howard Theatre in Washington, DC (23),

HOTELS
 **Ambassador**
 CHICAGO
 The ^{Question} ~~Discussion~~ of New & Old - Young & ^{MUSIC} old musician - always I seem to be ^{convinced} ~~designed~~ to Defeat me - But then I must take into Consideration the Power of the Question of Just How to Come from someone who is that aware of what is really going on today - they I imagine are speaking up the kids in the Top 40 who get the most publicity - like the kids who are Rebellion, or Purse Pat or Auntie who the ^{unsub} ~~unsub~~ in various & sundry forms of Unlawful Release -
 The other words the Naught kid, always get they ^{Proton} ~~Proton~~ on TV in newspapers etc the ^{Construction} ~~Construction~~ ^{gangs} ~~gangs~~ who are doing some ^{thing} ~~thing~~ Normal & Behaving like ^{clean} ~~clean~~ Progressive Individuals - Preparing themselves for a Responsible Position in the Society of Today & Tomorrow is never mentioned ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{music} ~~music~~ ^{picture} ~~picture~~ - there are many wonderful bands & individuals preparing themselves for a possible career even more

A LOEW'S HOTEL

Figure 3.2 Page from Ellington's notes for *Music Is My Mistress*, Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

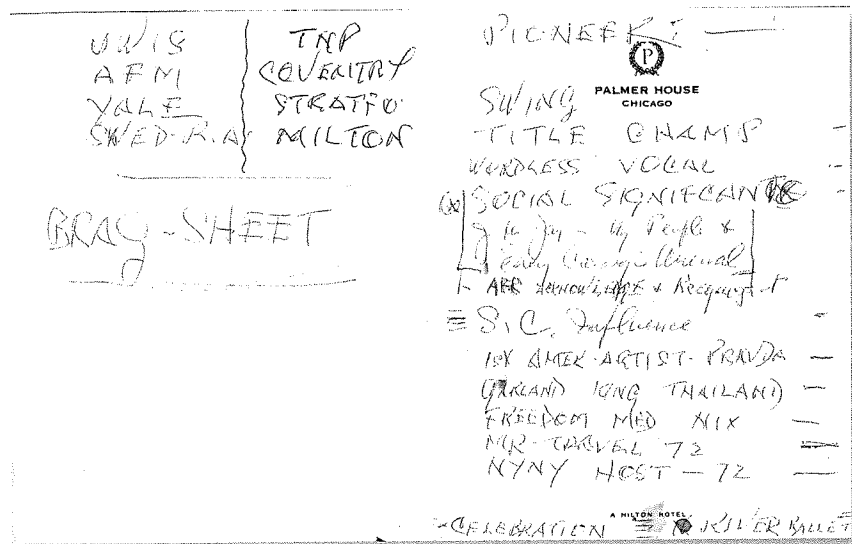


Figure 3.3 Page from Ellington's notes for *Music Is My Mistress*.

is written on stationery from the DC Hilton Hotel. A section of the faux “interview” that closes the book (455), where he considers the value of “new music” in the 1960s, appears on pages from the Fairmont Hotel in Dallas. In another stolen moment, Duke jots down a few paragraphs on the great stride pianist Luckeyeth Roberts (104) on a pad from the Waldorf Astoria in New York. His proud description of the band’s concert at the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar is composed on paper from the Desoto Hilton in Savannah, Georgia, in a thick black felt-tip scribble. The opening fable used as the book’s prologue—“Once upon a time a beautiful young lady and a very handsome young man fell in love and got married. They were a wonderful, compatible couple, and God blessed their marriage with a fine baby boy” (x)—appears on stationery from the Baltimore Hilton. On paper from the Steigenberger Park Hotel in Düsseldorf, Germany, Duke scrawls portraits of Al Hibbler (223–224) and Johnny Hodges (116–119), while he pens the section about his early days in New York with lyricist Joe Trent (70–71) and the anecdote about his 1962 recording session with Max Roach and Charles Mingus (242–44) under the letterhead of the Ambassador Hotel in Chicago.

During this period, Ellington was increasingly concerned with spiritual matters. He channeled much of his religious sensibility into the three *Sacred Concerts*, but it also became more and more part of his daily life, as he collected religious readings and meditations during the band’s tours. His papers contain an assortment of Bibles that fans and correspondents had given him, as well as religious broadsides and pamphlets from various sources—Jewish prayer books, programs from Catholic masses, Unitarian tracts, and an assortment of more obscure literature.⁶¹ He seems not to have paid close attention to the majority of this material, taking what was presented to him, and studying his personal copy of the Bible with the deepest care. One of the few other items that Ellington read assiduously in these years was a pocket-size pamphlet called *Forward Day by Day*, a “manual of daily Bible readings” published by the Forward Movement in Cincinnati, Ohio, which he received in periodic installments from the summer of 1968 until the spring of 1973.

Ellington seldom underlines the texts of these readings, and when he does, he usually highlights quotes from the scriptures that have to do with music. In the *Forward Day by Day* selection for March 17, 1973 (Figure 3.4), for example, when the band was playing an extended gig at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto, Ellington underlines only one phrase, “who gives songs in the night,” from an epigraph from the book of Job: “Men cry out; they call for help. . . . ‘Where is God my maker, who gives songs in the night?’”⁶² This is not to say that Duke leaves the books pristine, though: in fact, he marks up these daily prayer books heavily, with busy cross-hatches, long vertical lines, corner flourishes, and brackets that swirl around the margins of the texts. This odd, even compulsive graphicity must be read as concurrent with or concomitant to his reading, but not directly reflective of it—the markings have a consistency day to day and through the months that seems to have little to do with the texts he’s reading. One might understand this graphicity as “parallel” to his reading, then, in the Ellingtonian sense of the term. The marks don’t represent or translate the words he reads, as much as they move alongside the text, filling the margins, with what might be closer to a “musical” form of inscription than a linguistic one. Duke’s recourse to the pen could even be called a *scoring* of the books, in at least two senses: both as a marking or incision that interrupts or cuts the words on the page, and as the record of

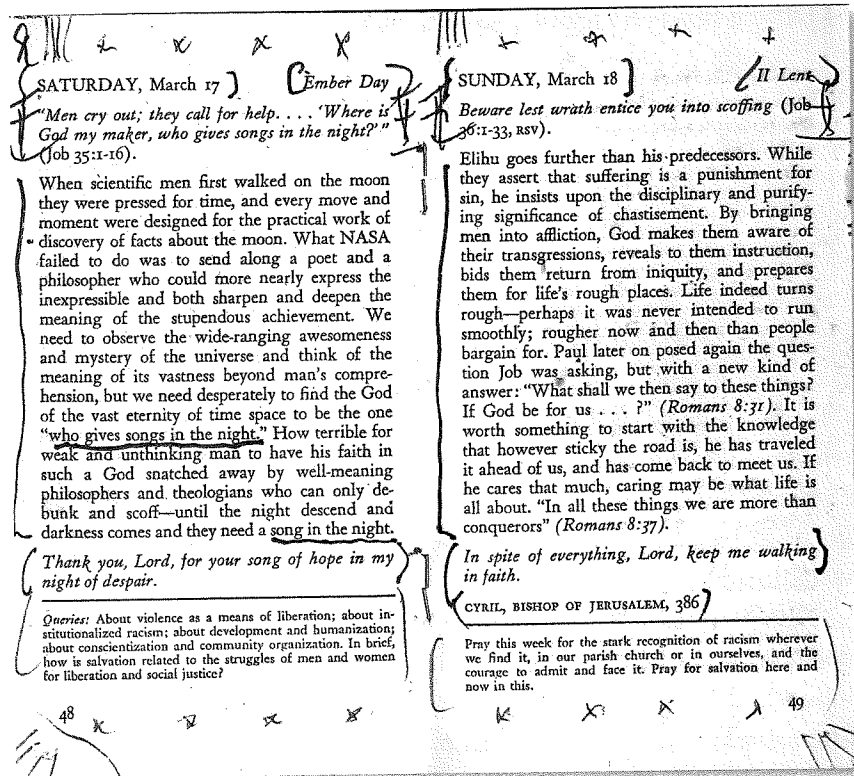


Figure 3.4 Page from Ellington's personal copy of *Forward Day by Day*, February 1–April 30, 1973 (Cincinnati, OH, 1973), Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

a kind of rhythm, a graphic suggestion of “beat” (through the spacing and iteration of the marks) that registers, subdivides, or accompanies the time of reading.

In March 1969 the Ellington orchestra played a three-week engagement at the Casbar Lounge in the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas.⁶³ In the *Forward Day by Day* for Wednesday, March 19, the reading is taken from 1 Corinthians 14: “Aspire above all to excel in those [gifts of the spirit] which build up the church,” which the book explicates in terms of the “ministry” of “what we say” in daily conversation and informal speech (Figure 3.5). The page ends with a prayer: “Direct and bless, we beseech thee, Lord, those who in this generation speak where many listen, and write what many read.”⁶⁴ Ellington brackets the prayer, as usual, but for

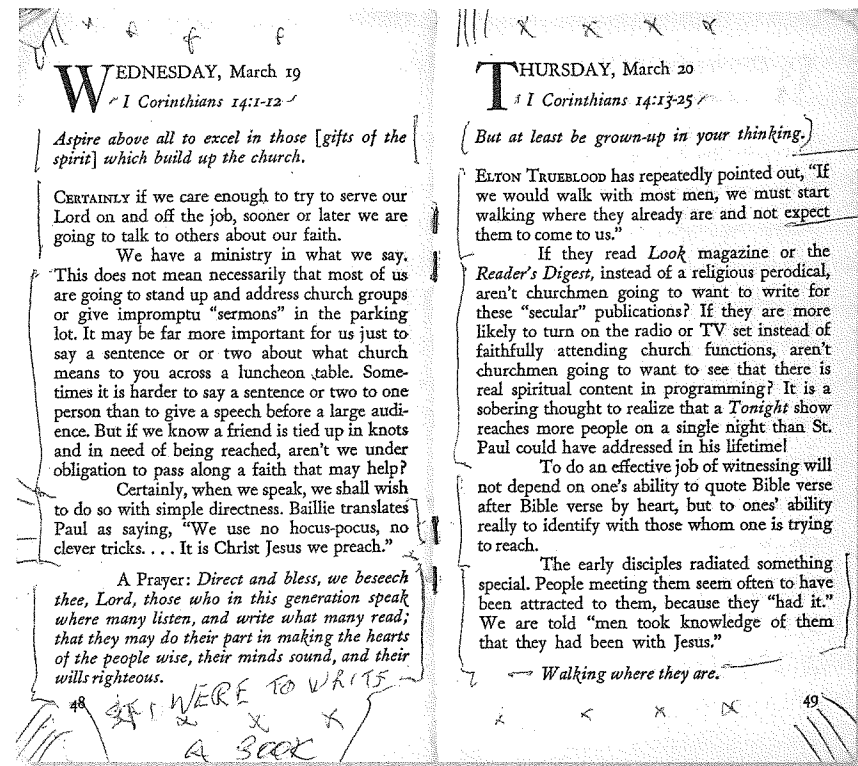


Figure 3.5 Page from Ellington's personal copy of *Forward Day by Day*, February 1–April 30, 1969 (Cincinnati, OH, 1969).

once, he adds his own marginal note at the bottom of the page, amid his usual X scorings, in a somewhat feeble-looking uppercase script:

IF I WERE TO WRITE
A BOOK

A strange and poignant subordinate clause to hang at the foot of a plea. It is important that this phrase isn't simply past tense (“If I wrote a book”) or declarative (“I want to write a book”)—much less some kind of glancing reinterpretation of the call to bless those who “speak where many listen, and write what many read” (if Ellington had written instead, for instance: “I write music” or “I play where many listen”). Neither is it an

allusion to the well-known Rogers and Hart popular standard, "I Could Write a Book," with its playfully amorous proclamations of literary agency. The phrase "If I were to write a book" expresses a kind of desire, but it is desire couched in the subjunctive, in the realm of a shakily contingent possibility, rather than a prediction or a promise or a counterclaim.

If the subjunctive mood denotes an action or state as conceived and not as a fact, then the phrase articulates in this personal and meditative space Ellington's sense of the literary. That Ellington would describe his "book" in this mood, as contingent and hypothetical, as an open-ended unlikely but imagined prospect, is not surprising given that he was struggling to write *Music Is My Mistress* during this period. "He dragged his feet," Mercer Ellington commented later, "and grumbled about the progress. He would have Stanley [Dance] go to places like Toronto and Houston when he had long engagements, but often they would sit up all night watching dog-assed movies and not work at all. It was the same when he was at home. Stanley would come to work, but after hours of Perry Mason and shoot-'em-ups, Ellington would be too tired for anything but criticisms and promises. It was a miracle the book was ever finished."⁶⁵ "If I were to write a book": it is appropriate, then, that Ellington comes to express that struggle as a fragile possibility, in a religious pamphlet titled to evoke daily progress "forward."

But in a broader sense, one might also read this subjunctive as the mood of all Ellington's grand racial programmatic ambitions, the desire to write a "tone parallel to the history of the American Negro" that in different ways animated all his "social significance" works: *Jump for Joy* and *Black, Brown and Beige* in the 1940s, *A Drum Is a Woman* in the 1950s, and *My People* in the 1960s. To write an extended composition about the Negro, the work that "tells his story," in Baldwin's phrase. "If I were to write": the desire, and the vulnerability, in the phrase might also be in part Ellington's conviction that his great work had to combine music and language, somehow, as I have already suggested—melody and text "parallel" to each other in voice-over narration, programmatic verse, and song lyrics—to capture the full richness of that history. Only such a work, an achievement in what he had called many years before "the literature of music," might offer an "authentic record" of African Americans. "If I were to": the contingency, the open-endedness, would seem unavoidable.

In *Music Is My Mistress*, Ellington writes that he felt the rather "unfinished ending" of the first section of *Black, Brown and Beige* "was in accordance with reality, that it could not be boxed, and stored away when so much else remained to be done" (MM 181). Part of the project's "authentic record," then, is precisely its open-endedness, parallel to the unfulfilled hopes of the African American. And it is likewise as though Duke could only conceive and desire his combination of words and music as a prospect, in the uncertainty of the subjunctive, only in an intimate space of reflection. For Ellington, the literature of music trembles at the margin of a prayer.

notes

Introduction

1. "The Cricket" [Editorial], *The Cricket: Black Music in Evolution* 1 (1968): a. On the history of *The Cricket*, see Christopher Funkhouser, "LeRoi Jones, Larry Neal, and 'The Cricket': Jazz and Poets' Black Fire," *African American Review* 37, nos. 2–3 (Summer–Autumn 2003): 237–244.
2. "The Cricket," b.
3. William Russell and Stephen W. Smith, "New Orleans Music," in *Jazzmen*, ed. Charles Edward Smith and Frederic Ramsey Jr. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939), 13.
4. Vic Hobson, *Creating Jazz Counterpoint: New Orleans, Barbershop Harmony, and the Blues* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 3.
5. Russell and Smith, "New Orleans Music," in *Jazzman*, 10–11.
6. Donald M. Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz* (1978; repr., New York: Da Capo, 1980), 8.
7. One was the Belgian critic Robert Goffin's *La Nouvelle-Orléans, capitale du jazz* (New York: Editions de la Maison Française, 1946), which was not widely read in the United States because it was never translated. Goffin spoke to New Orleans elders such as Big Eye Louis Nelson, Alphonse Picou, Bob Lyons, and Louis Jones, who were unable to confirm either that Bolden was a barber or that he edited a newspaper.
8. Jelly Roll Morton recorded this song three times in the late 1930s: Jelly Roll Morton, "Buddy Bolden's Blues," rec. 1938, Library of Congress Archive of Folk Song 1658A (Rounder 1092); Jelly Roll Morton's New Orleans Jazzmen, "I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolden Say," rec. 14 September 1939 (Bluebird B-10434-B); Jelly Roll Morton, "Buddy Bolden's Blues," rec. 16 December 1939 (General 4003-A).
9. The last four titles are drawn from one of the vivid set lists in Danny Barker, *Buddy Bolden and the Last Days of Storyville*, ed. Alyn Shipton (London: Cassell, 1998), 20. The great banjo player and historian Barker admitted to Alyn Shipton that when he was preparing one of the articles collected in this book, the well-known "A Memory of King Bolden," which appeared in the *Evergreen Review* (September 1965), he had added "a little monkeyshine" to the oral histories he had conducted with New Orleans figures such as Dude Bottley (see *ibid.*, viii).
10. Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden*, 7. The quotation from William Russell comes from Marquis's conversation with him at Preservation Hall on September 12, 1970.
11. *The Cricket* 1, no. 1 (March 21, 1896), New Orleans Special Collections, Tulane University, quoted in Hobson, *Creating Jazz Counterpoint*, 11. Hobson also discusses another issue, vol. 1, no. 8 (July 24, 1897), which he located at Xavier University. The mistaken information that Bolden edited *The Cricket* seems to have originated with Bunk Johnson, the trumpeter who was one of the musicians interviewed for *Jazzmen*; Johnson later explained to Robert Goffin that "in reality, it was a friend of Buddy's who edited *The Cricket*: Otis Watts" (*La Nouvelle-Orléans*, 99). According to Hobson, Watts was not the editor of the periodical, but may have contributed to it.
12. Hobson, *Creating Jazz Counterpoint*, 3.
13. As Studs Terkel once put it: "You can't be too prepared for an interview, because you don't know what the person you're talking to's going to say. But you've got to be ready for anything. . . . In a way it's like jazz, you've got to improvise. Have a skeletal framework, but be ready to improvise within that"; see Studs Terkel, with Tony Parker, "Interviewing an

- Interviewer," from *Studs Terkel: A Life in Words* (1997) 163–170, collected in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 127. One of the few works on jazz oral history in particular is Burton W. Peretti, "Oral Histories of Jazz Musicians: The NEA Transcripts as Texts in Context," in *Jazz among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 117–133, although Peretti explicitly limits his discussion to transcripts rather than the original recordings, thus arguably making it difficult to attend to the sonic and improvisational nature of the form (119).
14. Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different (1979)," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 52.
 15. Portelli, "Introduction," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, ix.
 16. Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 51.
 17. Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event" (1981), in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 26.
 18. "The Cricket," b–c.
 19. "Gossip," *The Cricket* 3 (1969): 31.
 20. "Inquiry," *The Cricket* 3 (1969): 28.
 21. Michael Ondaatje, *Coming through Slaughter* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 24. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text.
 22. James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone" (1951), in James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 19.
 23. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York: Norton, 1997), 18; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Brent Hayes Edwards (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 171. The phrase *the character of cognition* is adopted from Theodor Adorno's 1932 essay "On the Social Situation of Music." Despite the fact that Adorno invokes what he calls "jazz" as the preeminent instance of a music indelibly shaped by its "commodity character" (430), one might argue on the contrary that jazz is the very sort of music Adorno is otherwise calling for: a music that "is able to express—in the antinomies of its own formal language—the exigency of the social condition and to call for change through the coded language of suffering." Jazz fulfills, as much as any other twentieth-century music one might name, Adorno's dictum that "the character of cognition is to be demanded of any music which today wishes to preserve its right to existence. Through its material, music must give clear form to the problems assigned it by this material which is itself never purely natural material, but rather a social and historical product; solutions offered by music in this process stand equal to theories." See Theodor Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 393. This is not the place to rehash the heated debates around Adorno's castigation of "jazz," but it is worth noting (as many other scholars have) that it is not at all clear what music Adorno is referring to with the term. It is difficult to recognize the music of Armstrong and Ellington in Adorno's sneering remark that "the apparent improvisations of hot music are totally the expression of set norms which can be traced back to a very few basic types" (430).
 24. Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963; repr., New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 152–153. Here is the entire passage, which can also be read as the kernel of what a couple of years later will become Baraka's theory of black culture as a "changing same": "Music, as paradoxical as it might seem, is the result of thought. It is the result of thought perfected at its most empirical, i.e., as attitude, or stance. Thought is largely conditioned by references; it is the result of consideration of speculation against reference, which is largely arbitrary. There is no one way of thinking, since reference (hence value) is as scattered and dissimilar as men themselves. If Negro music can be seen to be the result of certain attitudes, certain specific ways of thinking about the world (and only ultimately about the ways in which music can be made), then the basic hypothesis of this book is understood. The Negro's music changed as he changed, reflecting shifting attitudes or (and this is equally important) consistent attitudes within changed contexts."

25. Sidney Bechet, *Treat It Gentle* (New York: Da Capo, 1960), 204.
26. Baraka, *Blues People*, viii–ix.
27. Portelli, "Introduction," *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, ix.
28. Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*, 48.
29. Ralph Ellison, "The Golden Age, Time Past" (1959), collected in Robert G. O'Meally, ed., *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings* (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2002), 51.
30. Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xiv. There are obvious parallels between my argument and Radano's important monograph, but my ultimate aims here are quite different. Radano's book analyzes the ways black music might be said to "lie up a nation," in the sense that it is taken as the irrefutable confirmation of a complex network of U.S. racial "myths," defined not as falsities or deceptions, but instead as "lying" in a sense Radano derives from the work of Zora Neale Hurston and Roland Barthes: "the stories we tell in giving texture and meaning in the making of our worlds" (3). Radano's project is unabashedly polemic: it is an attempt to "challenge . . . those strategies of containment that uphold the racial binaries informing the interpretation of black music" (ibid.). Specifically, Radano argues, the only way to attend to the "magical, miraculous quality of black performance" is to critique "black music's pervasive essentialism" (13). As he writes, "the true miracle of black sound derives neither from a simple African origin nor from an inherently 'spiritual nature' that seemingly 'jes grew.' It emerges instead from the alchemy of modern racial logic and the ironic differences that logic produces" (13). Thus Radano concludes that "continuing to uphold uncritically the myth of black music as a stable form or even as a 'changing same,' as Amiri Baraka calls it, forestalls consideration of the interracial background from which ideologies of black music developed in the first place" (3). The chapters in *Lying Up a Nation* are less concerned with twentieth-century black theorists of black music like Baraka; instead Radano provides a rich and incisive reading of primary texts mainly by white American folklorists, historians, and cultural commentators in the nineteenth century to demonstrate that the very notion of "black music" is a phenomenon that "grow[s] from the white racial imagination" (xiv). My aim here, however, is not to provide a more accurate critical genealogy (a better picture of that "interracial background"), but instead to consider the ramifications of certain figures of black music in the work of a host of black artists in the twentieth century, especially in the ways they thought about innovation and experimentation. In other words, I want to trace the ways twentieth-century black literature and music were both shaped by what Radano describes as a "conception of a discursively constituted black music standing between as it embodies the textual and musical, as resonance" (11).
31. Ibid., 15.
32. Daniel Stein, *Music Is My Life: Louis Armstrong, Autobiography, and American Jazz* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 8.
33. Michael Cogswell, *Louis Armstrong: The Offstage Story of Satchmo* (Portland, OR: Collectors Press, 2003), 39, 82.
34. Armstrong's many autobiographical efforts include the partially ghostwritten 1936 book *Swing That Music*; the extensive "notebooks" he prepared for Robert Goffin in the mid-1940s; a second, classic book in 1954, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*; the overlapping but not identical text "The Armstrong Story" of the same period; the continuations of and sequels to *Satchmo*, which include the 1959 manuscript "gauging" the joys of marijuana, titled "The Satchmo Story, 2nd Edition"; and the rambling, provocative, and moving document he wrote while ill near the end of his life, "Louis Armstrong + the Jewish Family in New Orleans, LA, the Year of 1907," *Swing That Music* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936) and *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (New York: New American Library, 1954) are available in book form; the other documents are now collected in *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, ed. Thomas Brothers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
35. Tom Piazza, "Introduction," in *Setting the Tempo: Fifty Years of Great Jazz Liner Notes*, ed. Tom Piazza (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1996), 1. Piazza's introduction to this anthology

- is still the best short history of the jazz liner note as a genre. Piazza situates its emergence in the 1930s during the first wave of interest in the *history* of the still-young music, in which repackaged compilations of recordings from the previous decade (referred to using a term adopted from photography: *albums*) were issued with notes providing historical, biographical, and discographical information, often framing the compilation as representative of a geographical area (*Chicago Jazz*), or a performance location that gave rise to a particular style (*Riverboat Jazz*). Although its generic contours were more or less set by the advent of the LP (which imposed a strict length-limit—the limited space on the back cover of a record album—as well as certain norms and expectations in format), the liner note shifted again in the late 1950s when musicians (and some writers linked to the “New Music”) began to write liner notes themselves; prominent examples included in *Setting the Tempo* include Bill Evans’s famous notes for Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue* (Columbia CS 8163, 1959), Charles Mingus’s notes to *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (Impulse! Records A35, 1963), and Amiri Baraka’s notes to John Coltrane’s *Live at Birdland* (Impulse! Records AS-50, 1964).
36. Piazza, “Introduction,” in *Setting the Tempo*, 2.
 37. As Martin Williams pointed out many years ago, the limitations of the ten-inch record (which allowed only about three minutes to a side) imposed a structural constraint on the blues that did not exist in live performance; in the recorded form, however, this limitation compelled the greatest singers to achieve an economy of statement approaching the density and complexity of the sonnet form. For Williams, singers like Ida Cox and Sara Martin “give each blues a specifically poetic development which takes subtle advantage of the four-stanza limitation and creates a kind of classic form within it.” See Martin Williams, “Recording Limits and Blues Form,” in *The Art of Jazz: Essays on the Nature and Development of Jazz*, ed. Martin Williams (New York: Grove, 1959), 92. I have discussed the impact of this constraint on the blues poems in Hughes’s second book, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*; see Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 60.
 38. See Sascha Feinstein, *Jazz Poetry: From the 1920s to the Present* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997); T. J. Anderson III, *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right: Four Innovators of Jazz Poetry* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2004); Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Integral Music: Languages of African American Innovation* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004); and Meta DuEwa Jones, *The Muse Is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011). This is only a sampling, of course; there is likewise a wealth of impressive scholarship on jazz fiction.
 39. See <http://www.satchmo.net/thearchives/louis.shtml>; Stephen Brower, ed., *Satchmo: The Wonderful World and Art of Louis Armstrong* (New York: Abrams, 2009).
 40. Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.
 41. Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*, 46.
 42. Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (1975; repr., Boston: Beacon, 1986), 96, 54.
 43. Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*, 91.
 44. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 134.
 45. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 26.
 46. Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1976), 108, 114.
 47. For a brief overview of these extended techniques in the history of jazz trumpet, see Todd Bryant Weeks, *Luck’s in My Corner: The Life and Music of Hot Lips Page* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 42.
 48. Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). Subsequent page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
 49. Albright summarizes the argument of Lessing’s *Laokoon* (1766) that “artworks in a sequential medium pertain to action and should be loud, vigorous, expressive,” while “artworks in a spatial medium pertain to stasis and should be decorous, calm, poised” (*Panaesthetics*, 3).

- The Clement Greenberg quotation comes from John O’Brien, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1:25–34 (quoted in *Panaesthetics*, 215).
50. Nathaniel Mackey, “Expanding the Repertoire,” *Tripwire* 5 (Fall 2001): 7.
 51. Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 267. Subsequent page references will be given parenthetically in the text. The French original was first published in the journal *Musique en jeu* in November 1972, and it is collected in Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes, tome II: 1966–1973*, ed. Eric Marty (Paris: Seil, 1993), 1436–1442.
 52. Zora Neale Hurston, “Sprituels and Neo-Sprituels (1934),” in *Folklore, Memoirs, & Other Writings*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall (New York: Library of America, 1995), 871.
 53. Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 79.
 54. I am not going to use the term *intermediality* to describe this interface among media, although it has come to be employed by a number of scholars over the past two decades. Note that Albright uses the term *intermedial* to describe a subjective and ultimately hallucinated element of the audience response to a work like an opera employing more than one medium (it is his name for the “imaginary artwork generated by the spectator through the interplay of two or more media”). In contrast, the scholarship on *intermediality* tends to employ the term in a normative fashion in a manner than could be accused of technological determinism (taking for granted the “independent properties of the medium” rather than understanding any medium to be not only a given “channel of communication” or the “specific material with which a particular kind of artist worked,” but also—and unavoidably—a “form of social organization”). See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 159; John Guillory, “Genesis of the Media Concept,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 347–348. For an introduction to the scholarship on intermediality, see, for example, Jürgen E. Müller, “Intermediality: A Plea and Some Theses for a New Approach in Media Studies,” in *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Inter-Relations of the Arts and Media*, ed. Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedlin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 295–304; Walter Bernhart, Steven Paul Scher, and Werner Wolf, eds., *Word and Music Studies: Defining the Field* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999); and Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). One jazz studies scholar who uses the term is Daniel Stein in his well-researched *Music Is My Life*.
 55. See *The New Cab Calloway’s Hepster’s Dictionary: Language of Jive* (1944), collected in Cab Calloway and Bryant Rollins, *Of Minnie the Moocher & Me* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 251–261; Babs Gonzales, *I Paid My Dues: Good Times—No Bread* (Newark, NJ: Expubidience, 1967); Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus* (New York: Knopf, 1971); Leo Smith, *Notes (8 Pieces) Source: A New World Music: Creative Music* (n.p.: Leo Smith, 1973); Joseph Jarman, *Black Case, vol. I & II: Return from Exile* (Chicago: Art Ensemble of Chicago, 1977); Marion Brown, *Afternoon of a Georgia Faun: Views and Reviews* (n.p.: Nia Music, 1973); Marion Brown, “Faces and Places: The Music and Travels of a Contemporary Jazz Musician” (MA thesis, Wesleyan University, 1976); Marion Brown, *Recollections: Essays, Drawings, Miscellanea* (Frankfurt: Juergen A. Schmitt Publikationen, 1984); Anthony Braxton, *Tri-Axium Writings* (n.p.: Synthesis Music, 1985); Art Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993); William Parker, *Conversations* (Paris: RogueArt, 2011).
 56. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 69.
 57. *Ibid.*, 69–70.
 58. James Snead, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Methuen, 1984), 70.
 59. Kelley, *Thelonious Monk*, 46.
 60. *Ibid.*, 46.

61. LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), "Epistrophe," in *New Negro Poets U.S.A.*, ed. Langston Hughes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 73. This poem was originally published in Elias Wilentz, ed., *The Beat Scene* (New York: Corinth, 1960).
62. Amiri Baraka, "AM/TRAK," in *Poetry for the Advanced* (1979), collected in Amiri Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. William J. Harris (1991; repr., New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999), 267–272. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text. I thank Amina Baraka for permission to quote Amiri Baraka's work.
63. Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*, 203.
64. "The Cricket," a, c.

1. Louis Armstrong and the Syntax of Scat

1. Boyd Atkins, "Heebie Jeebies" (Chicago: Consolidated Music Publishing House, 1926), 3–4. Sheet Music Collection, Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The sheet music was published after Armstrong's single, apparently in response to the record's popularity: it goes so far as to include a transcription of Armstrong's improvisation as a "'Skat' Chorus" (5), in which the piano accompaniment mirrors the melody and rhythm of Armstrong's scatting ("Skeep! Skipe! Skoop! Brip Ber Breep bar la bah"). At the same time the sheet music signals the inadequacy of its notation, glossing the transcription with the instruction that "Note: for correct interpretation of 'SKAT' CHORUS HEAR OKEH RECORD No. 8300." The discographical information for the recording is Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five, "Heebie Jeebies" (Okeh 8300, mx. 9534-A).
2. Louis Armstrong, "Jazz on a High Note," *Esquire*, December 1951, 85.
3. George Avakian, "Notes on Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five," *The Louis Armstrong Story*, vol. 1 (Columbia Records CL 851). Quoted in Stephen J. Casmier and Donald H. Mathews, "Why Scatting Is Like Speaking in Tongues: Post-Modern Reflections on Jazz, Pentecostalism and 'Africosmysticism,'" *Literature and Theology* 13, no. 2 (June 1999): 174. For other versions of this anecdote, see Hughes Panassié, *Louis Armstrong* (Paris: Les Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1969); Milton "Mezz" Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues* (1946; repr., New York: Citadel Press, 1990), 119. The discographical information for the recording is Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five, "Heebie Jeebies," Okeh 8300, mx. 9534-A.
4. Richard Hadlock, *Jazz Masters of the Twenties* (New York: Collier, 1965), 26; Philippe Bau-doin, "Introduction," *Anthology of Scat Singing*, vol. 1, 1924–1929 (Masters of Jazz MJCD 801, 1995), 19.
5. Other predecessors include a Chicago singer named Bo Diddly, as well as Gene Rodemich's June 1924 "Scissor Grinder Joe" and "Some of These Days," recorded by Coon and Sanders in November 1924. See also David Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers and Their Times* (New York: Primus, Donald I. Fine, 1988), 6.
6. Will Friedwald, *Jazz Singing: America's Great Voices from Bessie Smith to Bebop and Beyond* (New York: Da Capo, 1996), 28, 16.
7. Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll* (1949; repr., New York: Pantheon, 1993), 156. Of course, even Morton's chronology is exaggerated, since Armstrong did not in fact enter the Colored Waif's Home for Boys in New Orleans until January 1913.
8. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word *occasion* as meaning a "falling together or juncture of circumstances favourable or suitable to an end or purpose." Robert Creeley discusses poetics as occasion in this sense in his interview with William V. Spanos, "Talking with Robert Creeley," *Boundary 2* 6, no. 1 (Spring–Fall 1978): 19.
9. J. E. Lighter, ed., *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* (New York: Random House Reference, 1994, 1997), 2:68.
10. I have located only a single issue of *Heebie-Jeebies: A Sign of Intelligence* still extant, in the Beinecke collection at Yale University (listed as volume 1, number 36, from August 1, 1925). The weekly, housed on Indiana Avenue in Chicago and edited by P. L. Prattis, actually predated Armstrong's recording; judging from the date, it commenced publication at the beginning of 1925. The magazine featured coverage of African American life both in

- Chicago and elsewhere: political commentary; articles about prominent black figures of the day (Oscar de Priest, Nora Holt Ray, "Battling" Siki); listings for society dances, sports, sororities, and the events of black Chicago society. (The odd proposition of the title, reading "heebie-jeebies" as a [particularly African American?] "sign of intelligence," is not mentioned in the August 1925 issue.) It is unclear how long the journal was in publication, but at the end of 1926 A. Philip Randolph penned a lengthy rejoinder to an article in *Heebie-Jeebies* concerning the Pullman Porters. See Randolph, "Answering Heebie-Jeebies," *Messenger* 8, no. 2 (December 1926): 357–360.
11. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds., *The Book of Negro Folklore* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958), 484. Mezzrow and Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, 374.
 12. Mezzrow and Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, 212.
 13. Gary Giddins defines scat as "improvised nonsense syllables" in *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86. The term is glossed as "singing in nonsense syllables" in Hughes and Bontemps, *Book of Negro Folklore*, 487. Similarly, Will Friedwald describes scatting as a "wordless performance, generally an improvised one," in *Jazz Singing*, xii. Charles O. Hartman explains it even more confusingly—"scat singing—the nonverbal imitation of jazz horn playing"—in *Jazz Text: Voice and Improvisation in Poetry, Jazz, and Song* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 113. The *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* speaks of "a technique of jazz singing in which onomatopoeic or nonsense syllables are sung to improvised melodies"; see Barry Kernfeld, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 2:425. And Clarence Major's *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1994) defines the word as "pure sounds without regard to their meaning" (399).
 14. Roman Jakobson, "Language in Relation to Other Communication Systems," in *Linguaggi nella società e nella tecnica*, ed. Camillo Olivetti (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1970), 12. The French is in the original.
 15. On this recording, see Friedwald, *Jazz Singing*, 144. Paul Berliner also comments on quotation in jazz (both in scat singing and in instrumental performance) in his monumental *Thinking in Jazz: the Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 103–105.
 16. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 126, 127–128.
 17. *Ibid.*, 156.
 18. Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 28, 29. See also Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
 19. For an illustration of this point, chosen at random, compare the scat choruses of Betty Carter and Carmen McRae on their stunning recording of "Sometimes I'm Happy," *The Carmen McRae-Betty Carter Duets* (Great American Music Hall Records CD 2706–2, 1988). When the two singers exchange four-bar passages of scat, their "conversation" takes shape through a variety of phonemic choices and contrasts that gives the counterplay of their improvisations texture and rhetorical shape.
 20. See Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, especially 201–205; Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), especially 73–96; Brian Harker, "'Telling a Story': Louis Armstrong and Coherence in Early Jazz," *Current Musicology* 63 (1999): 46–83.
 21. Billie Holiday with William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956; repr., New York: Penguin, 1984), 10. There is more to say about this passage. As my colleague Elin Diamond pointed out to me, it seems to link shifts in signification to reception ("the meaning used to change, depending on how I felt"), implying that scat's nonreferential syntax is channeled or recoded by a listener's affective disposition.
 22. Nathaniel Mackey, *Bedouin Hornbook* (1986; repr., Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1993), 83.
 23. N. comments that "inarticulacy spoke" (*ibid.*, 182). Mackey's criticism takes up the notion of a "telling inarticulacy" in a number of instances; see, for example, Nathaniel Mackey,

- "Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol," in *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 253.
24. Mackey, "Sound and Sentiment," in *Discrepant Engagement*, 182–183.
 25. *Ibid.*, 63.
 26. *Ibid.* Roland Barthes contends somewhat similarly that singing "rustles" a *utopia*, a no-place "of a music of meaning" where "language would be enlarged" and even "denatured" but without "meaning being brutally dismissed, dogmatically foreclosed." See Roland Barthes, "The Rustle of Language," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 77.
 27. Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1976), 108, 114. Gunther Schuller makes a similar argument about music and speech in jazz (in relation to African drum languages) in his *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 5.
 28. Clark Terry, "Mumbles," recorded in 1954, *Oscar Peterson Trio Plus One* (Mercury 60975); Clark Terry, "Trumpet Mouthpiece Blues," recorded July 1957, *Clark Terry Out on a Limb* (Argo LP 620).
 29. Louis Armstrong, "The Armstrong Story" (ca. 1950s), Louis Armstrong House and Archives, Queens College/CUNY. See Louis Armstrong, "The Armstrong Story," in *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words: Selected Writings*, ed. Thomas Brothers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52–53; Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (1955; repr., New York: Da Capo, 1986).
 30. Mezzrow and Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, 220. On this subject, see also Neil Leonard, "The Jazzman's Verbal Usage," *Black American Literature Forum* 20, no. 12 (Spring–Summer 1986): 151–160.
 31. Louis Armstrong and His Orchestra, "Sweet Sue (Just You)," recorded April 26, 1933 (Victor 24321).
 32. See Slim Gaillard, Leo Watson, and Bam Brown, "The Avocado Seed Soup Symphony," AFRS "Jubilee" radio broadcast, December 1945, collected on *Leo Watson: The Original Scat Man* (Indigo Igo CD 2098, 1999).
 33. Mezzrow and Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, 225.
 34. Robert O'Meally, *The Jazz Singers* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Collection of Recordings, 1998), 98.
 35. Mezzrow and Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, 119.
 36. Slim and Slam, "Chinatown, My Chinatown," recorded January 19, 1938 (mx. 22319.1); "Matzoh Balls," recorded October 4, 1939 (mx. w.26159-A); "African Jive," recorded July 24, 1941 (mx H.368–2), collected on *The Groove Juice Special* (Columbia CK 64898, 1996).
 37. Calloway quoted in Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *To BE or Not . . . to BOP* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 111. Danny Barker also recounts this story in Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men Who Made It* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 344.
 38. Uncredited article, "Louis Armstrong Assails Bebop as Mere Technique," *Eve Leader*, July 13, 1949. Armstrong clippings file, Institute for Jazz Studies, Rutgers University. One anecdote claims that a different alterity was at the source of scat for Armstrong: his long-time friend Phoebe Jacobs heard him tell Cab Calloway that he got scat "from the Jews 'rockin,' he meant davening"—the stylized sway that accompanies prayer. Jacobs contends that "Louis never talked about this in public, because he feared people would assume he was making fun of Jews praying, which wasn't his intention at all." It is a fascinating connection (particularly given Armstrong's links to Jewish culture in his New Orleans childhood), even if it's more joking backstage banter than a discussion of performance technique, and even if it leaves open the rather complex question of Armstrong's "intention." See also Laurence Bergreen, *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 267–268.
 39. Brian Harker has recently advanced the argument that most of these elements of scat singing actually coalesced in early jazz "novelty" and vaudeville instrumental performance. He of-

- fers a reading of a 1923 book called *The Novelty Cornetist*, by a well-known musician named Louis Panico, who "gives detailed explanations and illustrations of such performance gimmicks as 'the laugh,' 'the sneeze,' 'the horse neigh,' 'the baby cry,' and the 'Chinese effect.'" In this light one might argue that the aesthetic continuum I have outlined is constitutive in the music; the key issue here would seem to be the music's negotiation of a politics of representation. One would have to consider a number of examples in this regard: Harker cites "naturalist" tunes like the Original Dixieland Jazz Band's "Livery Stable Blues" (1917) and "Bow Wow Blues" (1921), and Jelly Roll Morton's "Sidewalk Blues" (1926). Other sources on the period look elsewhere: trumpeter Rex Stewart describes his own fascination with Johnny Dunn, the "Ragtime King of the Trumpet," who would imitate a horse whinnying and a rooster crowing on his horn. See Harker, "Telling a Story," 48–49; Rex Stewart, *Boy Meets Horn*, ed. Claire P. Gordon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 47.
40. Regarding the musical epigraphs, see Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 492–493.
 41. See, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940), in *Writings*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1986), 638; and W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 62.
 42. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Writings*, 538–539.
 43. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 15. Lewis notes that the lyric still defies the attempts of linguists to find sources or translations. He notes one possible source in Senegambian song of captivity (585n7).
 44. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Writings*, 541.
 45. Gary Giddins, "Louis Armstrong (The Once and Future King)," in *Visions of Jazz*, 86.
 46. Zora Neale Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," in *Folklore, Memoirs, & Other Writings*, ed. Cheryl Wall (New York: Library of America, 1995), 872. The musical examples include Armstrong, "Lazy River," recorded in Chicago on November 3, 1931 (OKeh 41541, mx. W 405058–4); "Stardust," recorded November 3, 1931 (OKeh 41530, mx. W 405061–1); "All of Me," recorded January 27, 1932 (OKeh 41552, mx. 405133-A).
 47. On the meaning of obbligato in jazz, see Michael Jarrett, *Soundtracks: A Musical ABC Vols. 1–3* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 258.
 48. See Nathaniel Mackey, "Cante Moro," in *Disembodied Poetics: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School*, ed. Anne Waldman and A. Schelling (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 78.
 49. Wesley Brown, *Tragic Magic* (1978; repr., New York: Ecco Press, 1995), 5.
 50. Gayelord Hauser, *Diet Does It* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1944); Hauser, *New Guide to Intelligent Reducing: How to Reduce and Stay Reduced for Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1955).
 51. "Lose Weight the Satchmo Way," in Joshua Berrett, ed., *The Louis Armstrong Companion: Eight Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999), 99–102. The Christmas card is reproduced in Gary Giddins, *Satchmo* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 189.
 52. Armstrong, *Satchmo*, 20.
 53. Armstrong, "The Satchmo Story," in *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, 114–115. The ellipses in brackets mark omissions; other ellipses are Armstrong's.
 54. Martin Pops quotes Luther's narrative of achieving spiritual enlightenment while on the toilet; see Martin Pops, "The Metamorphosis of Shit," *Salmagundi* 56 (Spring 1982): 30. Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Eroticism," in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 29.
 55. See Pops, "The Metamorphosis of Shit," 36. The anecdote concerning this title is recounted in Richard Ellman, *James Joyce*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 154.
 56. Armstrong, letter to Joe Glaser (September 8, 1955), Music Division, Library of Congress.
 57. Armstrong, "Lose Weight the Satchmo Way," in *The Louis Armstrong Companion*, 102.

58. Armstrong, "Louis Armstrong + the Jewish Family in New Orleans, LA., the Year of 1907" (1969–1970), Louis Armstrong Archives, Queens College/CUNY, in Brothers, *Louis Armstrong in His Own Words*, 35–36.
59. Quoted in Albert Murray, "Jazz Lips," *New Republic* 221, no. 21 (November 1999): 34.
60. In a more serious mood, he told another interviewer: "Got to get all those impurities out every day. That's my success. I mean, I don't try to be more than anybody, no better than anybody. I just want to stay among them, make that gig." See Richard Meryman, interview with Armstrong, *Life* (April 15, 1966), collected as Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong—a Self-Portrait* (New York: Eakins Press, 1971), 52.
61. Panassié, *Louis Armstrong*, 55.
62. Giddins, *Satchmo*, 14.
63. Dan Morgenstern, "Introduction," in Armstrong, *Satchmo*, ix.
64. *Ibid.*, x. Some examples of writings published with careful attention to Armstrong's stylistic idiosyncrasies include Louis Armstrong, "Special Jive," *Harlem Tattler*, July 2, 1940, 7; Armstrong, "Special Jive," *Harlem Tattler*, July 19, 1940, 7, 19; "Louis and Letters," *Metronome*, April 1945, 48; "Chicago, Chicago, That Toddlin' Town: How King and Ol' Satch Dug It in the Twenties," *Esquire's Jazz Book* (1947): 40–43; Armstrong, "Europe—with Kicks," *Holiday* (June 1950): 11–13, 14, 16, 18, 20; "Ulceratedly Yours; Louis Armstrong," *Down Beat* 17, no. 4 (July 1950): 1, 19; "Jazz on a High Note," *Esquire*, December 1951, 85, 209–212. See the bibliography of Armstrong writings in Brothers, *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, 221–224.
65. Brothers, "'Swing a Lot of Type Writing': An Introduction to Louis Armstrong," in *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, xiii.
66. Armstrong, letter to Madeleine Berard (November 25, 1946), Louis Armstrong Archives, Letters-3, 1/6, Queens College. This letter is partially reprinted (with a number of unaccountable omissions and errors of transcription) in Berrett, *Louis Armstrong Companion*, 128–129.
67. Armstrong, letter to Mrs. Frances Church (March 10, 1946). Institute for Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.
68. Giddins, *Satchmo*, 23.
69. Armstrong, "The Armstrong Story" (ca. 1950s), Louis Armstrong House and Archives, Queens College/CUNY. Reprinted in Brothers, *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, 49.
70. Armstrong, Letter to Joe Glaser (August 2, 1955), Library of Congress, collected in Brothers, *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, 158–163.
71. Consider Friedrich A. Kittler's comment: "As a doubled spatialization of writing—first on the keyboard, then on the white paper—[the typewriter] imparts to texts an optimal optical appearance"; see Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 228.
72. Baraka writes: "I'd have magnetically recorded . . . & translated into word—or perhaps even the final thought/feeling wd not be merely word or sheet, but *itself*, the xpression, three dimensional—able to be touched, or tasted or felt, or entered, or heard or carried like a speaking singing constantly communicating charm. *A typewriter is corny!*" See LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), "Technology & Ethos," in *Raise Race Rays Raze* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 156.
73. See Kamau Brathwaite, *Conversations with Nathaniel Mackey* (Staten Island, NY: We Press/Xcp:Cross-Cultural Poetics, 1999); Stewart Brown, "Interview with Edward Kamau Brathwaite," *Kyk-Over-Al* 38 (June 1988): 84–93; Kamau Brathwaite, "Newstead to Neustadt," *World Literature Today* 68, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 656–658.
74. Brothers, "Introduction," in *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, xiv.
75. *Ibid.*, xv, xiii. See also *ibid.*, xiv; Brothers is right to depart from Kenney in reading all unconventional punctuation as indication of "irony," a "distance from the meanings of words."
76. *Ibid.*, xiv, xv.
77. Armstrong, letter to Joe Glaser (August 2, 1955), Music Division, Library of Congress, collected in Brothers, *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, 159. Armstrong tells the same story

elsewhere (not always attributing the advice to Black Benny), in ways that might help explain some of what seems to be an odd racial subservience in the letter to Glaser. In one interview in the late 1960s, he recalls that a group of black musicians playing one-nighters in Mississippi had been chased after a show and beaten with chains and knives by a group of white men, who hours earlier had been in the club dancing. Armstrong is disgusted by this practice of "nigger knocking" ("No reason—except they was so goddamn miserable they had to mess everybody else up, ya dig? *Peckerwoods!* Oh, this world's mothered some mean sons!"). But he contends that the militancy of the younger generation of African American men was simply not an available response in the context of such ever-present racial violence in earlier years: "If you didn't have a white captain to back you in the old days—to put his hand on your shoulder—you was just a damn sad nigger. If a Negro had the proper white man to reach the law and say, 'What the hell you mean locking up MY nigger?' then—quite naturally—the law would walk him free. Get in that jail *without* your white boss, and yonder comes the chain gang! Oh, danger was dancing all around you back then." The perspective here is less obsequious than pragmatic. (He segues directly from this story to explain the utility of his relationship with his manager Joe Glaser.) See Larry L. King, "Everybody's Louie," *Harper's Magazine* (November 1967): 67.

78. Brothers, *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, 163.
79. Jed Rasula, "Understanding the Sound of Not Understanding," in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 242.
80. Murray, "Jazz Lips," 32, 30.
81. Giddins, *Satchmo*, 14.
82. Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 87.
83. Giddins, *Satchmo*, 111.
84. *Ibid.*, 36. I have elided part of this quote because Giddins misreads one of the Armstrong manuscripts, arguing that Louis writes of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson as "comedian and danger in my race," and then extrapolating on the importance of a "threatening" physicality in Armstrong's aesthetic. In fact, as Thomas Brothers points out, it is much more likely that the portrait of Bojangles refers to him as a "comedian and *dancer*." See Brothers, *Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words*, 193.
85. Giddins, *Satchmo*, 26.
86. Krin Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 211.
87. Giddins, *Satchmo*, 26.
88. Nathaniel Mackey, *Dbjot Baghostus's Run* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1993), 154. This book is the second volume in his series entitled *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*, of which *Bedouin Hornbook* is the first.
89. *Ibid.*, 155.
90. Quoted in Linda Prince, "Betty Carter: Bebopper Breathes Fire," *Down Beat*, May 1979, 13.
91. The phrase "accompaniments of the utterance" is taken from J. L. Austin, *Lecture VI, How to Do Things with Words* (1955; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 76. I thank Fred Moten for directing me to this source. If scat mobilizes the index in particular, one would have to discuss scat as "improvisation" by taking into account the way that the index is temporally contingent: since a deictic gesture is registered in time, the index has what Rosalind Krauss calls "an existential connection to meaning, with the result that it can only take place on the spot"; see Rosalind Krauss, "Michel, Bataille et moi," *October* 68 (Spring 1994): 13. In writing, however, indexicality carries a temporal connotation but is not temporally contingent. The "on the spot" indicator can be added *after the fact*—thus Armstrong's predilection for inserting handwritten apostrophes and underlining to his letters in revising them.
92. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952; repr., New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 7. One can approach a reading of the famous reference to Armstrong in the prologue to *Invisible Man* only by taking up issues of indexicality. The unnamed narrator says that he plans to have

not just one but *five* phonographs in his basement “hole,” playing Armstrong’s version of “What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue” “all at the same time” (6). This desire both calls for a certain intensification of listening (“when I have music I want to *feel* its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body”) and parallels the room’s excessive illumination (it is wired with 1,369 lightbulbs), thus extending a playful critique of the optical figures of Enlightenment metaphysics. But the call for amplification may be less about simply increasing the sonic volume and more about stressing a simultaneity and potential multiplicity of signification in the music—the “slightly different sense of time” it articulates, in which the listener can “slip into the breaks and look around” (7).

2. Toward a Poetics of Transcription

1. Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues,” in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1964), 78.
2. See Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 25–29, 47–80; and generally Ralph Ellison, *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison’s Jazz Writings*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Modern Library, 2002), especially the 1976 interview “Ralph Ellison’s Territorial Vantage” (15–33).
3. James Baldwin, “The Uses of the Blues,” in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan (New York: Vintage, 2010), 70, 73.
4. Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues,” in *Shadow and Act*, 79.
5. See, for instance, the entry on *lyric* in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, where James William Johnson writes that lyric poetry “may be said to retain most pronouncedly the elements of poetry which evidence its origins in musical expression . . . the musical element is intrinsic to the work intellectually as well as aesthetically.” See James William Johnson, “Lyric,” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 713.
6. Craig Dworkin usefully points out that “music of course encompasses a range of works more expansive than the classical and Romantic imagination of the pleasant, mellifluous, or affecting” in “The Poetry of Sound,” *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (May 2008): 759. See also the special section on “The New Lyric Studies,” ed. Virginia Jackson, *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (January 2008): 181–234. Lytle Shaw points out the dearth of scholarship on African diasporic poetics in his review essay “Framing the Lyric,” *American Literary History* 28, no. 2 (2016): 405, in which he considers some of the most influential current contributors to these debates: Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, eds., *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Gillian White, *Lyric Shame: The “Lyric” Subject of American Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Jonathan D. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
7. Sterling Brown, “The Blues as Folk Poetry,” in *Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany*, ed. B. A. Botkin (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1930), 335.
8. Indirection is not coincidentally one of the key qualities of the lyric identified by Jonathan Culler (see *Theory of the Lyric*).
9. One study that approaches the history of modernist American literature (including but not limited to Harlem Renaissance poetry and prose) from such a perspective is T. Austin Graham’s fine *The Great American Songbooks: Modernism, Musical Texts, and the Value of Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
10. James Weldon Johnson, “Preface to the First Edition” (1922), in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. James Weldon Johnson (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 19; James Weldon Johnson, “Preface to the Revised Edition” (1931), in *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 6.
11. Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” *Nation* 122, no. 3131 (June 1926): 692, 694.
12. Louis Zukofsky, “A Statement for Poetry,” in *Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays of Louis Zukofsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 19.
13. Zukofsky, “An Objective,” in *Prepositions*, 16.
14. Kimberly Benston, “Performing Blackness: Re/Placing Afro-American Poetry,” in *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*, ed. Houston A. Baker Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 165.
15. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3.
16. See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 135; Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art (1934)*, trans. Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 34–35.
17. Christopher Funkhouser, “Being Matter Ignited: An Interview with Cecil Taylor,” *Hambone* 12 (Fall 1995): 29.
18. Nat Hentoff, “The Persistent Challenge of Cecil Taylor,” *Down Beat*, February 25, 1965, 17.
19. Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 309–311.
20. Sherley Anne Williams, “The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry,” in *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*, ed. Dexter Fisher and Robert Stepto (New York: MLA, 1979), 72.
21. *Ibid.*, 73.
22. Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Literary Theory and the Black Tradition,” in *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 34.
23. Stephen Henderson, *Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References* (New York: William Morrow, 1973), 61.
24. James Weldon Johnson, “Preface,” in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, 41.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, 6.
27. James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, eds., *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking, 1940), 2:19. This edition is a single-volume reprint of two anthologies originally published separately: *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* in 1925 and *The Second Book of Negro Spirituals* in 1926. The reprint edition retains the separate pagination of the two volumes. Subsequent references to these texts will be given parenthetically in the text as BANS I and BANS II, followed by the page number.
28. It should be apparent that this chapter takes up and extends the argument I make in Chapter 1 (“Variations on a Preface”) in my book *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). There I suggest that the explosion of anthologies and prefaced works on “Negro” subjects in the 1920s marks an effort to define and frame black culture, an effort that becomes central to the formulation of Western modernity in general. On the one hand, the larger argument juxtaposes works like James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, Claude McKay’s *Harlem Shadows*, Blaise Cendrars’s *Anthologie Nègre*, and René Maran’s *Batouala* to point out that such a struggle is transatlantic, and that even when seemingly limited to a particular nation-space, such prefaces consistently involve a vision of an African diaspora stretching beyond nation and language. On the other hand, it considers the politics of such framing gestures, and suggests that to a large degree they operate on the level of *form*, using the relationship between preface and text to represent and to situate black expressive culture to various ends.
29. Regarding the controversies provoked by Hughes’s early poetry, especially his second book *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), see Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, vol. 1, *1902–1941: I, Too, Sing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 140; Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K. A. Appiah, eds., *Langston Hughes: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York: Amistad, 1993), 60ff.; and Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940), 264.
30. Hughes explains in his autobiography *The Big Sea* that the poem “included the first blues verse I’d ever heard way back in Lawrence, Kansas, when I was a kid” (215). A number of singers recorded songs called “The Weary Blues” (although with different lyrics); and Steven C. Tracy has noted the similarity between the song lyrics quoted in the poem and

58. Obviously I do not mean that a blues poem *cannot* be put to music; some of Hughes's blues poems were indeed recorded by singers. To reiterate: I am trying here to get at the effect of the blues poem *on the page* as a literary artifact that exists in inextricable relation to the music it seems to point to, yet does not deliver. Incidentally, there is captivating documentation of the musical potential of Hughes's blues poems in the correspondence between Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. In the spring and summer of 1928, when Hurston was doing fieldwork among black labor communities (railroad camps, lumber yards, phosphate mines) in the rural South, she took copies of *Fine Clothes to the Jew* with her and found to her delight that her interlocutors enjoyed Hughes's poems "immensely." The workers called Hughes's volume "De Party Book," Hurston writes in one letter, and adds: "They sing the poems right off, and July 1, two men came over with guitars and sang the whole book. Everybody joined in. It was the strangest and most *thrilling* thing. They played it well too. You'd be surprised. One man was giving the words out—lining them out as the preacher does a hymn and the others would take it up and sing. It was glorious!" See Hurston, letter to Hughes, July 10, 1928, collected in Carla Kaplan, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 121.
59. George Kent, "Langston Hughes and the Afro-American Folk and Cultural Tradition," in *Langston Hughes: Black Genius*, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow, 1971).
60. In Northrup Frye's words, this is a "sentimental" use of music as opposed to a "technical" use of the term. See Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 255–256.
61. William Carlos Williams, "On Measure—Statement for Cid Corman," in *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1954), 337.
62. Robert Duncan, "Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's *Maximus*," in *Fictive Certainties* (New York: Norton, 1985), 69; Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "History of the Voice," in *Roots* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 264. Monchoachi, "Quelle langue parle le poete?" ("What language does the poet speak?"), postface to *Nuit Gagée (Wagered Night)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), 66.
63. Slemmon, "Interview with Wilson Harris," 47.
64. Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art (1948)*, trans. Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler (Cambridge: Zone Books, 1989), 62.
65. See, for example, Paul De Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 239–262; Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," *diacritics* 7, no. 4 (December 1977): 59–69.
66. Culler, "Apostrophe," 66.
67. *Ibid.*, 67. This passage also appears in the expanded and revised version of the *diacritics* article included in Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 227.
68. De Man, "Anthropomorphism," 254.
69. Nathaniel Mackey, "Interview by Edward Foster" (1992), collected in *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 268.
70. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 272.
71. On Guillén's adoption of the popular musical form of the *son* (and his interactions with Hughes), see especially William Scott, "Motivos de Translation," *New Centennial Review* 5, no. 2 (2005): 35–71; and Vera M. Kutzinski, "Havana Vernaculars: The *Cuba Libre* Project," in *The Worlds of Langston Hughes: Modernism and Translation in the Americas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 132–183. One wide-ranging and insightful attempt to track the African American poetic tradition across such an expanse is Meta DuEwa Jones's *The Muse Is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).
72. Jeanette Robinson Murphy, "The Survival of African Music in America," in *The Negro and His Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, ed. Bruce Jackson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 329.
73. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 473, 531.

74. See Nathaniel Mackey, *Bedouin Hornbook* (1986; repr., Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1997), 48.
75. Wilson Harris, "The Writer and Society," in *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: Beacon, 1967), 52.
76. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 36.

3. The Literary Ellington

- James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," *Partisan Review*, November–December 1951, collected in James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 19.
- Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature,'" in Baraka, *Home: Social Essays* (New York: William Morrow, 1966), 106–107.
- Duke Ellington, "The Duke Steps Out," *Rhythm*, March 1931, 20–22, collected in Mark Tucker, ed., *The Duke Ellington Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.* This is not the only such reference. In 1930 a Manhattan reporter wrote: "At present [Ellington] is at work on a tremendous task, the writing, in music, of 'The History of the Negro,' taking the Negro from Egypt, going with him to savage Africa, and from there to the sorrow and slavery of Dixie, and finally 'home to Harlem'"; see Florence Zunsler, "'Opera Must Die,' Says Galli-Curci! Long Live the Blues!" *New York Evening Graphic Magazine*, December 27, 1930, collected in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 45.
- Ellington, "The Duke Steps Out," 49.
- The works in question are Roi Ottley, *New World A-Comin': Inside Black America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943); Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy* (1946; repr. London: Heineman, 1989); John Steinbeck, *Sweet Thursday* (New York: Viking, 1954). See Ellington's own description of the impetus for *New World A-Comin'* in Duke Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 183. Subsequent page citations from this work will be cited parenthetically in the text with the initials MM, followed by the page numbers.
- A number of these texts are available: *The Golden Broom and the Green Apple* (MM 200); *The River* (MM 201–2); "Program Outline for the Sacred Concert" (MM 270–79); *My People* (1963), eight-page typescript, Subseries 4B: Scripts, Box 8, Folder 7, Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
- Barry Ulanov, "The Ellington Programme," in *This Is Jazz*, ed. Ken Williamson (London, Newnes, 1960), 168.
- Barry Ulanov, "Thumps Down," in "Two Thumps on 'A Drum,'" *Down Beat*, June 27, 1957, 18.
- Duke Ellington, "We, Too, Sing 'America,'" a talk delivered on Annual Lincoln Day Services, February 9, 1941, Scott Methodist Church, Los Angeles, CA, *California Eagle* (February 13, 1941), collected in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 146.
- Richard O. Boyer, "The Hot Bach," *New Yorker*, June 24–July 8, 1944, collected in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 239.
- Duke Ellington, "Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall (Duke's Poetry)," concert at Columbia University, May 20, 1964, *The New York Concert* (MusicMasters CD 01612-65112-2, 1995).
- Duke Ellington, "Moon Maiden" (recorded July 14, 1969), *The Intimate Ellington* (Pablo/Fantasy OJCCD-730-2, 1977). I am grateful to David Lionel Smith for alerting me to this rendition, and for helping me track it down at short notice. Ellington's manuscript for "Moon Maiden" is located in the Duke Ellington Collection Subseries 1A: Manuscripts, Box 229, Folder 8, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. George Avakian, who was present at the recording session, confirms that Ellington recites in an overdub (personal communication, November 2000).

16. Duke Ellington, "Spaceman," Duke Ellington Collection Series 5: Correspondence, Box 6: Notes, undated, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. See also Ellington's unpublished essay, "The Race for Space" (ca. 1957), in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 293–296.
17. Liner notes, *The Intimate Ellington*. Duke's claim notwithstanding, "Moon Maiden" is in fact not the first Ellington recording to feature his abilities as a vocalist; that distinction belongs to the obscure and odd version of "The Saddest Tale" that the band recorded in 1934. Another song under this title would be recorded in 1935 (with Billie Holiday singing) for the film *Symphony in Black*; however, the 1934 studio "The Saddest Tale" features Ellington himself, speaking a short lyric ("Saddest Tale Told on Land and Sea/Was the Tale When They Told the Truth about Me") over an instrumental backdrop.
18. Ellington uses this phrase in recounting a "cutting contest" between Sidney Bechet and Bubber Miley: "Call was very important in that music. Today, the music has grown up and become quite scholastic, but this was au naturel, close to the primitive, where people send messages in what they play, calling somebody, or making facts and emotions known. Painting a picture, or having a story to go with what you were going to play, was of vital importance in those days. The audience didn't know anything about it, but the cats in the band did" (MM 47).
19. Ellington, "Swing Is My Beat!" *New Advance*, October 1944, 1, 14, collected in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 249.
20. Boyer, "The Hot Bach," in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 226.
21. Ulanov, "Ellington Programme," 169.
22. Gary Giddins, "Duke Ellington (Part 3: At the Pulpit)," in *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 501. The phrase *Shakespearean universality* was used by a London critic reviewing Ellington's first appearance at the Palladium; it is quoted in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 216.
23. Strayhorn interview with Sinclair Traill and Gerald Lascelles, *Just Jazz 3* (London: Four Square Books, 1959), quoted in David Hajdu, *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1996), 156.
24. "Monologue (Pretty and the Wolf)" was originally recorded for Columbia Records on May 24, 1951. The live version appears on *Duke Ellington Live from the 1956 Stratford Festival* (Berkeley, CA: Music and Arts CD-616, 1989). Ellington performed this recitation frequently in concert. There is even a version in the telecast *Music '55*, broadcast that summer by CBS, where Ellington recites "Pretty and the Wolf" seated at the piano against the backdrop of a series of drawings by Andy Warhol (specially commissioned for the program), which scroll across a screen from left to right. See Klaus Stratemann, *Duke Ellington Day by Day and Film by Film* (Copenhagen, Denmark: JazzMedia APS, 1992), 358.
25. "Music Press Release # 6 (for Saturday Morning Release, April 13, 1957)," Stratford Shakespearean Festival, Ontario Canada (April 10, 1957). Ellington clippings file, Institute for Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.
26. Stanley Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 32.
27. Bob Smith interview with Strayhorn, Vancouver (November 1, 1962). I thank David Hajdu for making this interview available to me.
28. Beatrice Washburn, "The Duke—I Hear Music All the Time," *Miami Herald*, January 12, 1958.
29. Langston Hughes, "Shakespeare in Harlem," in *Shakespeare in Harlem* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), collected in Langston Hughes, *Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 260.
30. Rebecca Walkowitz has argued convincingly that Hughes's poem offers "a contrast not between two different traditions but between differences within traditions—Shakespeare or Harlem—that are thought to be undifferentiated. As 'Shakespeare in Harlem' points to Shakespeare's bawdy songs, it represents not 'low' Shakespeare so much as Shakespeare's own conjunction of high and low cultures"; see Rebecca Walkowitz, "Shakespeare in

- Harlem: *The Norton Anthology*, 'Propaganda,' Langston Hughes," *Modern Language Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (December 1999): 515.
31. Irving Townsend, liner notes to Duke Ellington and his Orchestra, *Such Sweet Thunder* (Columbia CL 1033, 1957).
32. Ulanov, "Ellington Programme," 171. The phrase is taken from Hippolyta's speech in act 4, scene 1 of the play: "I never heard/So musical a discord, such sweet thunder" (lines 120–21).
33. Hajdu, *Lush Life*, 161.
34. "Music Press Release # 6 (for Saturday Morning Release, April 13, 1957)," Stratford Shakespearean Festival.
35. Stratemann, *Duke Ellington*, 239.
36. Stanley Crouch, Program Notes, Classical Jazz Series Concert, Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (August 10, 1988), collected in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 441.
37. "Sonnet for Sister Kate," Duke Ellington Collection Series 1A: Music Manuscripts, Box 363, Folder 6, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
38. Bob Smith interview with Strayhorn, Vancouver (November 1, 1962).
39. Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb," in *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 269–270. It would be a mistake to underestimate the role of humor in this fugitive mode—the way that *Such Sweet Thunder* is composed not just of "parallels in miniatures" but also caricatures. This is equally an element in Ellington's own writings. For example, *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*, recorded in 1971 in the wake of Ellington's travels on U.S. State Department tours in the 1960s, was apparently inspired by Marshall McLuhan's claim in the late 1960s that the world was "going oriental, and that nobody will be able to retain his or her identity—not even the orientals" (MM 4). But Ellington's spoken introduction to the suite's opener, "Chinoiserie" (which he repeated word for word at each performance) only glancingly takes up McLuhan's proposition, preferring to jaunt through a self-deprecating run of alliteration and association that matches its rhetoric of pseudogallantry with its tongue-in-cheek allusion to "the piano player": "In this particular segment, ladies and gentlemen, we have adjusted our perspective to that of the kangaroo and the djiridoo, which automatically puts us Down Under or Out Back. From this viewpoint, it is most improbable that anyone can tell who is enjoying the shadow of whom. Harold Ashby has been inducted into the responsibility and obligation of scraping off a tiny chip of the charisma of his chinoiserie, almost immediately after the piano player completes his riki-tiki." It is crucial to read this as serious play, though: to suggest, in other words, that the fugitive poetics of Ellington's language (its slippage along what Roman Jakobson would call the axis of equivalence) actually enacts McLuhan's proposition that the contemporary world is characterized by cultural mixing without progenitor—a state in which "it is most improbable that anyone can tell who is enjoying the shadow of whom"; see *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse: A Suite in Eight Parts* (Fantasy Records OJCCD-645–2, 1975).
40. Albert Murray has gone much further, arguing that this effect is not at all exceptional, but instead that the entire Ellington band must be heard as one orchestrated "extension of the human voice." He writes: "such was the vocal orientation of Duke Ellington's genius that in addition to achieving the most highly distinctive overall instrumental orchestral sound (made up of instrumental voice extensions), he not only played his orchestra as if it were a single instrument (to an extent that cannot be claimed for any other composer or conductor) but expressed himself on it as if the three-man rhythm section, three trombones, four to six trumpets, five woodwinds (plus occasional strings) were actually the dimensions of one miraculously endowed human voice"; see Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1976), 114.
41. Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, "Black, Brown and Beige," *The Duke Ellington Carnegie Hall Concerts, January 1943* (Prestance Records 2PCD-34004-2, 1977).

42. See also the summary of Ellington's verbal introductions in Barry Ulanov, *Duke Ellington* (New York: Da Capo, 1975), 254–255.
43. Quoted in Brian Priestly and Alan Cohen, "Black, Brown and Beige" (I), *Composer* 51 (Spring 1974): 33–37; "Black, Brown and Beige" (II), *Composer* 52 (Summer 1974): 29–52; "Black, Brown and Beige" (III), *Composer* 53 (Winter 1974–1975): 29–32; collected in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 195–196.
44. Priestly and Cohen, while demurring about any easy links between music and narrative, do offer some examples of the ways the suite format of *Black, Brown and Beige* may have arisen "from the demands of the programmatic motivation itself. In other words . . . the fragmentation and development of short thematic motifs, in 'Black' is intended to represent musically the fragmentation of African tradition on American soil; similarly, the conflict during 'Work Song' between motifs referring to the blues scale . . . and those affirming the major mode . . . may just be a metaphor for the clash between two cultures" (Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 188–189).
45. Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 2–3. Further references will be indicated parenthetically in the text.
46. Mark Tucker, "The Genesis of *Black, Brown and Beige*," *Black Music Research Journal* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 67–86.
47. Mark Tucker, *Ellington: The Early Years* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 7–8.
48. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, vol. 1, 1868–1919 (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 460. See also W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Star of Ethiopia," *Crisis* 11 (December 1915): 91–93; W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Drama among Black Folk," *Crisis* 12 (August 1916): 169–173; W. E. B. Du Bois, *A Pageant* (a four-page leaflet issued in 1915), in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Annotated Bibliography of the Published Writings of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thompson Organization Ltd., 1973), 543.
49. Krin Gabbard compares Ellington's dignified role as a bandleader in his debut film, *Black and Tan* (1929), with Bessie Smith's role as a victimized woman in the film *St. Louis Blues* (1929). See Krin Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the America Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 161–162. Gabbard (ibid., 210–211) follows Gary Giddins in arguing that Armstrong was able to "transcend the racist trappings" of his early films, such as the infamous *Rhapsody in Black and Blue* (1932); see also Gary Giddins, *Satchmo* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 36.
50. Stratemann, *Duke Ellington*, 121.
51. Ulanov, *Duke Ellington*, 258.
52. Robert Bagar, quoted in ibid., 257. Of course, this complaint had been common in reviews of Ellington as soon as he began to experiment with longer forms: Ulanov quotes Constant Lambert, who in 1934 wrote: "Ellington's best works are written in what may be called ten-inch record form. . . . Into this three and a half minutes he compresses the utmost, but beyond its limits he is inclined to fumble" (259). See also Mike Levin, "Duke Fuses Classical and Jazz!," *Down Beat*, February 15, 1943, 12–13, collected in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 169. Paul Bowles, "Duke Ellington in Recital for Russian War Relief," *New York Herald-Tribune*, January 25, 1943, collected in ibid., 166. On the critical reception of *Black, Brown and Beige*, see more generally Scott DeVeaux, "Black, Brown and Beige and the Critics," *Black Music Research Journal* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 125–146; Andrew Homzy, "Black, Brown and Beige in Duke Ellington's Repertoire, 1943–1973," *Black Music Research Journal* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 87–110; Brian Priestly and Alan Cohen, "Black, Brown and Beige," in Tucker, *Duke Ellington Reader*, 185–204.
53. Ulanov, *Duke Ellington*, 260.
54. Ibid., 259.
55. Duke Ellington, "Black," in *Black, Brown, and Beige*, undated typescript, 8. Duke Ellington Collection Series 4: Scripts, Box 3, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. I should note that scholars are still uncertain about the dating of this document. The typescript (based on an earlier handwritten draft), with the character

- Boola, would seem related to Ellington's plans to write an "opera" of the same name in the later 1930s. The question remains, of course, whether this script was written before or after the premiere of musical *Black, Brown, and Beige* in 1943.
56. Duke Ellington, "Beige," in *Black, Brown, and Beige* typescript, 1, 3.
57. "Duke's Book Will Explain His Carnegie Hall Symph.," *Variety*, June 9, 1943, 2, quoted in Lock, *Blutopia*, 110.
58. Carter Harman, audiotape interview of Ellington, Las Vegas, NV (1956), Oral History Collection 422, Tape 1, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
59. Janna Tull Steed has also suggested that Ellington approaches the literary through a spiritual focus in this period. See her reading of another untitled Ellington manuscript, written on stationery from a Zurich hotel (the poem opens "His Every Day Cracked Up/in Empty Day/With Promises of only the Blackest/Stormy Night . . ."), in Janna Tull Steed, *Duke Ellington: A Spiritual Biography* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1999), 152.
60. Mercer Ellington with Stanley Dance, *Duke Ellington in Person: An Intimate Memoir* (New York: Da Capo, 1978), 171.
61. On Ellington's turn to religion, see ibid., 110–111.
62. *Forward Day by Day* (February 1–April 30, 1973) (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement Publications, 1973), 48. Duke Ellington Collection, Series 14: Religious Materials, Box 2: Pamphlets, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. The Ellington itinerary is taken from Stratemann, *Duke Ellington*, 653.
63. Stratemann, *Duke Ellington*, 584.
64. *Forward Day by Day* (February 1–April 30, 1969) (Cincinnati, OH, 1969), 48. Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
65. Ellington, *Duke Ellington in Person*, 172.

4. The Race for Space

1. William H. Honan, "Le Mot Juste for the Moon," *Esquire*, July 1969, 53–56, 138–139.
2. John Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).
3. Amiri Baraka, "Sun Ra (1993)," in *Eulogies* (New York: Marsilio Publications, 1996), 174.
4. Jay Wright, "Desire's Design, Vision's Resonance: Black Poetry's Ritual and Historical Voice," *Callaloo* 10, no. 1 (1986): 14.
5. Sun Ra, *The Immeasurable Equation* (Chicago: Ihnfinity Inc./Saturn Research, 1972), 50.
6. Duke Ellington, "The Race for Space" (ca. 1957), collected in Mark Tucker, ed., *The Duke Ellington Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 296.
7. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1963), collected in James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), 379.
8. David Toop, "If You Find Earth Boring . . . Travels in the Outer Imagination with Sun Ra," in *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), 29.
9. Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 140.
10. Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): 51–64.
11. Bert Vuijsje, "Sun Ra Spreekt," *Jazz Wereld*, October 1968, 17, quoted in Szwed, *Space Is the Place*, 140.
12. See Sun Ra, "Your Only Hope Now Is a Lie," transcript of a talk given at Soundscape, New York, November 11, 1979, in *Hambone* 2 (Fall 1982): 113. The recording of this talk is available on CD, as well, under the title "The Possibility of an Altered Destiny" on Sun Ra Arkestra, *Live from Soundscape* (Disk Union DIW-388B).
13. Sun Ra, *Extensions Out: The Immeasurable Equation Vol. 2* (Chicago: Ihnfinity Inc./Saturn Research, 1972), 128.