

Avant-Gardes, Afrofuturism, and Philosophical Readings of Rhythm

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Here I will put forward a claim about rhythm – that *rhythm is relation*. To develop this I will explore the entanglement of and antagonism between two notions of the musical avant-garde and its theorization. The first of these is derived from the European classical tradition, the second concerns Afrodiasporic musical practices.

This essay comes in two parts. The first will consider some music-theoretical and philosophical ideas about rhythm in the post-classical avant-garde. Here I will explore how these ideas have been used to, on one hand, stage a critique of Afrodiasporic musics, and specifically jazz, and, on the other hand, diminish and obscure the relation between the post-classical and Afrodiasporic avant-gardes. In the second part I will develop another lineage of rhythm, orthogonal to that of the post-classical avant-garde. Drawing from philosophy and Afrocentric, Afromodernist and, finally, Afrofuturist theory, I will map a theoretical move from rhythm understood, in its post-classical guise, as an exclusive and strictly musical category, to rhythm understood as an inclusive and plural category. This likewise charts a passage from an aesthetically autonomous understanding of objects of art to social and collective forms of artistic practice.

While I will indicate some ways in which the critical exclusions of the post-classical avant-garde have obscured deeper theoretical and practical resonances between the traditions, and attempt to bring these resonances into focus, the space between the two parts of this essay will remain partially undetermined. It will maintain a *problematic* character – that is to say, it will remain open to further exploration and experimentation. Rhythm here stands as both an object of enquiry and as a theoretical framework to open points of productive connection between the two lineages, albeit a framework that recognizes the asymmetrical power relations that have historically held between these positions. Developed through engagement with Afrodiasporic musical practices, and in particular the radically creative impulse of Afrofuturist theory, rhythm acts here not as a predetermined relation, but as an ongoing process of forging relations.

I will begin by begin by sketching a historical moment around which I will frame many of my arguments, namely the artistic, critical, political, and theoretical terrain of the avant-garde of jazz of the 1960s.

From its earliest forms African American music found itself intimately linked with social and political movements. In the 1960s a particularly vivid constellation emerged in which black nationalism, Afrocentrism, and the emerging avant-garde of jazz developed in reciprocal relation. The work of key figures in free jazz and elsewhere in the avant-garde of jazz, such as John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp, Albert Ayler and Sun Ra, held a central role in the establishment of what became known as the Black Arts Movement. Characterized in Larry Neal's key 1968 text as "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (Neal 2000, 236),¹ the Black Arts Movement

¹ See also Robinson (2005) and Smedthurst (2005).

saw the development of African American arts across the 1960s as a concrete expression of the political values of Black Power.

Perhaps the key theorist of the relation between the avant-garde of jazz and the Black Arts Movement was Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). For Baraka, speaking in 1962, the African American writing of the time had yet to match the achievements in jazz of Ellington, Armstrong or Parker (Baraka 1998, 107), and by the mid-1960s it was free jazz that exemplified the inseparability of black politics and black music. Baraka argued that the music of Albert Ayler and others working in the avant-garde of jazz gave voice to the memory of the African American people, but under new forms “to more precisely reflect contemporary experience” (Baraka 1968, 185). This was an example of what Baraka called the changing same – by which an essential black musical expression, the ‘blues impulse’, persists through changing forms of music (Baraka 1968, 180). The jazz musician at once looks forward and backward.²

While Baraka’s reading of the avant-garde of jazz tends to highlight its look into the past, the Afrofuturist reading highlights the other aspect of its Janus-headed nature. As Nabeel Zuberi notes, Afrofuturism likewise finds a source in the feeling of alienation that characterizes the legacy of slavery and elements of its expression (such as the spiritual), and reimagines this under a new light (Zuberi 2004, 79). Here, however, this reinvention takes on an altogether more extreme character. In place of the essential foundation of Baraka’s ‘changing same’, we find a more unhinged and ungrounded mutation, a *transmolecularization*, to use Sun Ra’s term, whereby the past is dissipated and reformed “into a new cosmic and legendary perspective” (Zuberi 2004, 79). One of the most radical theorists of this model of Afrofuturism is Kodwo Eshun. Eshun suggests that Black Atlantic intellectual culture has found itself overdetermined by its history, in response to which Afrofuturism posits experimentation as a route out of this impasse (Eshun 2003, 287-88).

While these discourses – Black Aesthetic, Afrofuturist and so on – can in practice appear to be profoundly dissimilar, viewed through the locus of the avant-garde of jazz the relation between them becomes clear. Located on a spectrum from backward-looking to forward-looking, from concern with tradition and history to concern with futurity, we can see how each makes an attempt to determine the appropriate expression of and model for engaging with the contemporary condition of blackness, and developing the contemporary stakes of Afrodiasporic art.

Running alongside but in some respects distinct from these approaches is that of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). Formed in Chicago in 1965, the AACM initially comprised musicians and composers emerging from jazz backgrounds, but the concern of the group was less with a relation to either a jazz tradition or the avant-garde of jazz than it was with its own notion of ‘original music’ (Lewis 2001-2002, 102). On account of a close but contentious relation to the white-coding post-classical avant-garde, the AACM’s relation to Black Power, the Black Arts Movement, and black cultural nationalism is a complicated one. In addition, the self-theorization which was central to the AACM identity, perhaps exemplified with Anthony Braxton’s multi-volume *Tri-Axium Writings*, puts the AACM in a clear dialogue with the self-theorization common in the post-classical tradition (Lewis 2008, xxix). With this in mind, its position as spanning and traversing distinct

² As Jason Robinson points out, the musicians in question, while generally sympathetic, often had misgivings about aspects of the Black Aesthetic movement – often its nationalism and antagonistic nature and, in some cases, such as that of Sun Ra, its resistance to more speculative realms (Robinson 2005).

traditions and practices will be key to our navigation across these fields.

This offers only the briefest sketch of avant-garde jazz and its reception by and relation to political, social, and theoretical movements. However it is evidence enough to see that a distinct Afrodiasporic avant-garde developed alongside that which is more commonly considered to be *the* musical avant-garde, namely the post-classical traditions of Europe and, somewhat more contentiously, the experimental music most associated with North America.

While in the early twentieth century European modernist composers recognized the importance of jazz as a distinctly American music, this recognition was put aside in the development of a predominantly white post-classical understanding of the European avant-garde and American experimental music (Lewis 2008, 371). There are a number of discrete instances of meetings between practitioners across post-classical and Afrodiasporic traditions,³ but the art historical, critical and theoretical discourses have generally remained quite separate. For instance, in Pierre Boulez's *Boulez on Music Today* and Michael Nyman's *Experimental Music*, key texts in surveying and defining the status of the avant-garde on either side of the Atlantic which were both chronologically well-situated to engage with the radicalization of African American music, jazz receives only passing and largely dismissive mention.⁴ This exclusion is paralleled in theoretical realms which could otherwise have seemed particularly attuned to the avant-garde of jazz's entanglement with social and political radicalism. In the work of post-'68 French philosophers and theorists such as Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, work which often turns to musical sources, we find a distinct focus on composers like Boulez and others of the European classical and post-classical avant-garde traditions.

This absence may be dismissed as a contingency, and one which is fading in effect as the cultural hierarchies implied continue to lose their credibility. However in this essay I wish to address the manner in which this exclusion may be a constitutive one. This will involve looking at how the post-classical avant-gardes have defined themselves in internally-determined terms, which preclude association with an Afrodiasporic avant-garde, and how this in turn leads to a tendency in the Afrodiasporic avant-garde to dissociate itself from the post-classical. In exploring this divide, however, I hope to also bring into question the theoretical necessity of such an absolute distinction. In the case of theorists like Kodwo Eshun, the European philosophical-theoretical tradition and aspects of the post-classical avant-garde are drawn on for the furtherment of an Afrofuturist theory. While this can arguably be at the expense of a historical understanding of the exploitative and oppressive relation between Eurocentric and Afrodiasporic avant-gardes, I wish to begin to work through the antagonisms of these entangled fields and to consider how resonant points of experimental practice can be mapped across divergent traditions.

I will begin by looking at early modernist avant-garde readings of jazz by the composer Olivier Messiaen and the philosopher Theodor Adorno, exploring the "rhythmic obedience" which both locate

³ Perhaps most notable being Edgard Varèse's 1957 sessions with numerous major figures in the New York jazz scene. See Mattis (2006).

⁴ It is perhaps to reinforce this distance that Baraka took to using the term 'new black music' rather than 'avant-garde jazz'. Fred Moten (2003, 32) elaborates on the seemingly oxymoronic existence of the 'black avant-garde', these two terms apparently to each be predicated on the exclusion of the other. This terminological distinction, as well as the fuzziness of the line between avant-garde and experimental, are of note, but cannot be addressed at length here.

in jazz.⁵ I will then advance this discussion by looking at the composer John Cage's theory of rhythm. While Cage can likewise again be implicated in a critical dismissal of jazz, I will suggest that Cage's understanding of rhythm is complicated by his reading of the architect Le Corbusier's theory of rhythmic systems, and that in this the germ of a deeper discussion of rhythm within a modernist paradigm can be found.

I will seek to explore and expand this question by turning to readings of rhythm and its relation to collectivity, the body, and technology in the Afrodiasporic musical tradition. This exploration will pass from a generalized Afrocentric framework, onto some of the fundamental political questions engagement with Afrodiasporic music raises, and then into the Afrofuturist writings of Kodwo Eshun. Reading Eshun's theory of Afrofuturist rhythm alongside the philosophical theorization of metric and non-metric rhythms in Deleuze & Guattari, I will argue that the modes of rhythm that have developed through the Afrodiasporic tradition allow us to develop a richer understanding of the socio-aesthetic organization of musical practices.

The European avant-garde

The French composer Olivier Messiaen is widely regarded as one of the most important contributors to theories of rhythm in the classical tradition of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is his innovations with regards to rhythm that Messiaen deems his "most far-reaching contribution to Western music" (Pople 1995, 32). In his multi-volume theoretical text *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie* we find both analysis of a vast range of historical precedents and explication of his own developments, and throughout this text we find the persistent assertion that a musician can only merit that title if he or she is also a 'rhythmicist' (Messiaen 1998, 38).

In a 1967 interview with Claude Samuel, Messiaen diagnosed what he saw as a neglect of rhythm in the Western classical tradition, finding, for example, "harmonic colors, and extraordinary contrapuntal craftsmanship" in Bach, but naming him among "composers who knew nothing of rhythm" (Messiaen 1994, 68). This is because 'rhythm', in Messiaen's understanding of it, comes to stand for a characteristic quite distinct from meter, with which it is often equated. Messiaen begins his explorations of rhythm by distinguishing between rhythm as meter or cadence, where it acts only as homogeneous and static measurement, and that which is rhythm properly speaking, defined in terms of alternation, propulsion, variation. With rhythm properly speaking recurrence never occurs as pure and simple repetition, but only as an irreversible, unfolding movement in time (Messiaen 1998, 53-54).

The importance of Messiaen's theoretical work to the post-classical avant-garde is unquestionable, both in terms of the influence of his compositions and writings and in the vast number of major figures in twentieth century music who studied under him.⁶ His distinction between meter and

⁵ While the free jazz to which I have referred can often, no doubt, be characterized as being as free of metric rhythm as any other avant-garde music, I feel it is important here to step aside from this musical concern and emphasize the conditions of genesis for its rhythmic qualities and its juxtapositions of temporalities. In this sense it can no longer be heard in terms of a metric / non-metric opposition, but rather, ultimately, as the formulation of new rhythmic relations between diverse rhythmic characters. An example is John Coltrane's speaking of drummer Rashied Ali's "multi-directional rhythms" in the liner notes to Coltrane's exemplary free jazz album *Live at The Village Vanguard Again!*

⁶ Among those who studied under Messiaen were Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Pierre Schaeffer. See Boivin (1998).

rhythm, however, has deep resonances and consequences even outside of this tradition. In the same interview with Samuel, Messiaen turns his attention to jazz. In the case of Bach, Messiaen suggests that despite his great achievements elsewhere, we find an

uninterrupted succession of equal durations that puts the listener in a state of beatific satisfaction; nothing interferes with his pulse, breathing or heartbeat. So he is very calm, receives no shock, and all this seems perfectly ‘rhythmic’ to him. (Messiaen 1994, 68)

Jazz is considered under the same terms – deemed a “very striking example of non-rhythmic music which is thought rhythmic”. It is understood as fundamentally “established against a background of equal-note values” (Messiaen 1994, 68), insofar as the seemingly rhythmic quality of the syncopation we find in jazz is determined not by its own rhythm but by its relation to the equal-note values that it contradicts, what the theorist Steve Goodman calls a “shadow” of the metric (Goodman 2010, 115). The result of this, for Messiaen, is to cancel out the rhythmic quality of syncopation through the listener’s inversion of the off-beat back onto the on-beat, a move in which the listener gives himself “great comfort”.

While Messiaen does not discuss the precise form of this mode of listening or detail the kind of listener concerned, such is the impact of his work and his teachings that echoes of his account of rhythm, and the emphasis on it at the expense of rhythm-as-meter, can be heard throughout the avant-garde and in modernist music theory of the twentieth century. Within this we can likewise hear the echoes of a generalized denigration of jazz and in turn its Afrodiasporic musical successors.

Perhaps the most famous such critique of jazz is that of the critical theorist Theodor Adorno, also the theoretician most intimately linked with the development of the European new music of the twentieth century. Adorno’s controversial critique of jazz is often characterized as being aligned with his discussion of the culture industry – whereby the earlier notion of ‘mass culture’ is replaced by a distinction between popular culture and ‘culture industry’, understood as the industrialized production of cultural commodities (Adorno 1991). With this in mind, Michael J. Thompson grounds his defense of Adorno’s assessment of jazz by arguing that those who have treated it with disdain have neglected the extent to which it is built upon an aesthetic argument concerning the formal dimensions of jazz (Thompson 2010, 37). Thompson argues that this consideration is, for Adorno, always bound up in the entanglement between popular culture, culture industry, and their opposition to the autonomous work of art.⁷ Autonomous art here is art which produces its own meaning, independent of the dictates of state, church, market or otherwise. This autonomy, however, as Thompson suggests, is always inextricably linked to deeper aesthetic elements. For Adorno, the autonomous work of art, culture “in the true sense”, “did not simply accommodate itself to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived” (Adorno 1991, 100). This character of the autonomous work of art, by which it stands against the structure of society, is “tendentially eliminated by the culture industry” (Adorno 1991, 99). Within the terms of the culture industry we find a production of art which is “wholly assimilated to and integrated in those petrified relations”, through which “human beings are once more debased” (Adorno 1991, 100).

⁷ This is complicated further still in contemporary art by what Peter Osborne describes as “the increasing integration of autonomous art into the culture industry” (Osborne 2013, 21). While analyses such as Osborne’s provide what could be the basis for a more nuanced Adornian reading of jazz and other musical forms outside of the art music tradition, this is outside of the scope of this current piece.

In the specific case of jazz, Adorno diagnoses an even greater amplification of this problem. This is insofar as jazz takes on the guise of a radical art-form, despite, in his view, being solidly within the culture industry (Witkin 1998, 173). Writing in 1964, Adorno approvingly quotes Winthrop Sergeant's remark of 1938, with no comment on the vast changes jazz underwent in this period, that jazz is "even in its most complex manifestations a very elementary matter of repeated formulae" (Adorno 1981, 120). To this Adorno adds that jazz's "unruliness" exists only as it bears upon a strict scheme, that "its rebellious gestures are accompanied by the tendency to blind obeisance". Much as for Messiaen, the rhythmic complication of jazz syncopation is understood to be founded on a stable metric base. For Adorno, any seemingly radical characteristics we find in jazz exist only insofar as it ultimately returns to stability, to an accommodation to the status quo. As Tia DeNora puts it, jazz rhythms are for Adorno merely "pseudo-liberatory", eliding the beat "while simultaneously observing it" (DeNora 2003, 56).

In contrast to his usual technique of engaging with a select few exemplary works in a field, Adorno's claims with regards to jazz are brought into question by the lack of serious engagement he appears to make with contemporary jazz beyond broad generalities – hence a rigid critical position maintained over a period of thirty years. Likewise of note is that while the European avant-garde is authentic insofar as it emerges dialectically from its social and musical tradition, jazz, which Adorno accepts has the same characteristics, is nevertheless not an authentic music (Hegarty 2007, 43-44). For Adorno, the authentic expression of music is to "portray within its own structure the social antinomies which are also responsible for its own isolation" (Adorno 2002c, 393). This character is found in the work of Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern, but not in the 'harmlessness' which accompanies the dissonance found in jazz (Adorno 2002b, 306).

Ultimately it seems that for Adorno African American music cannot be of musical or social interest because of its status as being produced by the "domesticated body in bondage" (Adorno 2002a, 478), while, for example, Schoenberg's music is authentic precisely *because of* its reflection of our bondage. The contrast with Amiri Baraka's reading of jazz is stark. For Baraka it is precisely jazz that best reflects this state of bondage and its relation to a history of bondage – for instance, in his approving quotation of Archie Shepp's assertion that "[t]he Negro musician is a reflection of the Negro people as a social and cultural phenomenon. His purpose ought to be to liberate America aesthetically and socially from its inhumanity" (Baraka 1968, 177).

Cage and the experimental tradition

Insofar as Adorno's dismissal of jazz appears absolute and, indeed, oblivious to the changes jazz undergoes beyond the 1930s, it may appear to be a philosophically unjustifiable artifact of a certain form of cultural elitism. There is evidence, however, of a wider significance to Adorno's critique. In his influential 1974 book, *Experimental Music*, the composer Michael Nyman sets up a retrospective distinction between European avant-garde music and largely North American experimental music traditions. Nyman sets out to define an American tradition stemming from the work of John Cage, which could stand apart from and against the dominant post-serialist European form.⁸ For Nyman, the

⁸ As such Nyman's distinction is a strongly tactical one and necessarily overlooks many of the connections between the traditions, particularly the manner in which Cage spans the two.

European avant-garde, in which he includes “composers such as Boulez, Kagel, Xenakis, Birtwistle, Berio, Stockhausen, Bussotti”, finds itself on “the well-trodden but sanctified path of the post renaissance tradition” (Nyman 1999, 1). North American experimental music, on the other hand, is less interested in locating itself within a historical tradition. Its concerns, on the contrary, include new compositional and performative techniques such as chance and indeterminacy, techniques which serve to undermine the notion of pre-given structures and forms of organization which it is claimed the serialist tradition, like classical music broadly speaking, adheres to.

Adorno, while notably critical of the mathematization of music he found serialism developing towards, appears to locate himself firmly within the tradition of the avant-garde in opposition to that of the experimental. As Paul Hegarty argues, the basis by which Adorno addresses the musical artwork seems inseparable from the terms of modernist orchestral music (Hegarty 2007, 35). It is less a fundamental bias against jazz from which Adorno’s criticism stems than it is the assertion that the only authentic music is that which has emerged through the dialectic of Western classical music. We find here a curious irony. Adorno, one of the earliest thinkers to develop a thorough critique of the Enlightenment project, seems unable, or unwilling, to develop an articulation of music that does not follow a passage deeply steeped in the values of the Enlightenment and its corresponding musical forms (Gilbert and Pearson 1999, 42) – values such as intellectual rather than sensuous appreciation, composition rather than improvisation,⁹ and the structure of the orchestral form.

If Adorno’s critique of jazz is founded on a perspective internal to the avant-garde tradition which rendered him blind to any potential avant-garde element in jazz, it would seem to follow that American experimental music, seeking to free itself of the strictures of the art music tradition, would be more amenable to jazz as a radical music. I am going to suggest here that John Cage’s position does indeed point us in a different direction, and allow us a more direct engagement with the avant-garde jazz context with which we started, but perhaps not in the manner we would expect.

Having distinguished between the avant-garde and the experimental, it is somewhat surprising to see some of the criticisms of jazz we find in Adorno and Messiaen echoed in Cage’s thought. In a 1968 interview with the philosopher and musicologist Daniel Charles, Cage is asked whether the form of free jazz and its style of improvisation could meet his idea of musical indeterminacy. Indeterminacy here is understood as an approach to performance which does not predetermine what will be performed either at the level of the score or in the prefigured conscious or unconscious decisions of the performing individual. Cage responds:

In most jazz compositions I hear an improvisation that resembles a conversation. One musician answers another. So, rather than each one doing what he wants, he listens with all his might to what the other one is doing, just to answer him better. (Cage 1981, 171)

We find, therefore, another diagnosis of jazz performance as a mode of expression which poses as freedom, but which finds itself within a form of bondage, within a pre-given social relation. For Cage, improvisation, and its emphasis on the spontaneous, results not in discovery but a recourse to memory, to a kind of musical egoism which his own procedures of chance and indeterminacy seek to eliminate (Kostelanetz 1987, 222). Furthermore, Cage follows:

⁹ For Adorno, the structure of the improvising jazz group “merely outlines a parody of a future collective process of composition” (Adorno 2002a, 482).

What is called free jazz probably tries to free itself from time and rhythmic periodicity. The bass doesn't play like a metronome any more. But even then, you still get the feeling of a beat. (Cage 1981, 171)

While Messiaen and Adorno are critical of jazz per se on account of its regulatory rhythms, free jazz and other avant-garde jazz practices were often the subject of critique from jazz writers on account of their divergence from the standards of jazz rhythm, for their "refus[al] to swing" (Lewis 2008, 446). It is notable, and somewhat puzzling, then, that Cage still hears a regularity to the rhythmic form of free jazz – a claim which would surprise many of the genre's listeners. Cage, it is true, does not appear to hold the fundamental animosity towards jazz that we find in Adorno – we see an earlier interest in the jazz idiom, albeit a tense and ambivalent one, in pieces such as *Jazz Study* (1942) and *Imaginary Landscape No. 5* (1952). However he does, nevertheless, appear to share Adorno's fundamental objection to jazz precisely – that jazz is a musical form which purports itself to be free, but which in actuality always falls back on stability and restriction.

Immediately after these comments regarding free jazz, Cage discusses a meeting with an unnamed Chicago free jazz band with whom he had agreed to collaborate. While Cage found the rehearsals of the unnamed jazz band to be successfully 'free', he adds that when performing with the band in front of an audience, the band resorted to habitual forms of performance and to 'conversation'. As such, free jazz, while in some respects ideologically resonant with Cage's project, could not provide an adequately robust musical form to achieve its goals. The unnamed jazz band, as George E. Lewis has documented, was in fact a quartet led by AACM founding member Joseph Jarman. Jarman's account, and those of others in attendance, adds much nuance to Cage's retelling – not least in terms of the somewhat paternalistic tone Cage takes on to describe an event which was presented as a collaboration between equals (Lewis 2008, 130). Rather than being heard as a 'conversation', one reviewer in attendance criticized Jarman's group for their failure to respond to the sounds Cage was producing. While the reviewer intended this comment negatively, such a performance, of the group "sending into the air its own unrelated signals at the same time as [Cage's] electronic ones were being generated" (Lewis 2008, 130), would appear to fit something of the form of a Cagean indeterminacy in which no fixed relation is to hold between performers. Furthermore, Jarman's account was largely positive, and the performance played a part in his invitation to the ONCE Festival, a key gathering of composers within the post-Cagean experimental music.

These contrasts in mind, we develop a sense that Cage may not have been willing or able to countenance the possibility of jazz taking the form of an experimental music. Indeed Cage, in his influential text 'History of Experimental Music in the United States', claims that jazz "derives from serious music. And when serious music derives from it, the situation becomes rather silly" (Cage 1961, 72).¹⁰ Cage's attitude is reflective of what George E. Lewis has called the 'Eurological' approach to improvisation. Lewis argues that the white avant-garde obscures what it has borrowed from 'Afrological' jazz improvisation by adopting it into its own approach. For Lewis a racial space has been delineated through qualifiers to the word 'music' – 'experimental', 'new', 'art', 'concert', 'serious', 'avant-garde', 'contemporary' – from which traditionally black practices have been excluded. Likewise, techniques such as indeterminacy cover over their relation to improvisation, constituting an othering of jazz composers and performers which reveals "whiteness as power" (Lewis 1996, 99-100).¹¹ We can expand this also to the post-classical understanding of rhythm to which the rhythms of

¹⁰ Cage however immediately follows this by praising the jazz-inflected work of William Russell.

¹¹ Lewis' formulation is rich, detailed, and convincing, and while there are possible responses to some of his critical

jazz have been deemed inimical – it could be argued that jazz’s rhythmic complexities have been appropriated into post-classical music under new guises.

Lewis suggests that a more nuanced view of improvised music than that of the white avant-garde “might identify as more salient differentiating characteristics its welcoming of agency, social necessity, personality, and difference, as well as its strong relationship to popular and folk cultures” (Lewis 1996, 110). I would like to partially affirm this claim, and affirm the importance of those characteristics Lewis locates in improvised music. But I would also like to explore at a deeper level the relations and resonances between the two, which has been obscured by the exclusivity and prejudice that Lewis has diagnosed through his Afrological / Eurological distinction. Our first step towards this will be looking more closely at Cage’s work.

Rethinking rhythm

Cage’s position on some of these questions may be clarified by looking at how his thought and work is taken up in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, an engagement which will also guide us towards Afrofuturist theory. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze & Guattari highlight a persisting connection between the experimental and the avant-garde, in a manner that appears detrimental to jazz. This takes place through their reading of both Cage and Pierre Boulez¹² – drawing together perhaps the most important composers and theorists of American experimental music and the European avant-garde, respectively. For Deleuze & Guattari, Cage is the composer who “first and most perfectly” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 267) develops a musical practice that accommodates the entire field of sound, in all of its complexity and unpredictability. They draw from Cage’s idea of sound-space for their own articulation of the concept of smooth space, indicating a concern shared between their projects – of bringing into question the limits of structure, and emphasizing instead a plane on which stable organization is secondary to becoming, disarticulation, and mutation.¹³

This notion of the smooth space, however, is derived from the theoretical writings of Boulez, and his distinction between the smooth and the striated. This conceptual dyad returns us to the question of rhythm. For Deleuze & Guattari striated space and time is equated with cadence, that is, rhythm as mechanical regularity, and as such is thought in terms of form, as a limitation of an uncontrolled movement (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 363). However, Deleuze & Guattari, like Messiaen, wish to characterize rhythm in a manner which is not reducible to cadence. This is a rhythm without measure, without external ordering, instead concerning how “a fluid occupies a smooth space” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 364) – how matter behaves without the imposition of external limitations.

Despite vast differences elsewhere, we see little distinction on this matter between the European avant-garde and the American experimental tradition, nor between the theoretical strands represented by Adorno and Deleuze & Guattari. There likewise appears little room for other discourses, such as one

comments directed towards Cage – such as through Cage’s engagement with forms of musical spontaneity before the emergence of bebop, or the deference Cage shows to Indian and other eastern philosophies in favor of the European tradition – there is nevertheless much more to be said about the political weaknesses of Cage’s project. See for example Joseph (2008). For more on Cage’s work in relation to whiteness, see Thompson (2017)

¹² Messiaen is also an important figure in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

¹³ I elaborate on the relation between Cage and Deleuze in the context of contemporary work in sound studies in Campbell (2017). See also Panzner (2015).

representing jazz, to enter into the discussion. In Cage's more detailed discussions of rhythm, however, we can begin to locate a deeper problem to which Cage is responding, and through which this critique of rhythm can be thought of differently.

Perhaps Cage's strongest engagement with this question is found in 'Rhythm Etc', an extended reading of Le Corbusier's modernist architectural theory. In this essay, Cage develops a critique of Le Corbusier's formulation of harmony, specifically through a discussion of the latter's proportional measuring device intended to see architecture best fit human form, known as the Modulor. While the Modulor was suited to a number of proportional schemes, for Cage this form of thinking always amounted to a form of domination – what he calls a rhythmic police force (Cage 1967, 124). Having no reason to believe in a necessary proportionality of the world, Cage argues that it would be absurd to subject ourselves to the proportions of the Modulor. In this, the political kernel of Cage's thought becomes evident, and indeed it remains one that still resonates with Adorno – whereby we find oppression in that which accommodates itself to pre-given structures, and a kind of freedom in that which pushes against this status quo.

Cage is concerned with the kind of spaces that we find ourselves in when we are in artistic and social situations, and his assessment of the Modulor is that it operates within a pre-given space, defined in terms of similitude and identity. Cage's interest, on the contrary, is in the production of space without assumption or pre-determined principle. Intriguingly, it is precisely in this moment of Cage's engagement with social concerns that he comes to the conclusion that his problems are no longer strictly musical – and as such no longer possibly bound to the strictures of the autonomous artwork. Here he feels required, in seeming contrast to his assessments of jazz,¹⁴ to reevaluate the place of performative freedom in opposition to chance – “I must find a way to let people be free without their becoming foolish. So that their freedom will make them noble” (Cage 1967, 137). For Cage, then, the question of 'rhythm' becomes a question quite distinct from an opposition between metric and non-metric temporalities. It turns to a much wider matter of the space of performance and reception, and the relations that come into place within it.

Afrodiasporic openings

A turning point. Here we can begin to bring together this trajectory of the American experimental tradition with the Afrodiasporic tradition to which it has heretofore been opposed. There is a shortcut we could take. The ethnomusicologist John Miller Chernoff, in *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, his study of the relation between aesthetics and society in Ghanaian music, suggests that approaching jazz through a European understanding of rhythm fails to appreciate that metrical cadences, in the form of syncopation or polyrhythm, serve to emphasize a sense of in-betweenness (Chernoff 1981, 49-51). Furthermore, Chernoff weighs this rhythmic approach towards the listener, rather than the performer or composer. The specific articulation of a rhythm cannot be adequately understood if it is not analyzed in terms of its social uptake, in terms of the kind of social space it represents (Chernoff 1981, 30).

¹⁴ Cage's later relation to jazz is notable if obscure. There is little further reference to it in his written works or lectures, which become increasingly abstract and performative, but he is known to have taken an interest in the work of Sun Ra, seeing the Sun Ra Arkestra play in 1979 and even performing with the Arkestra in 1984. Unfortunately his thoughts on this relationship and the content of his discussions with Sun Ra went unrecorded (Szwed 2000, 352-356).

There is much of this understanding of rhythm I wish to affirm here. But there is also much in Chernoff's account that is troubling. Some of this is already evident in the disjunction between the text's title and its subject – can a study of Ghanaian music really be taken to represent 'African Rhythm and African Sensibility'? This carries into a wider understanding of Africa – we find the text's detailed analysis of specific practices interrupted by broad claims regarding "African music" and its relation to "African culture generally" (Chernoff 1981, 4). At the theoretical root of this, I would like to suggest, is that Chernoff finds something essential, even biological, in rhythm. Rhythm for Chernoff is linked to physical motor skills, including the movement of the feet, and implies a conflation of rhythm and body which posits rhythm as a kind of "universal language" (Windmüller 2010, 35). By extrapolating from this essence of rhythmic movement to link rhythm so intimately with sociality, Chernoff defuses that which is generative, conflictual, and disruptive – 'African rhythm' perhaps presents an ideal rhythm for an ideal social model.¹⁵

This pacifying, essentializing notion of rhythm is something I think it is important to avoid here. I want to look more into the emergence of models of rhythm, to resist effacing their constitutive tensions, their heterogeneity – to take a historico-theoretical approach which shows rhythm as indeed intimately linked to social structures, but practically and contingently so. A starting point for a more subtle articulation of this question is Molefi Kete Asante's work on the Afrocentric worldview, or African cosmology. Asante argues that in contrast to the individualist and ahistorical assumptions of Western thought, Afrocentrism posits, among other characteristics, an ontology grounded on interconnectedness, collectivity, and temporality (Jackson 2003, 120) – an understanding of Afrocentrism, it is important to note, which was commonly endorsed in the AACM.¹⁶

While I will argue that the question of rhythm, in this widened Afrodiasporic and Afrocentric sense, becomes a question not of a pure musical opposition but of the use of diverse strategies to produce different social spaces, we must first contend with the complex political questions that our assessment of Chernoff implies for understanding Afrodiasporic music. This comes down to carefully articulating difference without resorting to notions of essence. A key starting point here is through W. E. B. Du Bois, who in *The Souls of Black Folk* suggests that it is through Sorrow Songs, or spirituals, that we can "listen to the souls of black folk" (Du Bois 1989, 12). Each chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* begins with a printed musical bar taken from Sorrow Songs. In these, Du Bois says, lies "some echo of haunting melody from the only American music which welled up from black souls in the dark past" (Du Bois 1989, 2). Indeed, Amiri Baraka's theorization of jazz and the 'changing same' stands as a reinvention of Du Bois for the context of the 1960s – in the screams of free jazz, Baraka hears echoes of the church (Baraka 1968, 244), in Albert Ayler's music, a relation to Black-American religious forms (Baraka 1968, 193).

As Alexander Weheliye observes, however, Du Bois' insertion of only fragments of the spirituals into his text in fact diminishes the readers' chances of recognizing the songs being represented. The fusion between the spiritual and Western notation is presented as an uneasy one,

¹⁵ Kofi Agawu (1995) articulates many of these problems with Chernoff's position, and other positions which attempt to articulate the essential qualities of 'African rhythm'.

¹⁶ As with Joseph Jarman's belief that the intermedia approaches of the AACM were re-establishing African traditions (Lewis 2008, 153), or Anthony Braxton's affirmation of the Afrocentrism of jazz (Lewis 2008, 504).

suggesting an ultimate failure of notation to represent the spiritual (Weheliye 2005, 95). This disjunction is one commonly agreed upon by contemporary critics, with Eric Sundquist among others arguing that the spiritual is a cultural language which does not correspond to the mapping of sound that occurs in Western notation (Weheliye 2005, 93). This is not a recent insight, nor an unproblematic one. As Weheliye notes, research has suggested that romantic, abolitionist and other white discourses of the nineteenth century posited the spiritual as a kind of primitive, anti-rational form which stood against, but also helped to constitute, the figure of the white rational thinker (Weheliye 2005, 94). A certain primitivist romanticism remains much later in Chernoff's work – in for instance the claim that “African music does not require a theoretical representation or an explicitly interpretive understanding” (Chernoff 1981, 1). This opposition serves to reinforce an essential nature to the distinction between African and European culture and to, in turn, reinforce one of the oldest theoretical structures of social exclusion – that which recognizes a wild and free being which is valuable insofar as it is required to help constitute the dominant culture, but nevertheless cannot be reconciled with this culture.¹⁷

While assessing Afrodiasporic music as ‘unrepresentable’, as a kind of pure and unspoiled expression, is therefore an inadequate mode of dealing with this disjunction, the question of accounting for the incommensurability evoked by Du Bois's notation remains. To move towards an Afrofuturist discourse, I wish to address this through two primary figures – namely the body and technology. Du Bois's insertion of mute and indecipherable bars of spiritual into *The Souls of Black Folk* presents us with a kind of ghostliness, the “echo of haunting melody”, in which we seem distanced from the sound to which we are directed. As this ghostliness emerges from the failure of notation to represent the spiritual, however, it reveals to us also its opposite – embodiedness.

As Weheliye argues, black subjectivity represents an antithesis of the European Enlightenment subject – not merely by *having* a body, but by *being* a body (Weheliye 2005, 28). The division between the rational subject and its corporeal existence is erased, as is that between musical expression and its representation. The Western classical tradition and its philosophical readings, in all their diversity, from Rousseau up to Adorno, is strongly characterized by a denigration of music's physicality, maintaining a distance between the sensory-corporeal and the intellectual (Gilbert and Pearson 1999, 59). This stands alongside the veneration of the rational subject and the failure to see beyond the individual producer, a failure which renders understanding the Afrocentric extended notion of the specific social dynamic of material intersubjectivity that takes place in musical performance impossible. In the latter case, engagement with music is not merely a rational act, but part of an extensive and collective affective act in which performance is inseparable from reception, from immediate dancing to sociopolitical implications.

This extends to the question of technology, and the Afrodiasporic tradition is characterized from an early stage by a serious engagement with technologies of reproduction and distribution. Consider, for example, Adorno's notion that “there has never been any gramophone-specific music” (Adorno 2002d, 277),¹⁸ as opposed to Ralph Ellison's repeated engagement with the specific subjective experience of the phonograph throughout his fiction and non-fiction (Weheliye 2005, *passim*). Indeed, this question, decades later, becomes internal to the European avant-garde, as suggested by Georgina

¹⁷ See, for instance, Plato's representation of the chora as the femininely-characterized space from which all emerges, and the feminist readings of this from Luce Irigaray (1985) and others.

¹⁸ Adorno was writing in 1934. Denning (2015) provides an interesting contrast to this in his account of the cultural form of early phonograph recordings.

Born in her anthropological exploration of IRCAM, the French institute of contemporary music and sound research founded by Boulez in 1977. One of the great fissures in the European avant-garde came to be between those invested in the notated form – including Boulez – and those who felt that the score could not do justice to the sound worlds created by new technologies (Born 1995, 139, 224).

While Born notes the erasure of a jazz influence (Born 1995, 82) and the constitutive exclusion of jazz-derived practices in IRCAM (Born 1995, 87), the conflict regarding the adequacy of notation in this case takes place internal to the European avant-garde. However, we find again the AACM crossing this territory in a manner which brings the relations at work into focus. The AACM use of graphic scoring is in some respects an aspect of an orientation towards approaches which can encompass both compositional and improvisational elements (Lewis 2008, 322), as it was with Cage's indeterminate scores. It was also, however, as in the world of IRCAM and elsewhere, concerned with rethinking the status of sound. One regular feature across the diverse practices of the AACM was and is an emphasis on multi-instrumentalism, a confrontation with traditional instrumental taxonomies of jazz's star system towards having players be proficient on numerous instruments (Lewis 2008, 362). This was directly associated with an interest in likewise multiplying the timbral qualities produced by the performing group beyond those prescribed in the jazz tradition – with individual players playing multiple instruments in an individual performance. The use of 'little instruments', an array of small percussion instruments, whistles, bells and so on, which founding member Malachi Favors posited as an African influence (Lewis 2008, 160), was the technique most closely associated with the AACM (Lewis 2008, 142). But it is crucial to note that the AACM expansion of the traditional jazz sound palette also involved electronics.

The use of electronics, beginning at an early stage of the AACM, was immediately controversial in the jazz world. Critic Ron Welburn would speak of "technological intrusions" into the acoustic world of jazz, and associated the use of emerging technologies with a white musical lineage (Lewis 2008, 148-49). Dismissive critical engagement with the AACM's use of electronics, graphical scoring, and other techniques which drifted from a jazz tradition towards a post-classical one, continued in various forms into the 1970s and 1980s (Lewis 2008, 354). But neither side of this critique – of a failure to represent their own tradition or of a failure in imitation of another tradition – need be the final analysis. The question of unrepresentability provides both a look backwards and a passage forwards. Where the 'unrepresentability' of Afrodiasporic musics had previously been posited as a primitivist feature, in the case of the AACM it stood for technological and theoretical advancement. This can finally take us towards the question of Afrofuturism. As Lewis notes, a key feature of Afrofuturism is its rejection of blackness as something understood to be essentially anti-technological (Lewis 2008, 551n106). Returning to the status of musical rhythm and engaging from this point of departure can help us bring together and clarify many of the problems posed so far.

Afrofuturist rhythms

A leap forward. As technological engagement intensifies, the question of the function of rhythm becomes ever more refined. Referring to the strict electronic 4/4 beat of house music, Drew Hemment notes that metrical rhythm serves as a form of capture (Hemment 2004, 86). The paradigm of house music brings into further question the shape that any distinction between metric and non-metric time can take. The displacement caused by techniques of rhythmic variation, such as syncopation and

polyrhythm, can be thought under the terms of either moving towards a non-metric rhythm or, as Adorno and Messiaen would have it, merely masking a simpler stability beneath. But the 4/4 house beat, brutally and unflinchingly regular, forms what Hemment calls a “mechanistic grid of digital clock time” (Hement 2004, 85) in its incessant metronomic repetition. In this, however, it comes to emphasize textural – rather than rhythmic or melodic – qualities, bringing forth a particular molecularity and singularity of the sonic matter that lies between the beats. The subtle qualities of this singularity are made sonorous due to this isolation within a fixed framework. As Hemment argues, “nuance and inflection are heard because of a reduction of indeterminacy on another level” (Hement 2004, 86). It is not, then, that a musical piece becomes more affective the more its rhythmic qualities detach from the metric and move towards the non-metric. On the contrary, different rhythmic formations serve to maintain a body’s consistency in different ways, with the common purpose of allowing it to express its intensive qualities, to be made sonorous as an affective force.

Afrofuturist musical thought has taken the reformulation of rhythm that we find in the passage of Afrodiasporic music across the twentieth century as a starting point for reconsidering how the social and the aesthetic intertwine, as distinct from the notions of artistic autonomy and social freedom that we find in the modernist tradition. Steve Goodman, for example, draws from Deleuze & Guattari, but develops his own thought through a crucial inversion. Goodman reverses a hierarchy he posits Deleuze & Guattari to be asserting, headed by non-metric rhythm and its conceptual equivalents, and rather emphasizes how affective capacities can be mobilized through metric organization. Goodman’s musical perspective takes the “rhythmic reservoir” (Goodman 2010, 107) of noise, or sonic chaos, as only a site of potential for actualization. This is to think of noise not as a weapon in itself (as in the case of the Italian Futurists), but rather through a notion of rhythmic consistency in which “vibrational force would be captured, monopolized and redeployed” in a movement of affective mobilization and contagion, the movement of a body towards transforming that with which it comes into contact in its own image.

In reconstituting the sonic war machine in terms of the affective capacities of specific bodies, Goodman moves to initiate a more robust and productive take on metrical rhythm than he believes Deleuze & Guattari allow themselves. In this rhythmic theory, Goodman makes use of Kodwo Eshun’s dense and dazzling exploration of Afrodiasporic music in the twentieth century, *More Brilliant than the Sun*, and in particular Eshun’s concept of the Rhythmachine. Eshun argues that late twentieth century ‘Black Atlantian’ African diasporic music – jazz, funk, techno, hip-hop – constitutes a new sensory paradigm in terms of music’s radically mobilizing and transformative capacities, the paradigm of *texturhythm*:

The Rhythmachine captures your perception as it switches from hearing individual beats to grasping the pattern of beats. Your body is a distributed brain which flips from the sound of each intensity, to the overlapping relations between intensities. Learning pattern recognition, this flipflop between rhythm and melody and texturhythm drastically collapses and reorganizes the sensorial hierarchy (Eshun 1998, 21-22)

Texturhythm here is opposed to the previous paradigm of rhythm and melody – the essentially Western classical valuing of unilinear progression within a piece. Texturhythm, on the contrary, is found in a layering of heterogeneous materials, with, as Hemment later argued within the Deleuzian context, metric rhythm offering consistency to that which falls between the beat. The two paradigms of rhythm and melody and texturhythm are, however, not simply opposed, but are rather folded onto one another. Linear rhythmic patterns are recognized by the perceiving body, but this recognition is also interrupted

by the manner in which heterogeneous intensities congeal between rhythmic points. The movement combining the texturhythm and the rhythmeloody is simultaneously a music of narrative forward movement (of melody and its conjunction with the rhythmic) and of the intensive individuality of sensuous sonic matter. Furthermore, this movement is also an entanglement of the two paradigms under the formational power of the Rhythmachine. What this entanglement under the Rhythmachine entails is that the sonic singularity is at once internally differentiating and holistic between the beat, yet also part of a larger body of relations across the beat. Individual grains of sound are drawn together under the shaping force of wider rhythmic qualities and narratives. The individuality of the sound block held between the beat – the internally differentiating and autonomous sound block being key in Boulez’s work and Deleuze & Guattari’s reading of it – is called into question by the figure of the rhythmic-as-Rhythmachine, drawing together intensive qualities into bodies moving with and against each other.

It is not, then, that metrical rhythm acts as a blockage, and is necessarily a formal model of oppression which stifles movement. It rather shapes this movement into sonorous form. Following rhythm’s new guise as a Rhythmachine involved in the constitution of affective bodies from diverse intensive materials, in Eshun’s synthesized paradigm-assemblage of texturhythmeloody the virtual material and its actual formation become indistinguishable (Eshun 1998, 90). The beat is, at once, the framework for intensive relations and an affective body in itself.

In this we hear echoes of Chernoff’s descriptions of polyrhythm and the active listener, but with the murmurs of a foundational essence which permeate Chernoff’s work replaced by the mobility and transformative capacities of the Rhythmachine in action. In so doing Eshun can, like Chernoff, describe the processes by which rhythm draws bodies together, but without resorting to a rhythmic essentialism, and, like Messiaen, describe the processes by which heterogeneous rhythms combine, but without capitulating to the exclusive terms of the post-classical avant-garde. Beyond the closures and impasses of those approaches, rhythm acts to transform perceptual bodies. The receptive body of the listener, or dancer, acts as an extended mind, a move which in turn reverses back into the neural pathways enacting mental change as an aspect of a body succumbing to other rhythmic bodies (Eshun 1998, 82, 144). In hip-hop and techno’s beat displacement, the oscillation between the habituation of a bodily rhythm and its subsequent fracturing serves to form an ever more constricted but ever more intense and potentially explosive rhythmic unit (Eshun 1998, 89). The body is affected and transformed as a consequence of entering into connections with disruptive rhythms and the particular formations of intensity that they harness.

Many of these aspects of Eshun’s Afrofuturist rhythmic formations are reflected in Dhanveer Singh Brar’s remarkable analysis of Chicago’s Footwork scene. A recent development in Chicago’s long line of black electronic dance music innovations, Footwork is characterized by its complex, off-kilter rhythmic arrangements and the equally intense speed of the gestures deployed in its dance battles (Brar 2016, 21). Brar emphasizes that despite this complexity, Footwork does not operate on a logic of individual virtuosity at the level of either producer or dancer, but is rather constituted by “an ongoing ensemble of sonic, gestural, social, racial, economic, and geographic relations” (Brar 2016, 24). Agency here is located in a kind of collective experimentation. The sociality of dancing, dance understood as a practical mode of thought, is inseparable from a DJing and production style which in part models itself on the hectic, but rigorously organized, character of the battle circle (Brar 2016, 39). In turn, the DJ shapes the battle circle, driving and molding an enclosed circulation of intensity from its heterogeneous bodies. These two aspects are drawn together through, but likewise inform, what Brar,

following Fred Moten, terms the “phonic materiality” of the music (Brar 2016, 21; Moten 2003, 1).

For Brar, in this context rhythm takes on an irruptive function. A collective rhythmic improvisation refuses any attribution of essence to black diasporic life, and rather conducts a form of experimentation which marks blackness as a form of sociality produced and reproduced (Brar 2016, 38). This rhythmic characteristic marks perhaps the most striking aspect of Brar’s analysis. Despite its geographically and sociologically specific nature, as the ‘ghetto’ music of Chicago’s south and west sides, Footwork nevertheless operates with a relative autonomy. This is far from the autonomy of the artwork described by Adorno. It rather consists in a complex socio-aesthetic consistency, the inhabitation of the environment, a blackness produced within the antiblackness of the sociological and sociopolitical demarcation of the ghetto (Brar 2016, 43). In staking out this position, Brar resists the common positioning of black music in the sole context of a constitutive antiblackness.

An intriguing source is used to bolster this claim. Brar draws a distinction between the external restraint of the sociopolitically demarcated ghetto and the internal relations of social life within the ghetto from Cayton and Drake’s early analysis of Chicago’s ‘Black Belt’. This analysis, published in 1946, captures Chicago during the formative moments of many key AACM members, a background depicted in detail by George E. Lewis (2008, 3). Likewise these concerns with a self-constituting sociality run through Lewis’ assessment of the AACM, throughout its history. The AACM itself, perhaps, constitutes a complex socio-aesthetic ecology, with rhythmic modulations providing a passage between its musical forms, its social bonds, its audiences, its educational programmes...

Concluding remarks

A step back. Returning retrospectively to the starting point of a critique of jazz which seems to be shared between Messiaen and Adorno, the terms by which we set off seem to have transformed significantly. While Messiaen and Adorno’s comments on jazz bear a superficial resemblance to each other, they appear to derive from quite different points of departure. Adorno’s position is carefully critical of the Western classical tradition but, nevertheless, distinctly internal to it. Messiaen appears to diagnose a fundamental lack in that tradition. Messiaen may well be right to diagnose a neglect of rhythm in the Western classical tradition, but there is much more to be said about his transposition of this argument onto the rhythmic character of jazz.

A more fundamental limit in the European avant-garde tradition, and the Western classical tradition more widely read, is an insistence on the isolated autonomy of the artwork. As reflected in Afrodiasporic musical forms, this notion neglects music as a collective and social practice. ‘Rhythm’, when it accommodates these factors, is no longer a question internal to an autonomous work of art, and therefore a question dogged by an impossible quest for self-sufficient freedom. It becomes a relation, whereby diverse modes of musical rhythm are drawn together with rhythms collective, social, and political, engendering new forms of social and aesthetic space. That Cage came to realize this on his own terms offers us a meeting point between two disparate forms, two spaces brought together in rhythmic resonance, albeit two spaces whose asymmetrical political dynamics cannot be ignored. But in all of this, musical rhythm, in its plural forms, metric and non-metric, becomes one element within a broader rhythmic ecology.

It was through this understanding of the entanglement between the sociopolitical and the

aesthetic that the Black Arts Movement came to articulate a powerful theory of the mode of expression of the avant-garde of jazz in the 1960s. It is likewise this engendering of space through the invention of new forms of rhythmic relation that has concerned Afrodiasporic musical practices from the jazz group through to the Footwork battle circle. Afrofuturism here stands for this notion taken to light speed, where late twentieth century black music has proven the exemplary form of extending this question beyond its limits, beyond any pre-given social forms, beyond even the human. Through a kind of sonic science fiction it has explored just how bodies and technologies can emerge, relate and create in the twenty-first century. By centering on the question of rhythm, these seemingly distinct models of theorizing the black avant-garde connect and collide with a new resonance.

Neither reading can assert a universal authority or infallibility. As noted, the musicians on whom the Black Arts Movement drew were often at odds with some of its central tenets, and many have commented on a questionable essentialism and masculinity at the heart of the Black Aesthetic (Robinson 2005). On the other hand, the radical Afrofuturism of Eshun has been criticized for its thorough jettisoning of historical and even contemporary concerns, with Zuberi suggesting that Eshun's argument "risks evacuating a consideration of the social, political and economic contexts in which it is produced" (Zuberi 2004, 94). But what the relational, collective character of these pluralistic Afrodiasporic rhythms tells us, however, is that these approaches and others, including the post-classical avant-garde traditions and the philosophical traditions with which theorists such as Eshun are already engaging, can coexist with and enrich each other, spawning new approaches along the way.

The AACM can perhaps be positioned at the obscure junction of these tendencies. Its ambiguous position results in Baraka's assessment of the work ongoing within it ultimately taking on an ambivalent, often negative character. This can be seen in his reference to the "tail Europe" nature of their post-classical engagements which in his view rendered jazz a "secondary appendage" of concert music (Baraka and Baraka 1987, 260), or his rebuke of its anti-populist practices on account of their failure to represent black life (Lewis 2008, 336). Key to the AACM approach, however, was at once an agreement that black music expressed black life, but beyond this an assertion that there is no such thing as an essential and unitary 'black life' – in Muhal Richard Abrams' terms, the diversity of the AACM represents the diversity of black life (Lewis 2008, 214).

The AACM has consistently resisted cultural nationalist essentialism and oriented itself towards the future, but without discarding tradition and a direct sociopolitical concern with the condition of black people in the United States and worldwide. It also pushes at the boundaries of some of the analysis developed here – for instance its eventual international cosmopolitanism stands in contrast to the enclosed social ecology of the Chicago from which it emerged, and through which Brar richly presents the relative autonomy of Footwork. In this respect further study of its practices may help us to articulate the gaps and continuities the approaches outlined here. In so doing we should hope to do justice to the depths contained in the famed AACM slogan, understood by Lester Bowie and others as reflecting the internationalist, Afrodiasporic, and historical mode of the AACM approach to experimentation – 'Great Black Music', 'Ancient to the Future' (Lewis 2008, 444).

This resistance towards essential black identity which nevertheless concerns itself with the status of blackness and black life points the way towards the fluidity and connectivity of Afrofuturism. Taking on the AACM and Afrofuturism here reveals something more of what was already the case the avant-garde of 1960s jazz. As Jason Robinson notes, "the religious tropes in Coltrane's later music; Sun Ra's sci-fi mysticism; Albert Ayler's 'religious music'; [Archie] Shepp's transgressive protest music;

Cecil Taylor's convention-transcending approach" (Robinson 2005, 31) all simultaneously offered irreducibly heterogeneous models for the aesthetic expression of the African American sociopolitical condition.

Rhythm as relation, extended beyond classical and post-classical traditions through Afrodiasporic musical practices, does not travel in one direction. Its individuations are diffuse and diverse but always collective and connective, always reevaluating the past, reflecting on and remolding the present, and pointing towards new futures. Rhythm offers a model for that which is without model, that which cannot be pre-determined by the existing sociopolitical order – the constitution of new relational practices through which voice can be given to collectives historical, contemporary, and impending.

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